

The Barbican Arts Centre

£106,000,000 worth of inner city resurgence

The fortress is just about to open. Now can it earn its keep? In this first report on what the City of London has been doing for itself and the Arts, our CUE man on the site (wearing a white helmet and a security pass) writes about the vast scale of an enterprise that will run and run.

On February 11 this year the London Symphony Orchestra played to an audience in the Barbican Hall for the first time. It was a test concert and the audience was invited. The people who came included, of course, many of those who had worked on the design and construction of the Centre, but the greatest number of seats was allocated to residents in the surrounding flats, because it was felt to be right to give them some reward for all their patience during the years when, instead of enjoying the civilised surroundings of the gardens and lake, they have found themselves looking into one of the biggest and noisiest holes in London, unable to follow the intended pedestrian routes through the site because they were blocked by hoardings. Very soon those will all be things of the past

and not only the locals but the whole of London will be waking up to what has been created in their midst.

An Arts Centre on the magnificent scale of what has been built was not part of the original conception of the Barbican Development; that was, and still remains, to quote a resolution passed in 1956, 'that there should be created in the Barbican area a genuine residential neighbourhood incorporating schools, shops, open spaces and other amenities, even if this means foregoing a more remunerative return on the land'. One of the schools in question was the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Which needed new premises, and

the theatre and concert hall included in the early schemes were relatively modest in size and designed to be used partly for the teaching purposes of the School and partly for public performances by professional artists. This idea of shared use was subsequently abandoned and the School was designed with its own small theatre and music rehearsal hall, so that a new policy had to be developed for the other auditoria. Instead of retracting from the project, the Corporation courageously decided to increase the size and improve the facilities

*The Arts Centre, plan at level 3.
Architects: Chamberlin, Powell & Bon
(Barbican)*

