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629-2024

Communication

Request of James Lee to address Council regarding sound in auditoriums

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A brief description of Communication: Sound in Auditoriums

Document History

Item 629 Communications in [July 10, 2024 Council Agenda](#)
(<https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2024/7/10>)

City Council

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Requested Agenda Type

Communications

Date and Time Information

Requested Council Date

July 10, 2024

Presentation to Council of the City of Portland
by
James Bernard Lee
10 July 2024

History of Architecture with Theoretical Physics

Mister Mayor, Members of Council, I am James Bernard Lee. I reside in Southeast Portland and speak only for myself.

On May 29th Council heard three half-hour presentations by real-estate promoters alleging improvement to our Keller Auditorium. I request equal time to present alternatives.

I graduated from Central Catholic High School, took a degree in physics from Saint Mary's College, did rocket science for the Navy at China Lake for six years, studied architecture at the University of Oregon, took a master's degree in Architectural Science at the University of Sydney, thesis on concert halls.

Since then I have continued to study this intractable problem, eschewed by two Nobel laureates in physics, Lord Rayleigh and Richard Feynman. There has been progress: presentations to technical societies; publications in this country and Europe.

Forty years ago I bird-dogged the Performing Arts Project before Council, annoying many with accurate prediction of ineluctable errors of concept, design, execution.

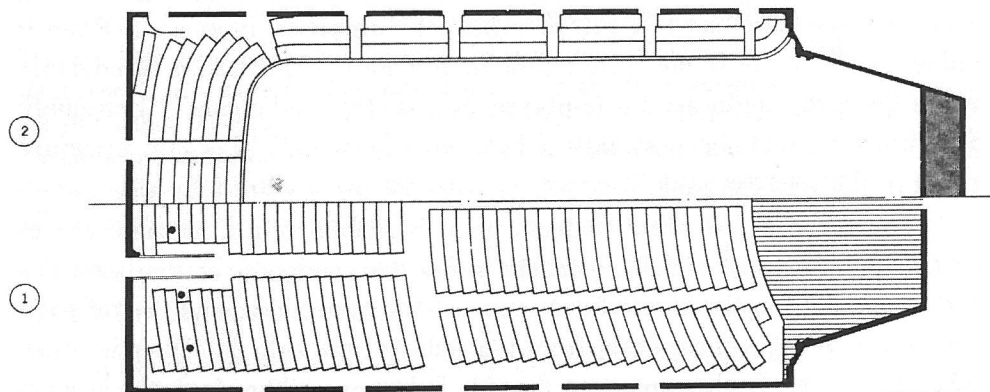
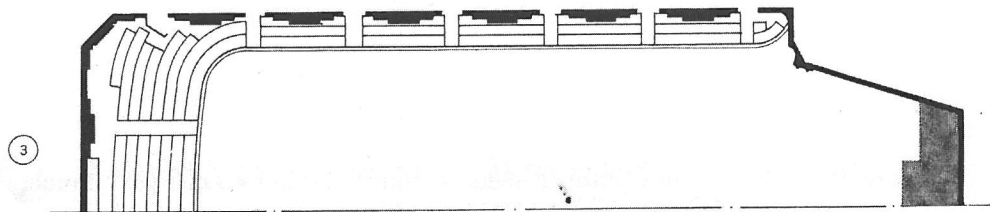
Now, as then, I am the only person here with detailed knowledge of these vital and problematic buildings. I desire to place a half-century of diligent research and substantial achievement before Council to accurately inform it prior to decision.

My idea is to build a version of Boston Symphony Hall for concerts and a version of Teatro alla Scala di Milano for opera. These are by far the finest venues built over the past 250 years. We should be wise to emulate them.

Last year I was to appear at a special session of the Concert Hall Research Group and the Acoustical Society of America beside Paul Scarbrough, who had been charged with rebuilding New York Philharmonic Hall for the third time over sixty years. A sudden heart issue prevented my traveling to Chicago.

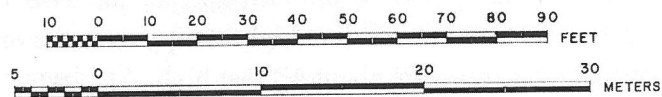
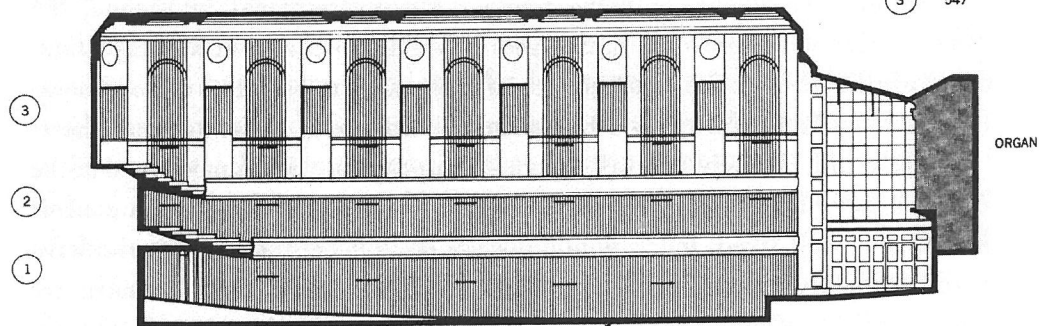
May I present that knowledge to you?

HALL



SEATING CAPACITY 2631

- ① 1486
- ② 598
- ③ 547



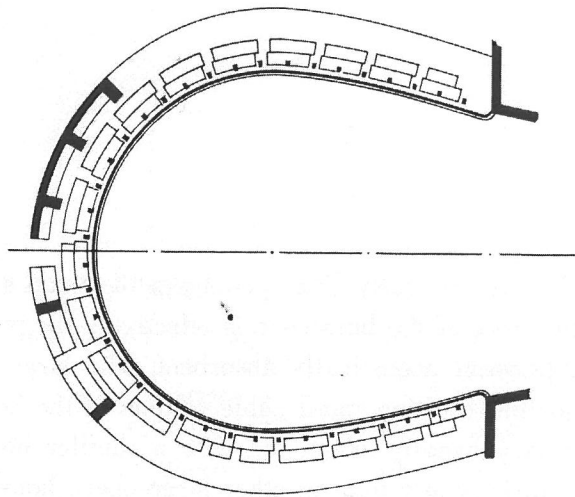
SEATING CAPACITY 2135

- ① 776
- ② 228
- ③ 248
- ④ 228
- ⑤ 246
- ⑥ 204 numbered + 63 unnumbered (+ standees)
- ⑦ 205 numbered + 91 unnumbered (+ standees)

Capacity 2135 (plus 154 unnumbered seats from which stage is not visible when person is seated)

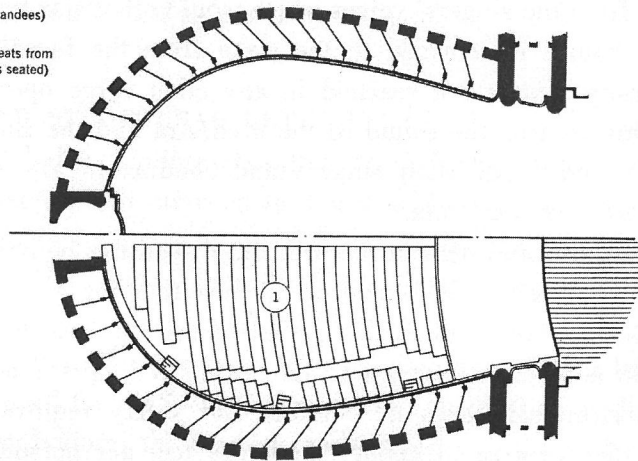
⑥

⑦

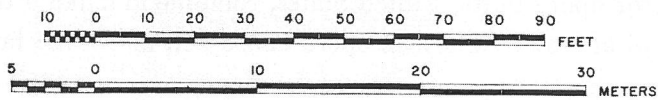
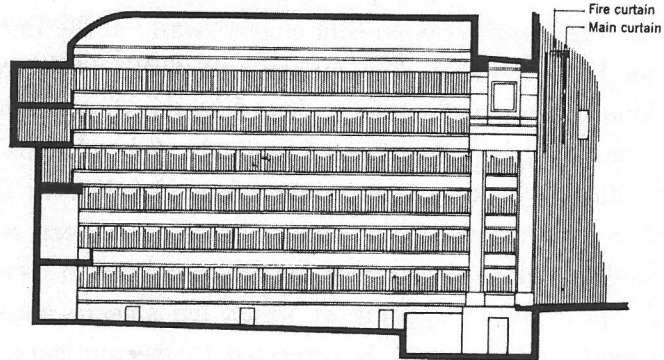


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Critical Points of Presentation to Council

James Bernard Lee

10 July 2024

1. The three existing proposals are based not on requirements of users, such as symphony and opera companies, but on advantages to promoters of real estate developments.
2. The President of PSU ought to be representing needs of her arts organizations, such as the university's fine student opera program, rather than endorsing expansion of the university's urban property interests.
3. Fifty years ago I worked with Walter Gordon and Gil Davis, prominent architects, to propose construction of a small classical opera house in the center of Lincoln Hall, to replace the old high school gymnasium. The idea was favorably received, but too costly then. The student opera program would have benefited greatly from our proposal.
4. Promoters of the "Keller Option" noted that seismic upgrade of the multipurpose auditorium would be, "...fairly straight forward." They did not mention its cost, a small fraction of their enormous regeneration of what currently is among the best multipurpose auditoriums extant.
5. Such a "conservative" approach should incorporate replacement of the current specularly reflecting suspended ceiling with a diffusing one, greatly improving acoustics.
6. The report for the Keller program advocates electronic enhancement of sound to improve, "acoustic range." In hundreds of technical sessions at meetings of the Acoustical Society of America never have I heard such a term. But electronic systems have been employed since the 1950s, notably at Royal Festival Hall, London, to "enhance reverberation." Always they fail. The finest concert halls and opera houses were built before the invention of electronic amplifiers.
7. At the meeting of Council on 29 May 2024 members commented on "beautiful pictures." Here is danger. Renderings of architectural proposals are misleading, usually by intention. They are advertising for work, covering a multitude of sins. Beware of developers flogging transcendently mediocre auditoriums!