

## **Judy and Arthur Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall**

Architects' Statement

The transformation of the third of Carnegie Hall's three original performance spaces to create the Judy and Arthur Zankel Hall marks the most recent phase of an ongoing twenty-five-year association between Polshek Partnership Architects and Carnegie Hall.

In the 1980s, Polshek Partnership was the architect for the restoration of the Isaac Stern Auditorium and Joan and Sanford I. Weill Recital Hall. The third of the original venues, a recital hall in the lower level, had been previously compromised both architecturally and acoustically beyond restoration. In the late 1990s, Carnegie Hall decided to create a completely new auditorium for the 21st century in its place.

Carnegie Hall's basic design criteria were to create an intermediate-size performance venue with excellent acoustics, contemporary in style yet sensitive to the landmark building above, which would double as an educational facility and accommodate the latest in contemporary communications technologies. To accomplish these goals, Polshek Partnership, leading a team of world-class consultants, developed a flexible and innovative design befitting Carnegie Hall's international stature.

Functionally, the main floor of the auditorium consists of a series of lifts, constructed atop screw jacks, which move up and down. The theatrical seats on the main floor are affixed to chair wagons, constructed atop air casters, which move in and out of an adjacent storage "garage." The lifts and chair wagons in tandem enable the auditorium to be reconfigured, including three different sized end stages, an end stage with orchestra pit, center stage, and flat floor. The ceiling of the auditorium consists of remotely controlled steel trusses that move up and down, allowing theatrical equipment to be readily repositioned to accommodate the different stage positions, and to fulfill production requirements for a diversity of events. Imbedded at the infrastructure level of the auditorium floor and ceiling are conduit and wiring to allow lighting, sound, video, communications and recording equipment to be placed virtually anywhere, as needed.

Formally, the design consists of a dramatic play of interlocking geometric forms in contrasting materials, containing two seating levels - Parterre (lower) and Mezzanine (upper). Placed within the rectangular outline defined by the footprint of Carnegie Hall's masonry bearing walls is a canted ellipse constructed of reinforced concrete. Nested in the ellipse are four freestanding walls, paneled in American Sycamore, that define the acoustical volume. Outside the auditorium, the ellipse, which is finished in finely polished artisan plaster, appears never-ending; its curvature leads the audience around to each point of entry to the house while drawing the eye through the

openings in the Mezzanine to realize the full height of the combined lobby levels. Within the house, the ellipse continues to lead the audience into the implied rectangle of the acoustic volume.

Zankel Hall's visual references to the main hall (Isaac Stern Auditorium) above are intuitive: above is a curvilinear concert hall within a rectangular space, below is a rectangular concert hall in a curvilinear space; both are finished in cream-colored plaster, mohair fabric, and warm woods detailed in bronze.

Structurally, the building of Zankel Hall required a significantly greater volume of space than the original lower level auditorium. Approximately 6,300 cubic yards of bedrock were excavated from underneath the landmark building. The design of the facility incorporates some of the original brick piers, now encased in plaster, and four of the original cast-iron columns, which extend upward and support the First Tier through Balcony of the Isaac Stern Auditorium above.

Entered on Seventh Avenue, the main entrance of Zankel Hall is at street level, under a new marquee and canopy, similar in design and materials to the entrances of Stern Auditorium and Weill Recital Hall on West 57th Street. The new entrance completes the refurbishment of the historic exterior façade, and the new auditorium below completes the restoration of Andrew Carnegie's original intent of three great stages under one roof.