

Pablo Casals Symphony Hall takes place as Ferré Center's newest gem

State-of-the-art concert hall to be officially inaugurated this weekend to the tune of \$34 million; 'shoebox' style venue, with seating for 1,300, is most technologically advanced in the region

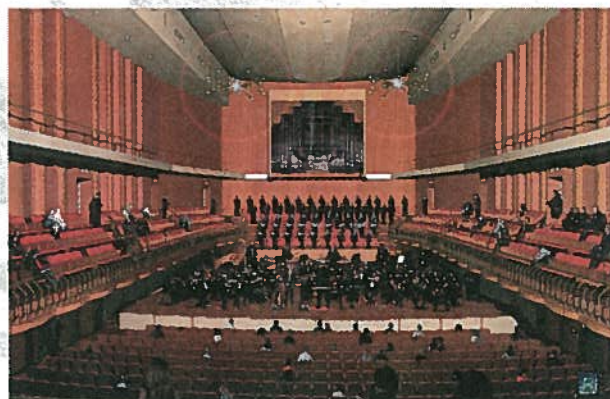
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The opening of a new concert hall is always cause for excitement, not only among musicians and music lovers, but for the community at large as well.

The new Pablo Casals Symphony Hall at the Ferré Center for Performing Arts in Santurce is scheduled to officially open this Saturday, Oct. 3,

taking its place as the most sophisticated and technologically advanced venue of its kind in the region.

The \$34.1 million hall, which began construction in February 2007, features the traditional shoebox design of the best concert halls in the world. It measures 70-feet wide by 140-feet long and boasts 50-foot ceilings. The carefully designed symphony space makes each of its 1,300 seats feel like the best seat in the house.



Architectural rendering of the new 1,300-seat Pablo Casals Symphony Hall.

acoustical engineers the perfect sound comes from the perfect balance between sound technology and design. Moreover, according to Savereid, it is the combination of such elements as reverberation, good clarity, plenty of strength and a high degree of spaciousness that delivers that distinctive pleasure and why some halls sound better than others.

Will the best sound in the world deliver the best

The new symphony hall will serve a range of symphonic, chamber, and popular music styles. Massachusetts-based Acentech, global leaders in acoustical architecture, audiovisual systems, noise control systems and information engineering designs, developed tailored acoustical computer models to determine the interior shaping and finishes of ceiling, wall and floor surfaces, and consulted on the design of a quiet air-conditioning system to enhance the overall symphony experience.

The hall, which had its soft opening in October 2008, will have its major public test as it welcomes its main tenant, the Puerto Rico Symphonic Orchestra, with one of the performances of the 2009 season. Under the direction of its conductor, Maximiliano Valdés, the orchestra will perform the previously scheduled No. 2 Brahms and the 2nd Schumann symphony.

"The hall's design is a variation on the traditional shoebox concert hall," Chris Savereid, Acentech's chief consultant in acoustics, explained. "Our audiovisual (AV) specialists designed the house sound system that features a retractable main loudspeaker cluster that can be hoisted into the attic during symphony concerts where amplification is not required."

That, in laymen's terms, means the design of the hall itself helps sound travel with minimum interruption for a pristine sound.

For many music aficionados, a speaker may just be a speaker; for

symphonic experience? Not necessarily. In fact, Savereid describes halls as having their own "personality," one that shapes up over time as the synchronicity between the orchestra and the space evolves.

"That varies and it takes time while people get used to the new sound, the new quality and personality of the hall. There are places such as the prestigious Boston Symphony Hall that opened in 1901 to harsh reviews and more than 100 years later it is one of the best halls in the country and one that classical music connoisseurs like the most," said Savereid.

Fortunately, both the size and the shape of the Santurce space were right on target with Acentech's design and acoustical goals for the new hall.

"That's simply a stroke of luck. When designing a hall of this magnitude, the site itself plays a tremendous role in the final product," added the Acentech executive.

"The concept of spaciousness in this hall, the most important of the most recently discovered acoustical measures, will deliver the kind of unique experience that will forever make the Pablo Casals Symphony Hall one of the best in the world. Musically speaking, spaciousness implies being in the midst of the performance, of being surrounded by the sound. The secret behind it is a preponderance of nonfrontal sound, reflections that intrude upon the listener from the sides rather than from straight ahead," he explained. ■

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