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BARCELONA'S FIRST SYMPHONY HALL

by Felicia Esquinas

Three weeks of music. As if making up for lost time, the Auditori has swept straight into centre stage. The inaugural concert, given on 22 March by the Barcelona and Catalan National Symphony Orchestra (OBC) with the pianist Alicia de Larrocha was followed by another 24 opening concerts, taking it up to 18 April. The schedule included names such as Joan Manuel Serrat, Michael Nyman, Jordi Savall, Jessye Norman, Lokua Kanza and Madredeus.

The facilities, which were designed by Rafael Moneo, have been introduced to society as L'espai de la música ("The Space for Music"), and they make no secret of their vocation to become a point of reference for Barcelona's musical life. "A great cultural centre for the city, open to all styles," in the words of Miquel Lumbierres, manager of the Auditori Consortium and the OBC. Although symphony music will constitute its main line, there will be plenty of room for even the most experimental of genres. The programme will include both the Consortium's own schedule and initiatives from private promoters, who will hire the facilities for the occasion. The Liceu Consortium, Ibercàmera and Euroconcert, among others, will offer part of their programmes there, and it will also host non-musical activities such as congresses.

The Auditori symphony hall is the first to be built in Barcelona specifically for large orchestras. The 260 sq m of stage space provides ample room for a large orchestra plus choir, and there is seating for an audience of 2,340. Music-lovers will be glad to hear that the price of the ticket depends only on the distance from the stage – not audibility or visibility, which are the same for the whole audience. The hall, with its 50,000 W of sound and 100,000 W of lighting, has the same acoustics throughout and unhindered visibility from all seats. The physicist Higiní Arau was commissioned for the acoustic design. According to Lumbierres, "The technological facilities are first-class, and we hope that acoustically this will be one of the best complexes in Europe."

The facilities at the complex are complemented with the multipurpose hall, which can be used as a rehearsal hall, a recording studio (the OBC will record its CDs there) or a space for concerts of a multidisciplinary or experimental nature. The Consortium also hopes to have the chamber hall ready one year from now. In addition to rehearsal rooms, study rooms, and all the other facilities for performers and public alike, the complex features two foyers which can be used to house exhibitions. The total cost of the project amounts to 7,776 MPTA, 50% of which has been provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the remaining 50% by Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Government (Generalitat).

The Auditori, born to provide the city with a symphony hall and the OBC with a headquarters, will ultimately be a great cultural complex also housing the Higher Conservatory of Catalonia and the Music Museum. At least, such are the plans for the scheme. Some 9,800 sq m for the Conservatory and 2,700 sq m for the Museum have already been made ready in preparation for the move, the date and conditions of which are to be fixed by the Generalitat and the City Council, and which is now under negotiation.

The opening of the Auditori has given the finishing touch to the Plaça de les

Arts de Glòries, which it shares with the TNC (National Theatre of Catalonia) and the Archive of the Crown of Aragon. The complex, with three separate halls allowing concerts to be held simultaneously, will be a major focus for the area's musical life and will expand the available range of music.