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## CRIT> GREEKS AND GEEKS

Ennead's Bing Concert Hall helps build an arts district on Stanford's campus.



THE OVAL-SHAPED HALL IN ITS LUSH ENVIRONS.  
JEFF GOLDBERG / ESTO

Stanford University is creating an arts district on the edge of its campus, enriching the cultural life of the Bay Area and the minds of geeks who pass through on their way to lucrative careers in Silicon Valley. One project in the district that was completed recently is Bing Concert Hall. New York-based Ennead Architects won the commission to design the venue, which is programmed for unamplified musical performances. A tapered oval drum of reinforced concrete provides acoustic isolation for the 842-seat auditorium, and is surrounded with a spacious foyer and back stage facilities for performers, including a lofty rehearsal room.

Bing faces west on a wooded site set back from a road and directly across from the Ionic portico of the Cantor Arts Center. Happily, Ennead has avoided such period motifs, creating a building that respects its context with no attempt at mimicry. Its concrete facades are faced in ochre-toned stucco that refers to the sandstone buildings at the historic core of the campus, and the drum and service areas are partially buried to reduce their height. A wide canopy shades the glazed entry facade and south side, where glass sliders open the café to a sheltered terrace. The expansive glazing pulls in natural light and blurs the boundary between indoors and out. Performers' rooms open out to a private terrace on the north side.



The triumph of Bing is that it creates a feeling of intimacy within the soaring space, by gathering musicians and audience tightly together. The front row of seating is at the same level as the stage, and the back row is only 75 feet away. Fabric panels and curtains between the baffles and at the rear of the auditorium can be deployed to dampen the acoustic for speech and amplified music. As one might expect, Stanford students create computer-generated music as well as jazz, and their needs are different from those of a string quartet. The Bing Concert Hall erases physical and aural boundaries to promote a sense of discovery and delight for players and listeners.

**Michael Webb**



The hall's ovoid form, pointed out Ennead design partner Richard Olcott, evolved from discussions with acoustician Yasu Toyota, who also worked on Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall. "Yasu's quest for the perfect distribution of sound was matched by his concern for psycho-acoustics—hearing shaped by sensory feelings. He never told us what to do, but there were a few things he insisted on," said Olcott.

A key demand was height. The tilted oval ceiling canopy is suspended 47 feet above the centrally located stage. Alaskan yellow cedar provides an ideal degree of resonance, and hydraulic lifts can raise or lower sections to create horseshoe tiers for an orchestral or choral concert. Sound is bounced off the eight swelling baffles that rise to the height of the chamber. Their convex forms play off the concave walls, and a coating of warm white fiber-reinforced plaster disguises their mass and makes them feel as light and billowy as sails. Eight blocks of seating surround the stage, and the beech wood balustrades that enclose them are deeply ridged in a basket weave pattern. The concrete walls are concealed behind a rippling layer of fiber-reinforced plastic in a soft gray tone. All of these surfaces are modeled to diffuse the sound and contrast with the unadorned baffles. They draw the eye up to the ribbed ceiling canopy, which contains lighting and mechanical equipment.



Olcott and his design team strove to create an uplifting space—"more like a chapel than a theater, and tent-like in its whiteness"—that is anchored by the rich tones and tactility of blond woods. There's a good balance of plain and patterned, warm and cool surfaces, but the juxtaposition of two different patterns feels too busy.

It's a pity that the architects were not allowed to incorporate windows, as Gehry did so successfully at Disney Hall. The client thought that openings would prove distracting, so Ennead simulated a hidden skylight by using LEDs to produce a cone of light behind the stage.