

theatre staff can be made available to teachers and used to provide expertise on particular projects. Touring companies will be encouraged to participate with their outreach programs, by using the studio theatre. We want the place to be hectic, full of parents and shoppers who can meet and gossip while their children participate in youth theatre activities and after-school clubs. It can be used by local businesses and industry, supported by the very distinctive environment that we are trying to create. The building will have excellent services intended to provide unique spaces for conferences, meetings, trade shows, product launches and training days. We believe theatre technicians and front-of-house staff are probably more experienced and better at staging these events than people in many hotel conference facilities. After all, theatre people do it every day; they know what it is to get a show on and what is necessary to set up a complex presentation.

The diversity of the designs will hopefully attract interest from potential partnerships and residences from other arts providers – and across art forms – who will use the spaces to display work of local artists and craftsmen, and from schools and colleges. The facilities of the theatre can be used for multimedia displays, which are important in so many new art forms and which can be linked to the current productions, creating an ever-changing environment – something different for the regular users of the building.

These activities are not unusual for many subsidised rep theatres; they have been doing this but it is often behind closed doors, shut away from general view and not really enlivening the building. And it is less common to see it in commercial receiving houses where the tradition has been to open the doors half an hour before the show and, once the curtain is down, to close the building as quickly as possible, throwing the last hangers-on out. But Belfast City displays a new confidence in its cultural life and hopefully these extended concepts will

In the evening we will see how the theatre can respond to the competition. The Grand Opera House, like so many other theatres in big cities, is facing competition from other venues, repertory companies, arts centres and clubs. The facilities within the theatre therefore have to reflect this competition and compete. Here they can create a mood for the evening and this could perhaps be related to the theme of a show. We see 'seasons' in repertory theatres, for example, of Spanish plays, but it is more difficult in a

touring theatre where the company are only in the theatre for a week. Just as the paper posters are currently sent around a few weeks before a touring company arrives, in future video and projection material will be circulated. Why can't a CD or DVD be mailed out with the promotional material on it? That same material can be projected within the building to help to dress the foyers for the evening performances. It would use much of the same technology that the theatre has installed for its productions, and we are putting the necessary cabling infrastructure into these foyers to allow for this.

The aim is to get people to arrive early and to stay on after the show; perhaps a theatrical version of 24-hour drinking! We want workers on their way home to drop in and enjoy a bottle of wine, and wait to meet their partners, even perhaps when going on to another venue. The theatre should also stage pre-show events, provide quality sponsorship and hospitality packages of the sort at which the hosts and the invitees actually enjoy the occasion.

The studio can be used for showing art films when it is not in use for other events. Providing for the studio theatre audience is probably going to be a challenge for this management as they need the types of shows that will bring in a younger, newer audience; perhaps an audience that doesn't normally go to the theatre, as opposed to the audience for the traditional touring theatre in which a lot of the productions are amateur musicals and local drama along with a wide range of the professional touring productions.



The atrium space in the foyers of 'Olavshallen' in Trondheim, Norway, themed for the musical CHESS with a giant chess board played by the characters in the show. This foyer space is actually on the cross roads of two main pedestrian routes through part of the town; it includes a number of retail shops and is overlooked by bars and rooms of the integral hotel
Photo: Theatreplan

Architect Barry Pritchard focuses on the foyer developments in the Grand Opera House in Belfast, consultant Mark Stroomer describes the use of computer programs to plot movements of the public, while consultant Richard York and manager John Causebrook give their views on handling the public.

The completed ground floor foyer of the Grand Opera House in November 2006
Photo: Anthony Coleman

