

Lighting & Sound INTERNATIONAL

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The Entertainment Technology Monthly

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Ms Jackson

- Janet Jackson in Las Vegas

Barbican Restyle

- A £7million technical makeover

Ice Queen

- Björk leaves behind the cold Icelandic nights

Club Campus

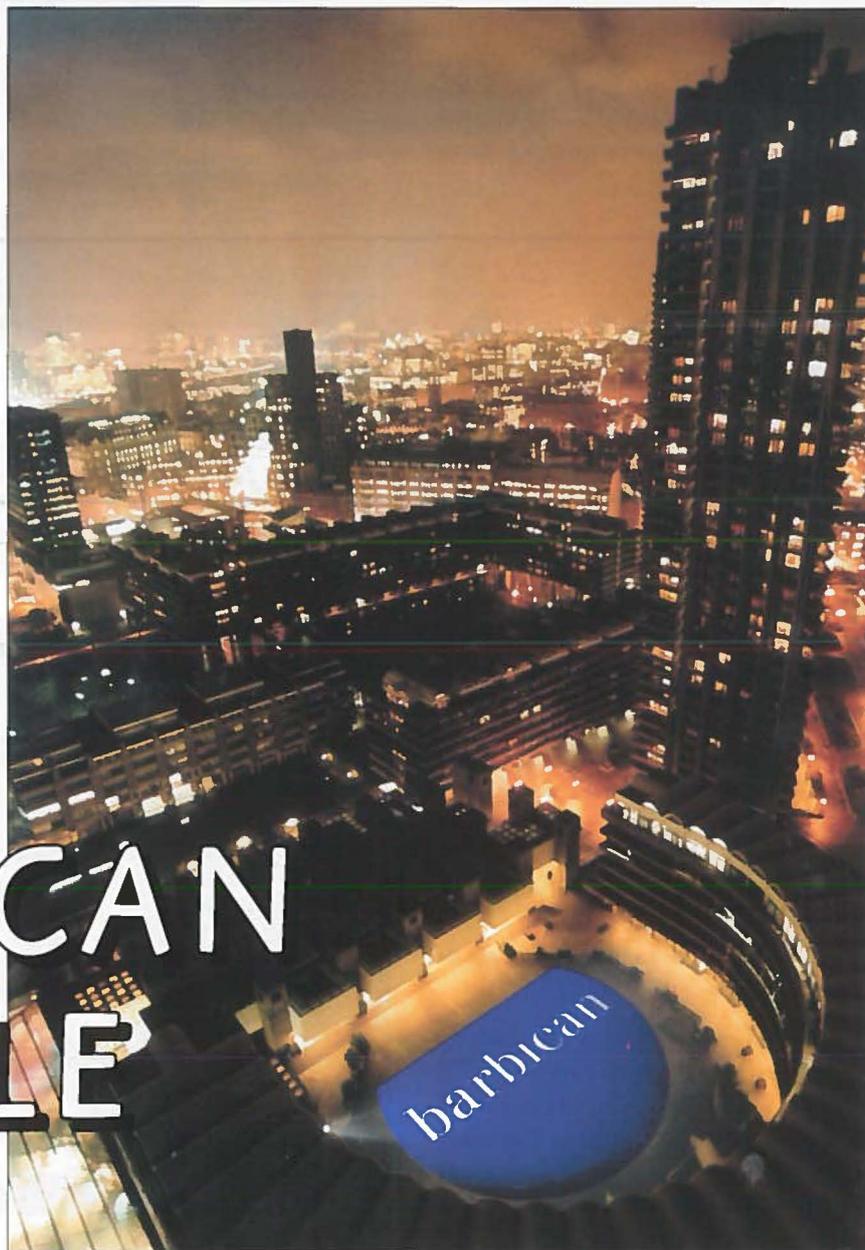
- Stylus, Leeds

Going Dutch

- Profile of Stage Accompany

PLASA

The renowned Barbican Hall, the 1,989-seat concert and conference space at the hub of the Barbican, has re-opened after four months of frenetic activity and a £7 million technical makeover, wholly funded by the Corporation of London. L&SI grabbed itself a front row seat . . .



BARBICAN RESTYLE

The refit has involved every technical production area of the Hall - sound, lighting, acoustics, stage machinery, flying and rigging facilities - and that aspect was overseen by Simon Prior, the Barbican's head of planning and production. "It's been an extraordinary achievement," he says, "to bring this project in within the timescale. All we have to sort out now is the snagging list!"

The overall objective was to make the Barbican Hall into a flexible, versatile and streamlined multi-purpose production facility for the 21st century. The Hall stages the highest profile international orchestras, musicians, bands and performers of all types, as well as corporate presentations, commercial and industrial events. The London Symphony Orchestra is resident at the Hall, and also uses it as a rehearsal facility, so it's not uncommon for three or more different events to happen within a single working day. The 'new' Hall is also designed to maximize the often short changeover times between events.

The venue's closure was initially triggered by the need to replace the air handling units and stage risers. It was soon realised that this was an ideal opportunity to upgrade other technical areas, and to add new equipment and facilities to the flagship venue that opened in 1982.

Five areas have received attention - air handling, replacement of the house lighting system, replacement of the production lighting,

rewiring of the production lighting system and the acoustic works. The concept design of the upgrade was already underway by October 2000 when Simon Prior took up his post - from high profile corporate event and technical production specialists HP:ICM. The Barbican's technical crew - renowned for their skills and experience - had already collectively made decisions on the right equipment for the Hall, and compiled a lighting spec.

LIGHTING

The supply contract went out to competitive tender and was won by White Light. The front of house rig includes 73 assorted new Robert Juliat profile lanterns and 60 ETC Source Four Pars, 12 of which are the MCM cold mirror reflector variety. The Hall retained its conventional Pars and a quantity of Patten 750 beam lights - used as specials and back lights for soloists.

The defining factor in choosing moving lights was quietness. With an orchestra playing below, ambient noise from lighting is non-negotiable! They decided to go with High End because the fixtures' convection cooling system ensures maximum quietness. The Barbican Hall now features a rig of 12 Studio Color wash luminaires and eight Studio Spots, plus a dedicated Wholehog II desk for control. In addition to the HES lights, more potential movement is offered with six new





operation of lighting for the late-night Club stage in the foyer - an area utilized after the main show for those wanting to party on! Here the existing rig is 10 Martin MAC 250s, six Source 4 profiles and 24 chrome Pars, and the entertainment oscillates between all types of bands and DJs.

AUDIO

The Barbican Hall's existing Renkus Heinz system, purchased four years ago, has been retained and modified to deal with its slightly revised positioning. It is now on movable points and can be flown up above the canopy when not needed. This vastly improves the general stage aesthetics and sight lines for classical shows where the system is not used. Before, the central cluster of speakers was in a fixed position and clearly in view!

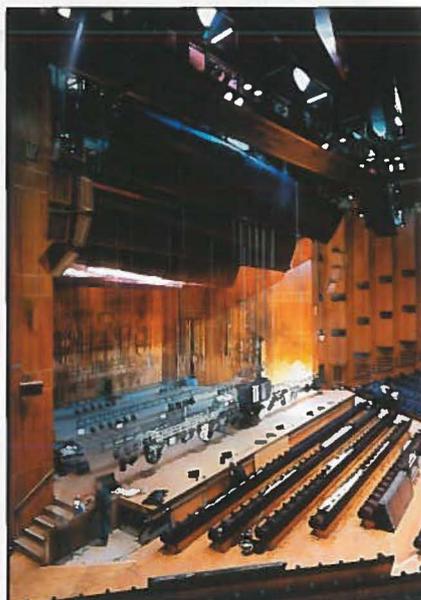
HISTORY OF THE BARBICAN

THE BARBICAN, EUROPE'S LARGEST MULTI ARTS AND CONFERENCE VENUE, LIES AT THE HEART OF THE 35 ACRE RESIDENTIAL ESTATE KNOWN AS THE BARBICAN. A MAZE OF SMALL STREETS AND WAREHOUSES BEFORE THE WAR, THE AREA WAS BOMBED IN DECEMBER 1940 AND COMPLETELY DEVASTATED, WITH ONLY THE HISTORICAL CHURCH ST. GILES', CRIPPLEGATE (WHERE OLIVER CROMWELL MARRIED AND JOHN MILTON IS BURIED) STILL SURVIVING INTACT.

IN 1955, THE FIRST PROPOSALS FOR THE AREA'S REDEVELOPMENT WERE SUBMITTED TO THE CORPORATION OF LONDON. CENTRAL TO THE SCHEME WERE NEW PREMISES FOR THE GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC & DRAMA, INCLUDING A SMALL THEATRE AND CONCERT HALL THAT COULD BE LICENSED FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCES.

IN 1959 THE CORPORATION OF LONDON BOLDLY SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY AND SELECTED A SCHEME DEvised BY THE ARCHITECTS CHAMBERLIN, POWELL AND BON, WHICH ENVISAGED A MAINLY RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD, BUT INCLUDED NEW PREMISES FOR THE GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC & DRAMA AND DESIGNS FOR AN ARTS CENTRE.

IN THE MID-1960S, THE RSC AND LSO BECAME INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING OF THE BARBICAN AFTER LEADING THEATRE PRODUCER ANTHONY BESCH HAD RECOMMENDED THE EARLY INVOLVEMENT OF A MAJOR THEATRE COMPANY AND ORCHESTRA. BY THIS TIME, A PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY HAD BEEN ADDED TO THE SCHEME. CONSTRUCTION WORK BEGAN IN OCTOBER 1971 AND THE BARBICAN WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED ON THE 3 MARCH 1982. IT WAS BUILT AS 'THE CITY'S GIFT TO THE NATION' BY THE CORPORATION OF LONDON AT AN HISTORICAL CAPITAL COST OF £161 MILLION - EQUIVALENT TO BETWEEN £400-£500 MILLION TODAY.



Top, AVW Controls designed and built a programmable controller for the Spiralift-based stage lift system.

Above, work in progress in the auditorium

City Theatrical Auto Yokes - added to existing stock to make a total of 16.

The generic rig usually stays fixed in position - fast turnarounds are of the essence, and so this part of the rig is utilized for general lighting coverage. The moving lights reside in over-stage positions, and will mainly be used for the lighter entertainment end of the classical spectrum featured on the Barbican Hall's programme, and for jazz and contemporary performance requiring more colour and movement.

Also retained are two existing lighting control desks - an ETC Obsession, used for the conventional rig, and an Avolites Pearl. The Pearl is used for live, hands-on

STAGING & RIGGING

This part of the refit was undertaken by Unusual Rigging, who Simon states have been "absolutely brilliant".

The refit saw two new fixed lighting bridges installed over the auditorium which makes access for maintenance and focusing much easier and quicker - previously, the fixed overhead FOH lighting positions had been reached by a moveable gantry. There are two new motorized side lighting positions front-of-house and also two further motorized bars added each side of stage for scenery or projection screens.

Overstage, there are now 10 new motorized flying bars, seven of which are designated for lighting, as well as a variable height screen box containing two roll-down front projection screens. Unusual Rigging designed and built a customized control system for all the overhead machinery, which can be operated from two positions - onstage and from the overstage walkway. Over the stage itself are four new moving bridges, for accessing lights at height, and four tabtrack bars at either side of the stage offer the option of a full blackout surround.

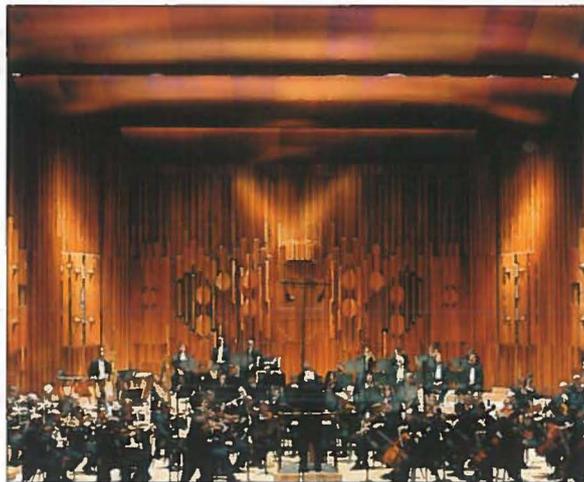
A major part of this section of the refit was the replacement of the old stage risers and hydraulic system with a new Spiralift-driven system (from Gala in Canada), which offers much more flexibility. All lifts are aligned in terms of available height differences, and the 10 stage risers can be pre-set to different levels and set-ups. Unusual Rigging asked AVW Controls to design and build a programmable controller for the stage lift system. This effortlessly enables risers to be sent into preset configurations with one button press.

ACOUSTICS

A new acoustic ceiling and over-stage canopy was designed by award-winning British architects Caruso St John, working in collaboration with Chicago-based acousticians Kirkegaard Associates. The design has a dramatic impact on the acoustic and ambience, as well as the aesthetic appearance of the Hall.

The integrated ceiling and over-stage canopy consists of 35 suspended acoustic reflectors coated in Rimex, an acid-etched stainless steel. The Rimex surface features a textured shot silk effect, reflecting a range of warm iridescent colours and shades - golden to bronze, burgundy to rich cherry - depending on the angle and ambient lighting.

The reflectors' angled geometry changes according to the acoustic requirements of different areas of the ceiling, producing an effect described by Caruso St John as 'a huge shimmering chandelier'. For theatrical-style events, the over-stage acoustic reflectors - originally specified by theatre consultants Carr & Angier - can tilt and retract to accommodate lighting and projection from above. The audiological objective was to dramatically improve the acoustic for both the audience and musicians. By raising the over-



Left, the completed hall, with orchestra

stage canopy two metres and suspending an array of the curved acoustic reflectors ascending steeply from the stage to the main body of the hall, full-bodied sound is distributed more consistently to all parts of the auditorium. The acoustic is equally adjustable for the more intimate requirements of recitals or chamber concerts, right up to the full scale requirements of a symphony orchestra and chorus.

The new Barbican Hall was re-launched at the end of September with concerts by the City of London Sinfonia and the LSO. The reviews so far speak for themselves: Erica Jeal, writing in The Guardian, said: "With the adjustable

panels in the ceiling set to suit a full orchestra, the LSO's sound, fuelled by Colin Davis's energetic conducting, was more vibrant than ever; the noise seems to come straight at you and to blossom in the air around your ears."

Laurence Hughes wrote in the *The Independent*: "... the acoustic's new warmth and immediacy came out in the rich string writing: the Barbican's changes are a distinct success."

Matthew Rye, for *The Daily Telegraph*, commented: "£7 million-worth of work, carried out over four months during the summer break - London at last has, on first reacquaintance at least, a large-scale concert hall worthy of the great music-making taking place inside it."

And the final word goes to Geoff Brown, writing in *The Times*: "Even before the first note is struck, you know the Barbican Hall looks different. The stage lighting is brighter, like dappled sunshine. . . . The old dry acoustic is kicked into memory. Warmth is now in the Barbican sound, plus a soupçon of resonance. The music seems closer, rounder, more alive."

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34 Spiralifts at The Barbican
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