



**LSO St. Luke's,
Islington**
Levitt Bernstein



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Architect: Levitt Bernstein
 Client: The St. Luke Centre Management Company
 Completion: 2003
 Construction Cost: £9.7m

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Brief

The brief is unique; the UBS & LSO Music Education Centre (LSO St. Luke's full name), is the home of the London Symphony Orchestra's ground-breaking music education and community programme called LSO Discovery, which formerly led a peripatetic existence in often unsuitable conditions. It takes great music to everyone, of every age and from every walk of life, both locally, and using information and communication technology, across the UK and the world. It also hosts orchestral rehearsals and recordings, smaller scale performances, conferences and private lettings. It is required to be a practical, workaday building that transforms into an inspiring ambience for events and performances.

Background

The Grade I listed Church of St. Luke, in Old Street, London, attributed to the great baroque architect, Nicholas Hawksmoor, has been brought back to life after an extraordinary reversal of fortune. In 1959 it was declared a dangerous structure following serious settlement in the North West corner; the roof was removed, many of the contents were transferred to other churches, and the shell was abandoned to the elements. Deterioration continued apace, but within scarcely a generation the unloved embarrassment had developed into one of English Heritage's most important buildings at risk.

Process

The project was first mooted in 1995, and a feasibility study undertaken with the support of Arts Council funds in 1996. In 1997 lottery applications resulted in grants from the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Funds and with the additional help of a major grant from UBS the project was able to proceed.

Layout

The complex is dominated by the Jerwood Hall, the adaptable space created by roofing over the ruined walls. Its area and volume are large enough for a full orchestra and chorus to rehearse or record in; retractable seating, movable rostra, and a shallow balcony around three sides provide for an audience of 350, and with banners to adjust its acoustic qualities. A variety of configurations are possible to suit the other elements of the brief.

Beneath the Hall the reconstructed crypt holds a cafe/foyer, kitchen, Discovery office, library and instrument store. The final third is created by digging new extensions beneath the churchyard; to the north the Clore Rooms provide three spaces for sectional rehearsals, meetings and workshops, and the largest contains a Balinese gamelan orchestra. There is only one addition to the church above ground; a new extension, on the footprint of the original vestry, houses the artists' entrance, a lift and stair and level access to the Hall.

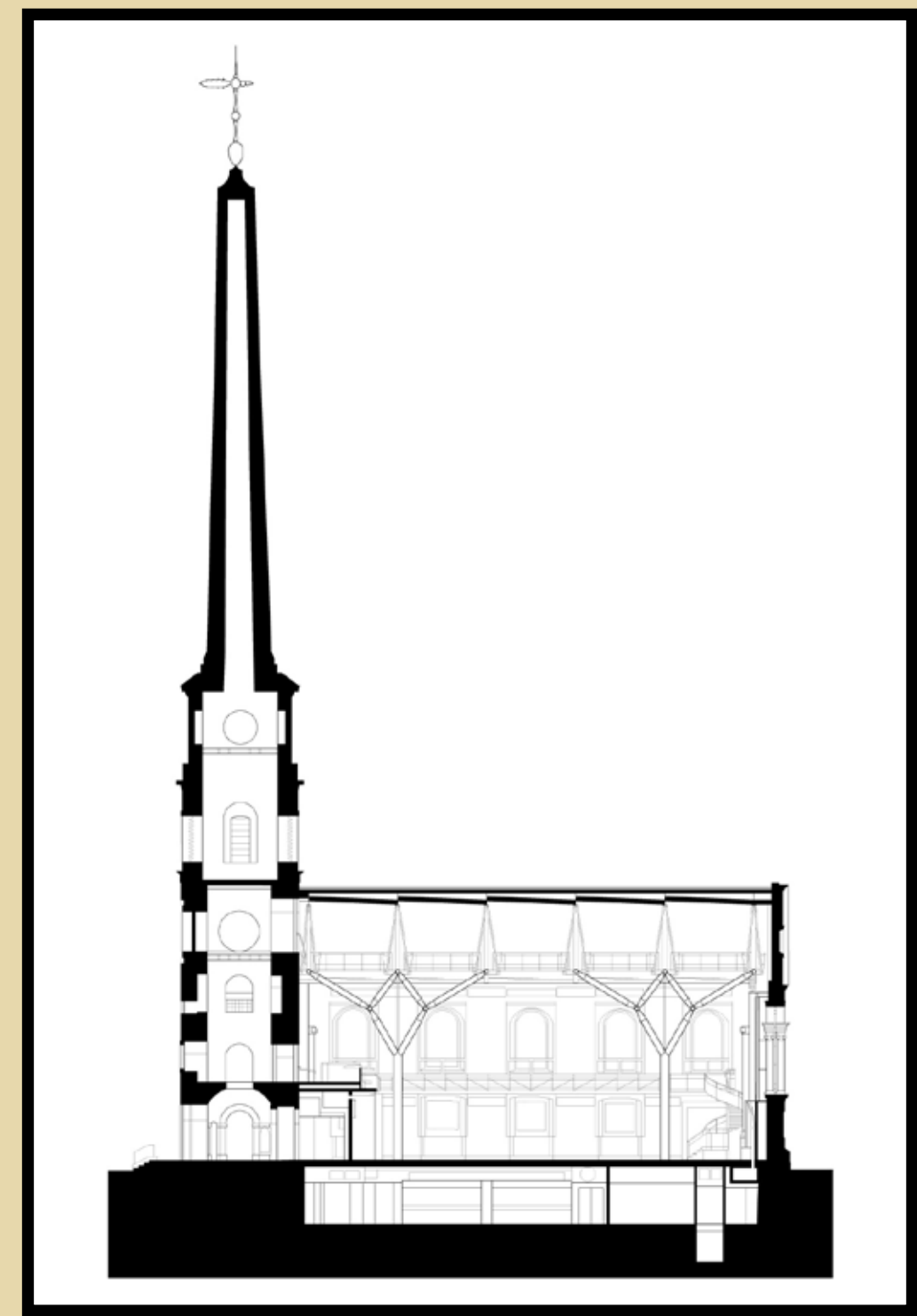
Design Approach

The architectural approach builds upon Levitt Bernstein's award-winning experience of adapting old buildings for new uses. Modern insertions are treated as benign interventions into the worn and time-ravaged shell of the old church, the contrast drawing attention to the quality of each.

Externally, the main structure of the church has been cleaned and repaired, and the roof is clad in new Westmoreland slate. Signs of the disastrous settlement has been retained, and every attempt has been made to keep the patina of age. The new 'vestry' building is an unashamedly modern structure, in Portland Stone.

Internally the new roof to the Jerwood Hall is supported on four steel columns, which spread like the branches of a tree to collect the six A-shaped trusses that incorporate lighting galleries. The balcony structure is also supported by the columns. The steelwork is robustly detailed to complement the grandeur of the room.

The existing bare brick and stone walls are retained, cleaned and repaired with a light touch to preserve their hints of original structure, fittings and decoration, which, in conjunction with the modern interventions, form a palimpsest of the building's extraordinary history.



Technology & Acoustics

The building services have been designed to combine the highest possible acoustic standards and low energy use with sensitivity to the historic fabric of the church. Designs include near silent ventilation systems and an innovative heating and cooling system that uses the ground deep below the building as its source of energy.

The main hall has become an acoustically sealed performance space where a full orchestra and choir can perform and even record music. Its ventilation system is designed to meet very low noise levels without intruding into the space or interfering with critical sound paths.

The design of the Hall and its enclosing walls is dominated by acoustic considerations. The roof and floor are an unusual build up of over thirteen distinct layers to control the transfer of sound. The original cast iron windows have been repaired or copied, and are glazed in 12mm glass; on the inside face, new frames are glazed with 53mm laminated glass, simply detailed to appear as removable additions. The roughness of the old brickwork perfectly disperses unwanted lateral reflections, and new surfaces have been carefully angled to achieve the same effect. Retractable banners enable the liveness of the natural acoustic to be moderated for different types of event.

