

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

Submission of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Society has welcomed the opportunity to revisit the original brief regarding the provision of cultural facilities in the West Kowloon Cultural District and is pleased to have the opportunity to make the following submission to the Sub-Committee on the West Kowloon Cultural District.

The purpose of this submission is to convey the wishes and ambitions of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in relation to any proposed development of the West Kowloon Cultural District.

The role of the Hong Kong Philharmonic in the cultural life of Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Philharmonic is Hong Kong's largest and busiest performing arts company. It has been performing the great works of the orchestral repertoire for Hong Kong audiences since its establishment in 1894. In 1974 the Orchestra entered the second chapter in its history, becoming a fully professional ensemble and building a reputation as one of the leading orchestras in the region. From 2004 the Hong Kong Philharmonic entered a third and vital phase in its history, setting its sights on the highest international standards of excellence, with an ambition to take its place on the world stage as the finest orchestra in Asia. With the appointment of Edo de Waart as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor, the Orchestra has taken the first steps towards achieving this goal and has put in place an artistic plan to fully achieve this vision over a ten year period.

The role of the West Kowloon Cultural District in the cultural life of Hong Kong

Hong Kong's claimed status as a world city is supported by the unrivalled dynamism of its commercial and finance sectors, its busy trading port and its natural location as a conduit between Asia and the West. Its world city status however is not supported by its cultural sector. Resident companies have languished with inadequate funding, meagre corporate support and with second-rate performing venues. A chaotic lack of co-ordination pitches sister companies one in competition with the other, instead of working in a mutually supportive way with the

shared goal of creating a vibrant, creative and inclusive cultural scene to rival that of the world's great cities.

WKCD has the potential not only to influence the future of Hong Kong's cultural life, but to shape it forever. The plans that are laid now will determine the scope and vibrancy of Hong Kong's cultural life for the next 30 years.

But what does the community envisage in 30 years' time? If Hong Kong is going to realize its potential to become the cultural hub of Asia as much as it is the business and finance hub, we need to imagine what that future looks like.

The Hong Kong Philharmonic envisions music to be the central art form in the cultural hub of Asia, as music, more than any other art form, is an international language which crosses cultural borders with ease and which is enlivened by multi-cultural influences. In Hong Kong's unique world position, and with this city's harmonious yet diverse population, music is the only art which brings communities together. Music offers a platform for both the finest performing artists from all over the world and for the emerging young talent from our own community to converge.

We therefore feel that the West Kowloon Cultural District must have, at its heart, first class performance, rehearsal, educational and administrative facilities for Hong Kong's major musical companies. As the preeminent performing company in Hong Kong, we believe that the Hong Kong Philharmonic has a central part to play in the success and vitality of the city's new cultural hub. As the Hong Kong Philharmonic grows in stature and flourishes into the finest orchestra in Asia, we will increasingly attract the world's best artists, from both the classical and pop music worlds, expanding our domestic audience and attracting international audiences.

In order to achieve our goal of great artistic development, the current concert hall facilities in Hong Kong are inadequate. Both the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall and the City Hall Concert Hall fall short of international standards of acoustics, and will soon stand in stark contrast to the Shenzhen Concert Hall, designed by Yasuhito Toyota (Nagata Acoustics), when it opens in late 2005. The concert hall is effectively the instrument that an orchestra plays on. Like a talented and promising solo violinist who needs a great instrument in order to fully realize his potential, every great orchestra has been able to achieve its highest standards only when it resides in a great concert hall. The world's greatest orchestras, from Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic to the Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, have become inextricably linked to the concert halls which are both their home and their instrument.

The ideal concert hall would include first class performance, rehearsal and educational facilities for a full-size symphony orchestra (with a large-scale education programme) complete with rehearsal rooms, choir facilities, dressing rooms, administration offices, the full range of audience facilities front of house and catering facilities for corporate guests and VIPs.

Beyond the specific rehearsal and performance needs of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the necessary components for a true cultural hub would include an integrated Academy for

Performing Arts, designed to provide all facilities for the training of young musicians, singers, dancers and actors for the next 30 years. By integrating these facilities into the rehearsal and performance facilities of the professional performing companies, a creative and dynamic environment is formed in which young, emerging artists mingle with the world's best.

Branching into other art forms, questions arise about the future of opera, dance, ballet and theatre in Hong Kong. While dance, ballet and theatre companies are well established in Hong Kong, the city is yet to have a full-time professional opera company which is capable of mounting its own productions. By including a first class lyric theatre in the scheme for the West Kowloon Cultural District, is there an intention for it to house a resident opera company?

If the answer is yes, the full rehearsal, production and administration facilities need to be incorporated and a long-term plan for the evolution of a full-time opera company needs to be instigated.

If the answer is no, then the cultural future of Hong Kong will, by default, exclude one of the greatest art forms of all.

Recommendation

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Society recommends that the Government revise the basic brief for the West Kowloon Cultural District to reflect a profound study of the future needs of Hong Kong's major resident performing arts companies and that it place music at the heart of this new cultural hub.

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