

When the first line appears on the paper, the architect knows that the process has just commenced the result of which is only partially predictable. In this fascinating and complicated process, unhindered imagination should smoothly intertwine with obvious pragmatism.

Tomasz Konior, architect of the new seat of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, frequently refers to the idea of „context architecture”. He also emphasises that a building can only be called a success when people visiting it have no doubts about it, i.e. when life goes on naturally in the space created by the designer and the rhythm of the life is dictated by functions of the building. However, before such a space is created, thousands of questions have to be answered by architects themselves since they should not only be able to conceive bold concepts but also to look at the design from various angles and to modify their plans.

When Tomasz Konior's Studio won the competition for the design of a new seat for the NOSPR, we could see on display-boards an interesting solid body that was to be merged with the space of the former "Katowice" coal-mine and become a part of the „culture axle” defined by the city authorities. At that time, the design did not call up any associations with Silesia, yet the way it evolved was very interesting.

Today, visitors' attention is attracted in the first place by the extremely interesting elevation of the building. It is composed of Silesian motifs and associations with music as organised by a distinct rhythm of pillars. Tomasz Konior says that he wanted the building to be a story in itself, a spatial narration originating from the local Silesian culture. Hence references to the architecture of Katowice's district Nikiszowiec which has fixed in everybody's mind the image of the past Silesia as built of brick, with windows bordered with traditional redness.

This seemingly simple outer structure of the building contains what is the most important for the world of music, i.e. concert halls: a great hall for 1800 seats and a small-audience one that can contain 300 music lovers. Interiors of the both halls are characterised by a very warm atmosphere obtained through the materials used: birch wood, combined with some exotic species, and concrete formed into wavy structures. Light is another factor of great importance in the hall interiors. 670 lighting outlets soften the outline of all interior elements. Another 500 spotlights can enrich a concert with unusual effects.

Under the ceiling of the great concert hall, there is a plafond installed; its special shape affects the sound propagation. The process of creating the concert hall was very complicated and acoustic was precisely the reason for that. The Katowice hall was built in cooperation with the Japanese company Nagata Acoustics and the company's work here was managed by Yasushisa Toyota, an unrivalled master in the field. Earlier, the Japanese had worked at construction of such halls as the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, the Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles, or Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. All those halls have the auditorium arrangement which is called *vineyard*. In this arrangement, stalls and in circles surround the stage and as a result, music is heard exactly the same way from each seat of the hall. Yasushisa Toyota had worked at construction of those halls together with such architectural celebrities as Frank Gehry or Jacques Jean Nouvel.

In case of the Nagata company, one of key elements of the process of the hall acoustics design is construction of the hall model in a 1:10 scale. Also the great hall of the NOSPR had such a miniature. Precisely that model was used by engineers from the Nagata company for conducting acoustic tests. The miniature, reconstructed in every detail and filled with nitrogen, was a sort of a sound laboratory.

The engagement of the Japanese in the hall construction process was suggested by the most eminent Polish pianist, Krystian Zimerman who had supported the plans of building a new seat for the NOSPR since the very beginning. He also visited the construction site and paid attention to details which in his opinion were significant for musicians and music lovers. He particularly cared

for the atmosphere in the small-audience hall where smaller ensembles and soloists would perform.

Also Krzysztof Penderecki was lively interested in the design. During his visit at the construction site, he not only shared his opinions based on his experience as a conductor but also his profound knowledge of trees. After all, he is the proud owner of the unusual park in Lusławice. In Katowice, he suggested the tree species that should grow in the area surrounding the new NOSPR's seat. Also the idea of the vegetable labyrinth replicating the plan of Katowice of 1926 caught his fancy as an attraction for people visiting the NOSPR's gardens. It was Penderecki who suggested hornbeam as a species best suited for creating the vegetable labyrinth.

Apart from Zimmerman and Penderecki, there were also other outstanding representatives of the world of music who passed their suggestions to originators of the NOSPR's new seat: Wojciech Kilar, Eugeniusz Knapik, Kazimierz Kord, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Yulianna Avdeeva to name but a few. All of them have formed a community of artists involved in the process of the building creation. The new seat of the NOSPR, as distinguished by its exceptional architecture, surrounded with gardens intriguing by their simplicity, with concert halls of superior acoustics, has defined a new way of thinking about the space for culture in Poland and become a symbol of Katowice's transformation. [Ewa Niewiadomska]