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With its 2,700 seats, the main auditorium of the Opéra Bastille (sketches 1, 2) is currently the largest auditorium ever built in France for the performing arts. Other spaces in the house include a 500-seat amphitheatre located in the basement under the main auditorium, and the Tour d'Argent studio, seating 280.

Avec 2.700 fauteuils, la grande salle de l'Opéra de la Bastille (croquis 1, 2) est la plus grande salle de théâtre construite en France. D'autres salles dans le bâtiment comprennent un amphithéâtre de 500 places au-dessous de la grande salle, et l'atelier "Tour d'Argent" avec 280 places.

Mit 2700 Sitzen ist der grosse Zuschauerraum der Opera Bastille (Zeichnungen 1, 2) derzeit der grösste Zuschauerraum, der je in Frankreich für die darstellenden Künste gebaut wurde. Andere Theater in der Oper sind ein Amphitheater mit 500 Sitzen, dass sich im Untergeschoss unter der Hauptbühne befindet, sowie die Studiobühne "Tour d'Argent" mit 280 Sitzen

cally controlled and motorized wagons so that sets for an entire opera can be brought from rehearsal stages to the main stage within ten minutes.

The main stage — 400 square meters of space and 20 meters high — is equipped with nine elevators, 72 traps, and a moveable orchestra pit that can be opened or closed in two to three minutes.

"With this stage, we can make our own topography. The proscenium is flexible so we can reduce or increase the space separating the audience and the stage, depending on the production," project coordinator and scenic director Michael Dittmann explained in an interview.

A bridge looming high over the main and backstages allows stage hands to load the ceiling with carpets, curtains and other decor without monopolizing the stage. The ceiling is also designed for storage, thus saving up to two hours a day each time productions are alternated.

Dittmann says the Opéra Bastille is not sophisticated, just practical. "Sophistication means complicated, and this building isn't complicated. It's very simple. It's a place where you have a lot of space. You have ten spaces around the main stage, and one rehearsal stage. You have nine elevators on main stage, four for the

orchestra pit, one turntable and a rigging.

"Here we don't have the daily problems of where to put our decor in between performances. At the Metropolitan you have to work at night. Here you won't, because you have enough space and can get organized very fast. These things are absolutely normal. I think the word sophisticated is wrong. The main idea is to cut out the stupid daily work of constructing, de-constructing, and reconstructing," he said.

The building also features some 6,000 square meters of workshop space with direct connection to the main stage — a welcome change from the Palais Garnier where scenery had to be built elsewhere, dismantled to fit through the building's doors, and then rebuilt on stage.

Costumes will be made and stored in 1,200 square meters on the second level adjacent to the performers' dressing rooms. And with three rehearsal rooms for the orchestras, two more for the ballet, two for the chorus, sixteen studios for singers and twelve studios for musicians, there will be no excuse for a poor performance.

Safety has been another major concern. Thirty specially designed, acoustic-treated rolling fire curtains have been installed.

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Five alone stand between the main stage and the rehearsal stage. "They are so effective, a rehearsal and a performance can take place at the same time," Dittmann said.

The hall seats 2,700 people — 1,400 downstairs and 650 in two sweeping balconies reminiscent of a Japanese pagoda. There are small balconies in the side walls "for human decorations," which is what Dittmann calls the audience seated within these side balconies. These balconies also serve to bring down the reflection of sound. Despite a glass ceiling and a cold colour scheme in white, black, and gray, the whole feeling is pleasant and intimate. No wonder — spectators in the back row are only 45 meters from the stage!

Dittmann says the hall's computer-analyzed acoustics are excellent. A polystyrene joint under the building absorbs vibrations from the three metro lines that cross under the Place de la Bastille. If that turns out to be inadequate, the subway cars themselves will be fitted with special rubber tires. Even the hall's chairs have been designed with acoustics in mind — there are small holes which allow the sound to pass through when they are empty. Small air vents under each seat

#### KEY DATES IN CONSTRUCTION OF OPERA BASTILLE

- **9 March 1982**  
Decision made to build a new opera house at Place de la Bastille
- **27 July 1982**  
Advertising of the international architectural competition
- **17 November 1983**  
Canadian architect, Carlos Ott, is selected as the winner of the international competition
- **November 1984**  
Start of demolition of La Bastille Railway Station located on site
- **February 1985**  
Start of foundations of new opera house
- **15 December 1985**  
Start of the concrete structure in the main auditorium area
- **March 1986**  
The concrete structure reaches the street level in the main auditorium area; start of the concrete structure in the stage area
- **November 1986**  
Start of the concrete floor of the main auditorium pit and in the full-sized rehearsal hall
- **February 1987**  
Completion of the pit-lobby and scenery floors at the stage level
- **April 1987**  
Completion of the first balcony lobby floor; start of construction of the first balcony concrete structure in the main auditorium
- **May 1987**  
Completion of the second balcony lobby floor and the full-sized rehearsal hall floor
- **June 1987**  
Completion of the second balcony structure in the main auditorium
- **August 1987**  
Start of the facade work
- **September 1987**  
Start of the finishes at the amphitheatre level
- **November 1987**  
Completion of the concrete structure of the main auditorium and of the concrete floor of the modular auditorium
- **1988**  
Start of stage and scenery area, equipments, and completion of finishes
- **January 1989**  
Targeted completion of the main auditorium finishes
- **April - May 1989**  
Targeted completion of project
- **13 July 1989**  
Targeted opening of the new Opéra Bastille as part of the ceremonies of the French Revolution Bicentennial Celebration.