

Helsinki Music Centre

The concept of the Helsinki Music Centre began in the early 1990s. The aim is to create a music living room placed in a prestigious part of Helsinki, which will enrich Finnish culture and act as a premier concert centre and oasis of expression. The new building will serve as a catalyst for new ideas and activities, and in many ways, the Helsinki Music Centre is making the history of European cultural venues.

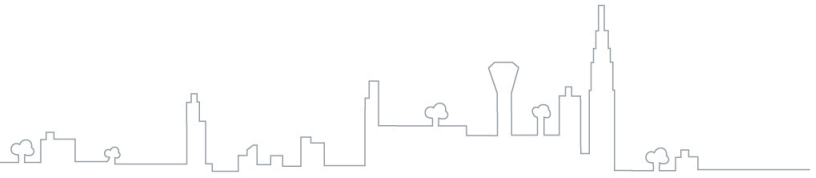
During the past 50 years, the role of cultural venues has been marked by a significant shift from elitism towards cultural democracy. The development of technology as part of performance and a broad range of music enable a dialogue with various audiences. People's musical tastes have also changed and expanded in recent times. The Helsinki Music Centre, which will host two orchestras and the Sibelius Academy, will face various challenges when creating visions and strategies, and finding practical tools for successful administration and cooperation among different bodies.

The aim of the seminar, organised by the Sibelius Academy and the British Council in June 2009, was to learn from, and be inspired by the experience of three cultural institutions from the UK: the Sage Gateshead, the Southbank Centre and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

According to Anthony Sargent - the General Director of the Sage Gateshead - single and integrated management that enables dissolving the identities of all companies involved, and starting afresh to run a space are important elements in the success of a cultural venue.

The principles applied in the Sage Gateshead are as follows:

- All music genres are treated equally



- Since the education programme in Britain is a secondary priority, half of the project is based on education
- The centre is to serve the local community.

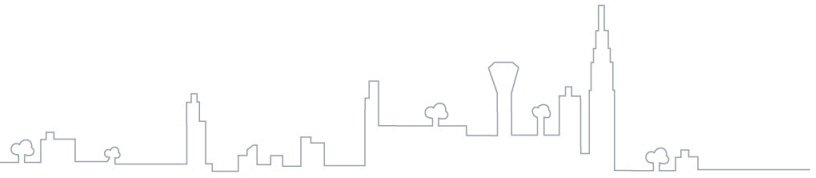
The core purpose of the Sage Gateshead is to be a centre for discovery, adventure, experience and learning for local community. Learning is visible and serves as an inspiration to the public. Children are treated with special attention, as they will create the next generation of audiences and sponsors in 20-30 years time. For instance, children and young people are offered the best seats for them to have a vivid and positive experience.

Although performance and learning are not equal, there is an attempt to connect artists with young people by offering them the artists' knowledge and experience. Such practice could also be applied at the Helsinki Music Centre to build relationship between students and some of the great artists involved in performances.

Sargent points out that the journey of the audience defines the venue: "All journeys start from where you are. Where the audience is, not where you wish they are". Diaries are made for people who do not know about a specific kind of music to allow them to learn about specific events and to encourage people to learn about the artists performing. Hosting different types of events at the same time allows for a mixing of audiences. There are constant attempts to reach and attract different communities. To this end, good media coverage is a vital issue.

The space of the venue is an organism cared for by a single team with shared values, who understand that integrity, consistency and quality are essential for the success of the centre.

Gillian Moore – the Head of Contemporary Culture - explains that the Southbank Centre in London hosts four orchestras. The mission of the centre is to enhance social change and recreate musically engaged society by using the different ways in which orchestras can reach



audiences. The key principle is never to underestimate or compromise with the audience. There are attempts to broaden the audience's interest in different styles of music.

Over time, the Southbank Centre has come to be perceived as a living room in London, being a popular place to meet, hang out and visit exhibitions. The centre has also proved successful with its shops and restaurants. People are offered the use of the space in a creative way, and this has proved appealing to the public.

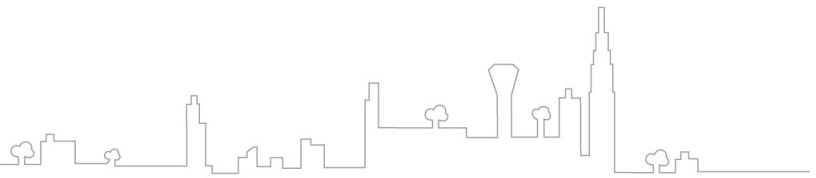
There is also a special focus on children and young people. A new repertoire for children is being created, and many youth groups act in the premises of the centre. It is also important to listen to children's requests, and to engage with top international composers for children, schools and families. There are also attempts to create employment opportunities for young people who otherwise do not have a chance to enter this field.

Gillian stresses that quality and innovation are the essence of success: "The more excellent you are, the more you can change people's lives".

Sean Gregory describes the Barbican Campus as a landscape where young musicians can engage in other fields and learn new skills, such as leadership, technology and composition. The idea is to provide opportunities that can help individual students to find their own ways to personal development. The mission of the Barbican Campus is:

- Public use
- Professional practice
- New audiences.

The campus is a large-scale systematic and institutional collaboration that will deliver significant benefits within and beyond the higher education and arts sectors.



The final conclusion of the seminar is that the starting point for the Helsinki Music House is where we are now - the process starts here. Sharing experience with the UK is very valuable, as it helps to find ways of overcoming problems and offers good examples of quick wins.