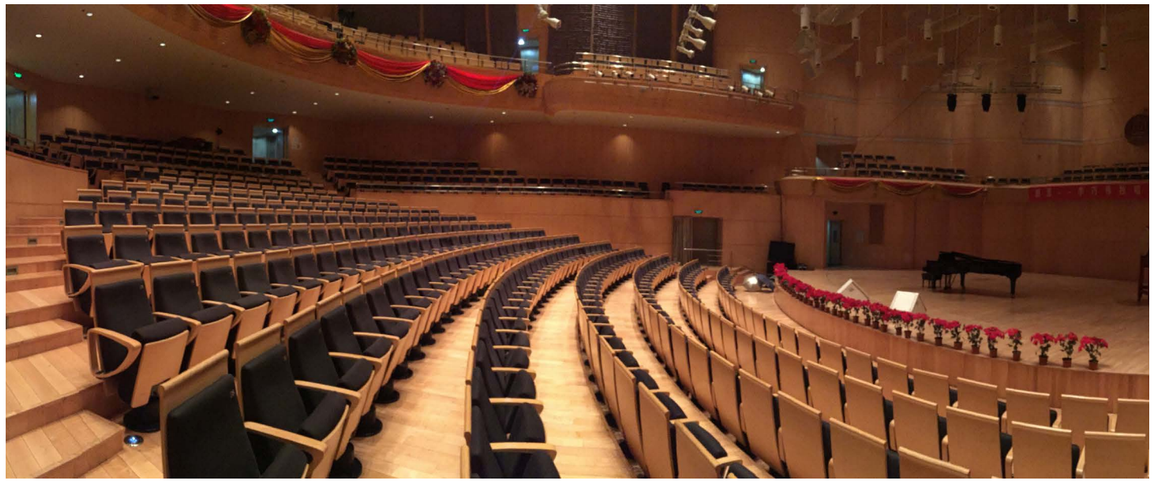
Top Three Factors for Developing a High Functioning and Enduring Theater

A well-designed theater must be functional and accommodating to both the audience and performers, while consecutively creating an intimate and creative space. There are multiple components to consider when designing a performance space. The three factors that follow put an emphasis on programming, acoustics and versatility.

1 INTELLIGENT PROGRAMMING

One of the key success factors in the development of a successful theater facility is in gaining a complete understanding of the depth and breadth of user needs and transforming that into an effective, economical, and accommodating program.

Understanding the key components from "front of house" functions, including lobby/reception area/informal performance area and auditorium to "back of house" functions like rehearsal spaces, green rooms, dressing rooms, prop storage and workshops and maintaining appropriate balance between each component is critical. A complete understanding of the programming and scheduling of the facility may lead to the consideration of several program options. For example, should a small, 150-seat studio theater for experimental performances be included in the program? Can certain spaces serve multiple functions – lobby as reception area, studio theater as rehearsal hall, etc.?



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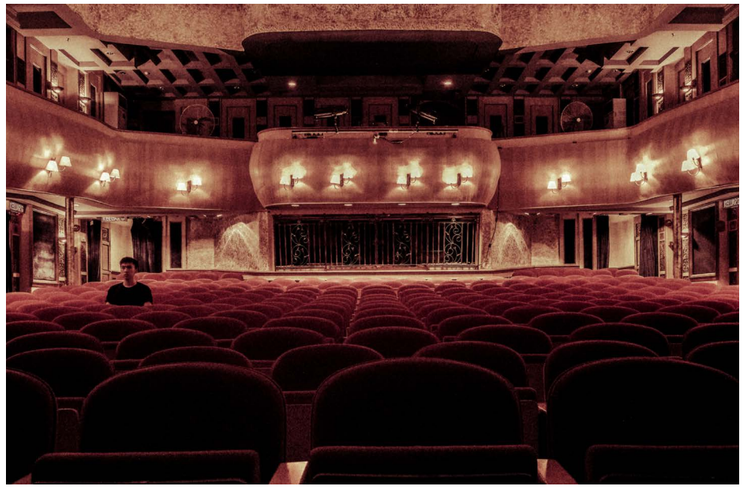

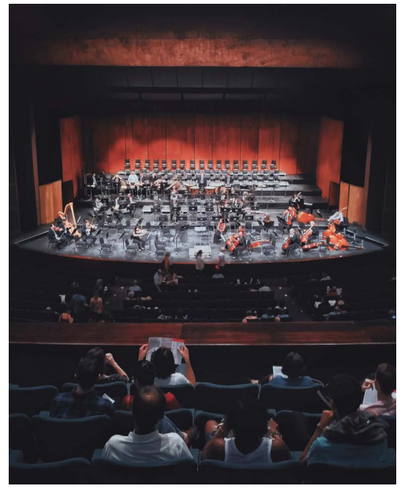

2 SUPERIOR ACOUSTICS

Great theater spaces are judged, first and foremost, by the room acoustics. A well-designed theater balances reverberation, audibility and resonance to maximize the immediacy and depth of experience of both the audience and the performers. Different activities are ideally matched with specific and differentiated acoustical settings. In a performance hall with fixed seating and a defined volume, room acoustics are designed to accommodate a range of acoustical requirements and may not be optimal for any one specific mode of performance. For example, a hall designed for drama may lack the degree of reverberation that is desirable for musical performances. Ideally, multi-purpose halls with fixed seating are designed with some degree of built-in adjustability to allow the space to be more or less reverberant.

The use of tracked acoustical drapes or extended volumes, that can be open or closed to the main theater volume, allow the 'tuning' of the room for different occasions.

Increasingly, theater design is evolving to accommodate digitally controlled sound environments using a combination of pre-established computerized settings and sound reinforcement to give a specific space a far greater range of acoustical variability. The choice to be made and how it achieves success for the school depends in part on how Loyola wishes to teach and train its students.

3 VERSATILE SYSTEMS

The flexibility, utility and effectiveness of the theater arts center as a teaching facility depend on the skilled selection, deployment and configuration of a complex array of systems, from stage rigging to acoustical shells to seating. Successful performance spaces create a sense of intimacy and connection between actor/musician/speaker and the audience. To that end, great sightlines and choice of viewpoint and position for all members of the audience are critical.

Depending on the program requirements of the theater, consideration should be given to fixed versus telescoping seating. Fixed seating provides a lasting, familiar environment; more flexible telescoping seating can still define an intimate theatrical experience while offering the option of a flat floor for expanded performance space or theater in the round configurations. The configuration of the orchestra pit is another critical consideration that affects the experience and versatility of the theater setting. A well-designed orchestra pit can be covered or raised and lowered to create a thrust stage, eliminating the separation between stage and audience when an orchestra is not deployed.

Another critical factor that will contribute to the success of the theater as a performance venue is the approach to heating and cooling. HVAC systems need to be designed to be as quiet and constant as possible. Air distribution strategies and comfort criteria need to be studied carefully to ensure a superior acoustical environment that optimizes the experience of audience and performer.

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