

Panel on Home Affairs and Panel on Development

Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the
West Kowloon Cultural District Project

Meeting on 10 June 2013

The Hong Kong Philharmonic is regarded by many as one of the leading orchestras of Asia. Its history goes back to 1895, and for the last 40 years it has been a professional orchestra, now full-time, with a core membership of 90 players. What can help make an orchestra world-class is a great hall, and it is probably no accident that most of the world's leading orchestras all have their own, essentially purpose-built halls, with the orchestra as the primary resident group in their hall: Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Hong Kong has a rare opportunity to match these cities by including in the WKCD a world-class, purpose-built concert hall.

We would like to take this opportunity of stating again our position with regard to the concert hall in the WKCD:

Although we have previously shared most, if not all, of the following thoughts with representatives from the WKCDA and others in conversation and at meetings attended by representatives of the HK Sinfonietta and HK Chinese Orchestra, the timing seems appropriate to repeat these views in writing:

- The powers that be should enable each of the three main orchestras to be based in their own hall. This does not mean that they would be the exclusive user of that hall; what it means is that they would have priority booking over everyone else, as far into the future as they needed, and then at an appropriate moment would release dates for other users. This arrangement would allow the orchestras to plan professionally. As Hong Kong is planning on having three halls, and as there are three main orchestras, this seems a sensible arrangement.
- My suggestion would be that the Sinfonietta be based at City Hall, the Chinese Orchestra in the Cultural Centre Concert Hall, and the HK Phil at the new hall in the WKCD. When City Hall is renovated, the improvements

should be carried out with the specific needs of the Sinfonietta in mind; similarly, when the Concert Hall is renovated, the improvements should be carried out with the specific needs of the Chinese Orchestra in mind.

- The new concert hall in the WKCD should be designed not to be a multi-purpose hall that is OK for everyone but not great for anyone; it should be conceived specifically for the needs of a 21st-century western symphony orchestra, with appropriate acoustics, sight-lines, stage size, large screen projection facilities, chorus seating, backstage facilities and, crucially, rehearsal space in another room for a full-size symphony orchestra.
- In order for the public to differentiate easily from City Hall and the Concert Hall, it could be called “Philharmonic Hall”.
- Many of the HK Phil administration, players, Music Director, visiting conductors and soloists would be delighted to advise on the requirements and design of the new hall. We hope that the WKCDA will capitalize on the wealth of this knowledge and advice that is available locally, here in Hong Kong. We would strongly recommend that the resident orchestra be involved in all aspects of the planning process, from the very beginning.
- The primary resident orchestra therefore needs to be identified sooner rather than later.

Thank you

Michael MacLeod
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