

Richard Koshalek and Dana Hutt

The Impossible Becomes Possible:

The MAKING of
WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL

Great works of architecture exude a sense of inevitability and fitness. Rooted and timeless, they appear as if they have always stood, the complications of their birth forgotten or briskly receding into the past. By definition, creating innovative public architecture—the most civic, costly, time-intensive, and physical of the arts—entails a certain amount of risk, strife, and negotiation. Potential hazards lie at every step of the process, from the planning and design stages to construction, occupancy, and critical reception. All buildings are realized through the confluence of many individuals who must work together to make them happen. But a building of ground-breaking design must also overcome the inherent apprehension of the multiple parties involved: the client, the bankers, the backers, the contractors, and the community. A large public commission that aspires to creative originality must also transcend forces beyond its immediate circumstance, obstacles of economics, politics, and leadership.

These challenges are worth the effort because a great cultural building provides a rare, memorable experience that contributes immeasurably to the identity of a city. The Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House, and the Centre Pompidou are among the most celebrated examples of beloved civic icons that were highly controversial at the time of their creation. What is especially notable about the sixteen-year history of Walt Disney Concert Hall is its democratic process. Unlike François Mitterand's *grands projets* for cultural infrastructure and monuments in Paris in the 1980s, this building did not result from the patronage of the state, nor was it the product of a private commission. Walt Disney Concert Hall emerged—in fits and starts—from a collaboration of private individuals and civic, cultural, and corporate leadership in Los Angeles. The history of the Concert Hall is the story of a city's growing pains.

MUSIC CENTER EXPANSION

The roots of the Concert Hall's complicated public/private alliance can be traced to the inception of the Music Center. In 1955, the supervisors of the County of Los Angeles appointed Dorothy Buffum Chandler to chair a civic committee to promote the creation of a performing arts center for Los Angeles. The wife of *Los Angeles Times* publisher Norman Chandler and an imposing force herself, Buff Chandler secured County land on Bunker Hill and raised millions of dollars for the three-building complex designed by Welton Becket and completed in 1967.¹ She subsequently planned to establish a performing arts academy, and in 1968, her son-in-law F. Daniel Frost drafted an agreement between the Music Center and the County that reserved the County-owned Lot K for the conservatory.² The Music Center abandoned the plan, but retained a "slim legal hold" for expansion on the site.³

In the early 1980s, the Music Center considered, then scaled back, an ambitious plan to build three new theaters on Lot K. Music Center president Michael Newton recognized that the addition of a new hall for the Los Angeles Philharmonic would benefit the entire organization.⁴ Meanwhile, the County supervisors were maneuvering to regain Lot K for more lucrative uses. They retained architect Barton Myers to develop plans to shift the site for the new concert hall to the Civic Center Mall, flanked by the County Courthouse and the Hall of Administration and across Grand Avenue from the Music Center, which would free Lot K for commercial development. In 1985, Myers presented these plans to Frost (then Music Center Chairman) and Lew Wasserman (former Music Center Foundation treasurer), who reacted with surprise and outrage, having expected to see plans for the Lot K site.⁵ A stalemate ensued, which ended only when the County agreed to give the Music Center limited time to raise funds for the proposed building; otherwise, Lot K would revert back to the County.⁶ A major donor soon stepped forward—to the shock of both the County and the Music Center.

THE GIFT

By all accounts, Lillian B. Disney's decision in May 1987 to bestow the Music Center with \$50 million for a concert hall—"the largest single gift in the history of the United States for a cultural building"—was extraordinary.⁷ An elegant, yet extremely modest woman, the eighty-seven-year-old widow of Walt Disney opted to stay in the background when the gift was announced. "Her wishes are to let the gift speak for itself," a spokesman said.⁸ Since the mid-1950s, the Disney family had amassed millions of dollars from the licensing and sale of the commercial rights to the Walt Disney name.⁹ The family had intended to start a charitable foundation, but urged by her daughter Diane Disney Miller to do something that would bring tangible results, Lillian Disney settled upon a concert hall to be named in honor

1 "History," Music Center Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, April 1, 2003, www.musiccenter.org/history.html.

2 Ted Vollmer, "Music Center Dispute Not Over Need to Expand—But Where?" *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1987.

3 F. Daniel Frost, interview by authors, Tucson, AZ, 15 December 2002.

4 Richard Weinstein, interview by authors, Santa Monica, CA, 26 November 2002; Joanne Kozberg, telephone conversation with authors, 21 January 2003.

5 Vollmer, "Music Center Dispute." Myers revised the plan in March 1987, in an effort to break the gridlock. He suggested shifting the new concert hall site to a bridge over Grand Avenue at the top of the Civic Mall (Leon Whiteson, "Harmony On The Hill With Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 1988).

6 Frost, interview.

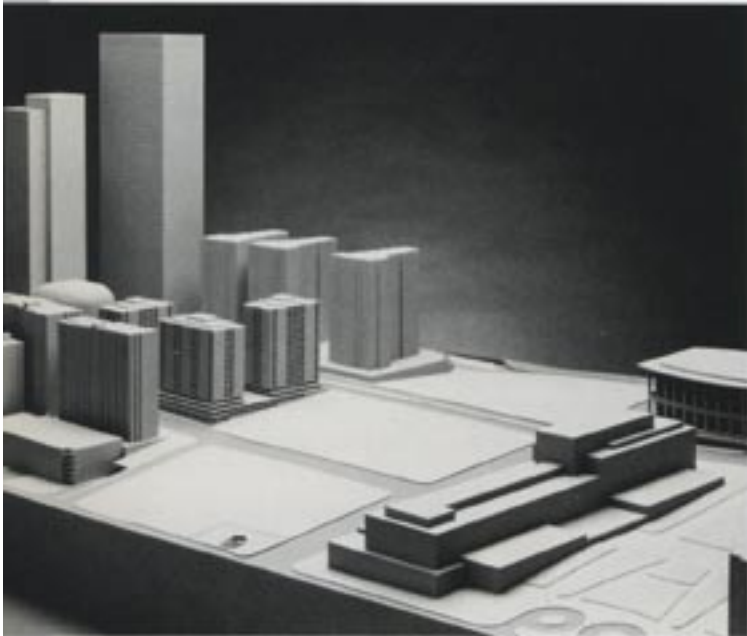
7 Judith Michaelson, "Music Center Gift Keeps on Giving," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1987.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Ronald E. Gother, interview by authors, Pasadena, CA, 15 October 2002.

RONALD GOTHER:

Lillian Disney had a very positive outlook on life. She was very kind and gentle to everybody—just a very refined lady.



COMPETITION MODEL FOR
WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL
SHOWING LOT K SITE,
AS WELL AS LOTS Q AND W, 1988

LILLIAN DISNEY

DIANE DISNEY MILLER:

It's strange that Walt Disney and Frank Gehry never worked together; they might have. If Dad had lived ten years longer, I know their paths would have crossed.

of her late husband.¹⁰ The Disney family had a long-standing relationship with the Music Center. Walt Disney, who had been friends with Buff Chandler, had participated in its initial stages. Lillian Disney was a founder of The Blue Ribbon, a volunteer group that supports the activities of the Music Center, and their daughters Miller and Sharon Lund were active on various boards.¹¹ The gift also reflected Walt Disney's love of music, as evident in his collaboration with the conductor Leopold Stokowski to combine classical music with animation in the 1940 film *Fantasia*, and his fascination with innovation and urban planning, as seen in the visionary plans for EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow).¹² A state-of-the-art concert hall in Downtown Los Angeles appeared to be the ideal memorial for Walt Disney and a powerful gift for Los Angeles.

Lillian Disney's two major conditions for the gift were that the hall be built on Lot K and that approval by the County of Los Angeles, the Music Center, and the Philharmonic Association be settled within thirty days. Other conditions included her approval of the architect, agreement from the County to build the parking garage, and a deadline to break ground by December 31, 1992—in five years—or the gift would be rescinded.¹³ From the beginning, the County's hold on Lot K generated other conditions. Supervisor Edmund D. Edelman, although always supportive of the Music Center, insisted that commercial uses be included on the site so "as not to impede the county's revenue potential."¹⁴ Mrs. Disney was amenable to the County's objectives, but stated "first and foremost, the concert hall...must be designed and built...to be one of the finest in the world and serve as a permanent tribute to my late husband, Walt Disney."¹⁵ She requested that any adjoining development be designed by the same architect who designs the hall.¹⁶

Aside from Philharmonic leaders who greeted the news as "a dream come true," Mrs. Disney's gift was met with skepticism, even by critics at the *Los Angeles Times*. Dan Sullivan lamented the gift's purpose: "If only Mrs. Disney had offered the Music Center a \$50-million gift, free and clear, to be used in whatever way would do its artists the most good!" Charles Champlin noted that the new hall would require operating monies and "possibly even supplementary capital funds that do not presently exist," concluding: "The irony of Mrs. Disney's offering is that it really is a challenge."¹⁷

THE CHAIRMANSHIP

Before the announcement was made, the Music Center leadership considered how best to organize the planning for Walt Disney Concert Hall. Frost recalls, "Mia [Frost, his then-wife] said the only person to do the work is Fred Nicholas."¹⁸ An attorney, real estate developer, and "old hand at dealing with civic complexities," Frederick M. Nicholas had just spent six years overseeing the complicated design and construction process of Arata Isozaki's Grand Avenue building for The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

10 Diane Disney Miller, interview by authors, San Francisco, CA, 25 October 2002.

11 Michaelson, "Music Center Gift."

12 Disney's drawings for EPCOT appeared in the MOCA-organized exhibition *At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture* (1998).

13 Gother, interview.

14 Michaelson, "Music Center Gift."

15 Ted Vollmer, "For Disney Concert Hall, Take The \$50-Million Gift, County Advised," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1987.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Charles Champlin, "Disney's \$50-Million Gift: Two Views: Hard Realities—and Challenges—of a Music Center Expansion," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1987; Dan Sullivan, "Disney's \$50-Million Gift: Two Views: Are We Creating Mausoleums Filled with Starving Artists?" *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1987.

18 Frost, interview.

(MOCA).¹⁹ After making a few inquiries, Frost discovered that Nicholas enjoyed a reputation for an effective, no-nonsense management style, and immediately offered him the position of chair. Nicholas was stunned—he recently had been offered the chairmanship of MOCA, and now suddenly was confronted with another, equally challenging proposition—but agreed to talk with Lillian Disney. “I wanted to meet Mrs. Disney and to know whether she had a commitment to world-class architecture,” Nicholas says. She told him that “world-class architecture was fine,” and she wanted a garden and great acoustics.²⁰ Nicholas subsequently accepted the chairmanship for the Concert Hall, through which he felt he could continue his efforts to revitalize Downtown Los Angeles. He organized a committee to oversee the design and construction process—the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee, which Frost dubbed “the Nicholas Committee”—with Nicholas, Disney family attorney Ron Gother, and Bob Wilson of the Disney Foundation as the original members.²¹ He assembled a series of subcommittees for the selection of the architect, contractor, and construction manager (chaired by then-director of MOCA Richard Koshalek and developers Robert Maguire and James Thomas, respectively), with input from experts and the Music Center. He identified professionals in architecture, development, and acoustics to prepare the building program, and retained architectural historian Carol McMichael Reese to document the proceedings from the beginning. Above all, he wanted a process “clean and pure, free of extraneous political pressures.”²² Diane Disney Miller recalls, “It was a beautiful start.”²³

DEFINING THE PROGRAM

The mission was straightforward: to create a world-class concert hall with great acoustics. But what kind of concert hall would best suit the Los Angeles Philharmonic? How many seats were optimal? What type of connection between the orchestra and the audience was preferred? How would the building relate to the rest of the Music Center and to the greater urban context? To gain a clearer idea of the issues involved, Nicholas arranged a research tour of the great concert halls around the world. In November 1987, a small group, including Nicholas, Koshalek, Gother, Joanne C. Kozberg, Stanley Beyer, Royce Diener, Donna Vaccarino, Los Angeles Philharmonic executive director Ernest Fleischmann, cellist Barry Gold, and trombonist Byron Pebbles traveled to performances in major concert halls in Europe: Cologne, Berlin, Paris, Birmingham, Nottingham, London, Amsterdam, and The Hague.²⁴ In February 1988, a smaller group including Miller and her husband Ron visited concert halls in Tokyo and Osaka, Japan.²⁵ The Berlin Philharmonie, designed by Hans Scharoun, emerged as the group’s favorite for its combination of acoustical excellence and audience intimacy.²⁶ Later, Fleischmann specifically cited the Berlin Philharmonie when he described what he wanted Walt Disney Concert Hall to be: a single-purpose hall that is inviting, open, and accessible to the street; a space that creates a close connection between the musicians and the surrounding audience; and a performance hall that has a rich, warm sound that preserves absolute clarity and transparency.²⁷

19 Leon Whiteson, “Harmony on the Hill with Disney Hall,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 1988.

20 Frederick M. Nicholas, interview by authors, Playa del Rey, CA, 26 November 2002.

21 Frost, interview.

22 Whiteson, “Harmony on the Hill.”

23 Miller, interview.

24 Kozberg, telephone conversation.

25 *Ibid.*

26 An article at the time also observed: “It seems to be generally agreed among musicians that, of all the large (2,000-plus-seat) concert halls built since World War II, only the wrap-around 1963 Berlin Philharmonic, designed by Hans Scharoun, manages to offer both really good sight lines and good acoustics” (Whiteson, “Harmony on the Hill”).

Nicholas oversaw the building program, which was drafted by architect Donna Vaccarino and refined by Fleischmann. He also enlisted Charlotte Nassim, an architectural program consultant from Paris who had been recommended by the conductor Daniel Barenboim and Paris acoustical consultant Daniel Commins, who was teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles. Don Stastny, an architect based in Portland, Oregon, served as the professional advisor for the design commission.

Despite all these efforts, members of the Music Center's old guard still resisted the vision proposed for Walt Disney Concert Hall. Nicholas recalls that after a discussion about how the Concert Hall could become the focus for the city, much like the Sydney Opera House, one trustee told him and Koshalek not to go to any more trouble. "I'll tell you what to do," he said. "Get the drawings for the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion out of the drawing cabinet, hire the same architect, upgrade the mechanical, lighting and sound systems, and build the same damn building across the street."²⁸

THE COMPETITION PROCESS

Nicholas considered the Architectural Subcommittee to be the most important of the subcommittees. To remove the possibility of politics, he avoided representatives from the City and County of Los Angeles, the Music Center, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Instead, he chose individuals who were involved with "culture and excitement and creativity" in the city: the directors of three art museums and deans from two architecture schools.²⁹ Accordingly, the five jurors were John Walsh from the J. Paul Getty Museum; Earl A. Powell from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Richard Koshalek from MOCA, who chaired the subcommittee; Richard Weinstein from the University of California, Los Angeles; and Robert Harris from the University of Southern California. The charge of the subcommittee was to recommend an architect to the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee, who would then make the final decision. In this way, the subcommittee members could "act on the basis of their conscience," and the Concert Hall Committee would be free to follow or disregard the subcommittee's recommendation.³⁰ According to the initial conditions of the gift, Mrs. Disney had the right to veto the selection and to choose the architect; however, she gave the Concert Hall Committee the authorization to make the decision.³¹

The competition preparation began in August 1987 with a list of eighty architects from around the world. To bring the list down to twenty-five architects, the subcommittee held numerous meetings in an open process, to which the Music Center leadership was invited. The twenty-five architects who were chosen then submitted their qualifications, and during a slide show at Mrs. Disney's house in Holmby Hills, the subcommittee reduced the field to six candidates: Goffried Böhm of Cologne; Harry Cobb of New York; Frank Gehry of Venice, California; Hans Hollein of Vienna; Renzo Piano of Genoa; and James Stirling of London. The jurors looked

27 Ernest Fleischmann, "The Design and Building Process" (paper presented at the Walt Disney Concert Hall symposium, The Getty Center, 20 April 2002); Ernest Fleischmann, interview by authors, Hollywood, CA, 17 December 2002.

28 Nicholas, interview; Richard Koshalek, "The Design and Building Process" (paper presented at the Walt Disney Concert Hall symposium, The Getty Center, 20 April 2002).

29 Nicholas, interview.

30 Weinstein, interview.

31 Leon Whiteson, "Four Different Visions of Disney Concert Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1988; Nicholas, interview.

for diversity among the architects to make the choice easier and to get the unusually talented into the mix. The subcommittee conducted interviews with the six architects, and then, as previously agreed upon, the subcommittee and committee could each eliminate one candidate for any reason. At this time, two architects were dropped.

THE FINAL FOUR

On March 17, 1988, Nicholas and Koshalek announced the four finalists: Goffried Böhm, Frank Gehry, Hans Hollein, and James Stirling. All but Gehry were winners of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, architecture's highest honor. Böhm, best known for the Church of the Pilgrimage in Neviges, Germany, received the Pritzker in 1986. Hollein—the winner of the 1985 prize—was the architect of two acclaimed modern art museums in Mönchengladbach and Frankfurt, Germany. Stirling, who won the Pritzker in 1981, had designed (with partner Michael Wilford) a number of cultural buildings, including the Neue Staatsgalerie and the Chamber Theatre in Stuttgart, the Clore Gallery at the Tate Museum in London, and the Arthur H. Sackler Museum at Harvard University. Gehry, the only local architect on the list, had built work throughout Los Angeles, including the Aerospace Museum, MOCA's Temporary Contemporary, and the Goldwyn Library in Hollywood. "In making the decision," Nicholas said, "the subcommittee applied what they called a 'ripeness test,' to determine whether the architect was at that stage in his career that he could be producing his greatest work."³² Each architect received \$75,000 to prepare the competition materials.

As soon as the final four were announced, members of the subcommittee started "getting flack" from the Music Center and others close to the project: "You can't pick Frank Gehry; we're going to be the laughingstock of the whole universe."³³ Gehry's popular reputation as an architectural "wild man" for his use of unconventional materials, for a rawness that exposes process (like the work of his Venice artist friends), and for an idiosyncratic, personal form-making that evokes the disunity and energy of vernacular Los Angeles clearly scared the elites of Downtown Los Angeles. Ironically, his work also demonstrated a highly pragmatic business sense. By this time Gehry was internationally recognized as one of the most progressive architects in the country. His work had been included (although he agreed to it reluctantly) in the Museum of Modern Art's *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition in 1988. At the very moment he was named as a finalist in the Concert Hall competition, down the street, MOCA was presenting a major retrospective of his work organized by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Moreover, Gehry had previously collaborated with the Los Angeles Philharmonic on the renovation of the Hollywood Bowl in phases from 1970 to 1982. He also had two other music venues to his credit: the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Maryland, and the Concert Pavilion near San Francisco. When asked about the experience of each of the finalists, Fleischmann mentioned Gehry's music pavilions, stating, "We [the Philharmonic] performed there [in Concord] with Leonard Bernstein and found it terrific to play in."³⁴ One might presume that Gehry was the shoo-in candidate and that the competition was partisan, but this was not the case. "It was really the

32 Judith Michaelson, "Finalists Pared to 4 in Competition for Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 March 1988.

33 Nicholas, interview with authors, 26 November 2002.

absolute opposite," says Fleischmann. "It was loaded against Frank with that Music Center lot; you know what the feeling was about Frank in the city."³⁵ Among themselves, the subcommittee took a straw vote after selecting the final four, and the winner was Stirling. He was a prominent European architect of the moment and his designs were not considered extreme, while Hollein was seen as perhaps too quirky.³⁶

Each of the finalists received a highly detailed, itemized program for the design commission in three booklets—what became known as the "play book." The competition's three main foci were summarized as challenges and opportunities.³⁷ The first challenge was to create a "conceptual link" to the Music Center. The second was "to develop the site and building to its optimum potential as a focal point in Downtown Los Angeles." Highlighting the site's role as an urban link, the program cited the opportunity to design a civic plaza "reflecting the warmth and friendliness of Southern California." In addition to the design of the concert hall, the architects were also asked to do a preliminary planning analysis for Lots Q and W2, to the east of Lot K. That program comprised commercial and retail space on the ground floor and offices above. The third challenge related to the acoustics of the hall, which, the play book stipulated, "should produce good natural sound: strong, clear, and direct sound without distortions." The architects were encouraged to design to acoustical parameters. Above all, the program stated, "the concept must represent an inspired solution, one that honors the creativity and integrity of Walt Disney and upholds the standard of artistic excellence of the Music Center's resident companies."³⁸

In July, the four finalists returned to Los Angeles for a competition briefing, followed by a kick-off reception at Lillian Disney's house. The event revealed an aspect of the donor that would prove crucial later in the competition. Weinstein recalls: "There were flowers everywhere at the house, including an explosion of [blooms] along the border of the lawn where the party was held. It was clear that Mrs. Disney was an inveterate and passionate gardener. The evening was filled with ceremony, speeches, champagne, and lots of people, and architects cruised around like sharks."³⁹

FINAL SELECTION

After the briefing, the architects met with the subcommittee two more times: for a concept review in September and for the final presentations in late November. The two-stage look at the design development allowed the subcommittee to assess not only the progress of each design concept, but more important, how well the architects listened and responded to feedback from the earlier review. As Nicholas had said earlier in the process, they were not looking for a final design "so much as a way to judge the architect's ability to solve problems and work with the client group."⁴⁰

In early November, as the final presentations approached, a member of the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee grew increasingly concerned about the possibility of Gehry being selected. This committee member strongly proposed that the Architectural Subcommittee provide

34 Judith Michaelson, "6 Architects Are Candidates for Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 1988.

35 Fleischmann, interview.

36 Weinstein, interview. Stirling had also been one of the three finalists in the architecture selection process for the Getty Center.

37 *Architecture program for the Walt Disney Concert Hall Design Commission, volume 1* (Los Angeles: The Music Center of Los Angeles County, 1988), 5.

38 *Ibid.*, 26.

39 Weinstein, interview.

THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL,
RENOVATION WITH
ACOUSTICAL SPHERES DESIGNED
BY FRANK GEHRY, 1980



RICHARD WEINSTEIN:

I was concerned about a mission statement.... I wanted to see how carefully the architects would listen. It's one thing to get a program and make sure you've got every space on the program in the building. It's much harder to catch the spirit of what the client wants and to have your design be responsive to those intangible messages.

JOHN WALSH:

I will say that we could be thought of as a pretty closed little circle of partisans for advanced contemporary architecture.... So if I were a businessman, a banker, or a reluctant trustee of the Philharmonic... I might well look at this five and say, well, yeah, of course they're going to come up with... an architect who's going to cost us a fortune and for uncertain results. What I think they weren't accepting, couldn't see, didn't know about, was the fact that Frank had proven himself so thoroughly as a guy who could deliver a building on time, on budget.

commentary only and not final ranking as part of their recommendation. Furthermore, he demanded, they were not to speak with the press. The subcommittee resisted. All of the members decided to quit together if they were prevented from providing the committee with an uncensored recommendation, and at the subcommittee's suggestion, Walsh drafted a resignation letter. The subcommittee's decision to engage in a public dialogue diminished the conflict and the crisis was averted. At the end of November, each of the architects presented their submissions—a narrative, eight panels of drawings, a site model, and a Lot K model—to the Concert Hall Committee and Architectural Subcommittee.

After careful deliberation and a difference of opinion expressed by one subcommittee member, the final decision of the subcommittee became unanimous. On December 5, the Disney Concert Hall Committee gathered in the former Crocker Bank Center on Hope Street to hear the subcommittee's recommendation. Lillian Disney wore her lucky red dress.⁴⁰ Each of the five subcommittee members made a presentation to the group, explaining his reasons for the selection. Because of Weinstein's passionate commitment to the most innovative architecture, he began the discussion; Walsh was given the closing position due to his calm, confident manner and his clear understanding of the decision-making process and the uncertainties involved.

The subcommittee provided a ranking of the four architects, and at the bottom was Gottfried Böhm. In Böhm's scheme, a massive dome superstructure of reinforced concrete creates a grand atrium that contains all the functional spaces. The concert hall is raised off the ground. Surrounding the dome are buildings topped by roof gardens, stair and lift towers, escalators, and bridges. Walsh considered Böhm's idea fabulous and impossible, with a German idealism and "romanticism in these vast interior spaces with zillions of tiny people."⁴¹ Weinstein called it preposterous: "I found Böhm's sort of romantic, Wagnerian excess to be really a way of showing contempt for Los Angeles and the whole enterprise."⁴² The *Los Angeles Times* likened it to "a huge Brunnhilde bra cup in an Olympian-scale performance of the *Twilight of the Gods*."⁴³

The project by Stirling also disappointed. Relating the design to the tradition of monumental public buildings and the "populist aspect" of contemporary places of culture and entertainment, Stirling created an ensemble of abstract geometrical forms unified at ground level by a grand concourse.⁴⁴ Like Böhm, Stirling's design lifted most of the primary spaces off the ground—which some members of the subcommittee considered an elitist gesture.⁴⁵ In the design, a square box office that is topped by a rotating electronic billboard is situated at the corner of Grand and First streets. The cylindrical concert hall, dubbed "Snowflake" for its tiered, interlocking balconies, places the conductor and orchestra almost centrally in the room. According to the competition consultants, the hall's circular shape had low probability of attaining an outstanding acoustical environment.⁴⁶ During the concept review, Stirling was asked to redesign the balcony in order to improve sight lines, but returned in November with no change in the design. "I was disturbed by his kind of belligerence," Weinstein says.⁴⁷ In addition, as Walsh pointed out, the project could be anywhere, Detroit or Düsseldorf.⁴⁸

40 Whiteson, "Harmony on the Hill."

41 Gothe, interview.

42 John Walsh, Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee Report of the Architectural Subcommittee, 5 December 1988.

43 Weinstein, interview.

44 Whiteson, "Four Different Visions."

45 James Stirling and Michael Wilford, narrative, Walt Disney Concert Hall design commission, 1988.

46 Weinstein, interview.

47 Fred Stegeman and Fritz W. Kastner, memorandum, Walt Disney Concert Hall: Review of the Four Design Architect Submissions, 30 November 1988.



PRESENTATIONS, top left to right:
HANS HOLLEIN, JAMES STIRLING,
GOTTFRIED BOHM. left: FRANK GEHRY,
right: THE ARCHITECTURAL SUBCOMMITTEE
AT THE FINAL PRESENTATIONS
(from left: RICHARD WEINSTEIN, JOHN WALSH,
EARL A. POWELL, ROBERT HARRIS,
AND RICHARD KOSHALEK)

FREDRICK M. NICHOLAS:

It took a number of years to get organized, to get all of the work done, and to hire the architect, because this was a very, very political process, and I wanted to keep the process from exploding. It was an incredible process...because we had participation from all the experts.

The jazzy improvisation of Hollein's final design appealed to some subcommittee members, but ultimately misfired. His improvisation as well as "appetite" was much in evidence during the competition.⁵⁰ During a jumbled concept review, Hollein displayed four alternative schemes, and for the final presentation, he sent a second, alternative model, which was prohibited by the rules. Intended to be "light, exuberant, joyful with a touch of distinction and splendor," the postmodern scheme comprises a large horizontal monolith broken up by an assemblage of varied forms, colors, and materials—white marble, green quartzite, red sandstone, gray and green granite, and aluminum.⁵¹ Within the building are literal allusions to Walt Disney, including "a Walt Disney sculpture listening to the concert from a high pedestal" and a "Mickey Mouse bridge."⁵² The design aims to connect to a populist cultural context by anticipating a future Academy Awards ceremony, with Oscar in the form of caryatids reminiscent of the Vienna-Musikverein,⁵³ which Weinstein termed "beyond tasteless."⁵⁴ Furthermore, consultants deemed its uneven hexagonal concert hall to be acoustically flawed.⁵⁵ The design's relation to the urban context is also problematic. "The project is a long way from Los Angeles in being so enclosed and compacted, so turned inward, and the relation to the Music Center is very tenuous," Walsh reported.⁵⁶ Hollein placed a "slow second" in the competition.⁵⁷

Gehry won the commission decisively, with a thoroughly considered design and the potential for a highly original architectural statement. With its generosity of openness and space and a lush garden, Gehry's scheme evidenced a full understanding of what a building in Los Angeles should be. Its great glass-roofed conservatory, terraces, and facade were accessible to culturally and economically diverse audiences—as a "living room" for the city.⁵⁸ In response to the acoustical and social requirements for the new concert hall, Gehry created a more visceral and immediate experience through a surround stage.⁵⁹ Unlike those of his competitors, Gehry's design also takes into account how musicians will experience the building and includes many special features, such as the musician's garden. The design responds both to Fleischmann's concerns and to Mrs. Disney's love of gardens and flowers. The narrative submitted by Gehry capitalized on botanical metaphors, depicting the concert hall as a "garden oasis" in the city, which would grow out of the plaza in a "floral form of French limestone."⁶⁰ From the cost and project management consultants' reports it was clear that Gehry was the only one of the four architects who had absorbed the program and had truly listened.⁶¹

Now that Gehry was the clear winner, one question remained. How could the Architectural Subcommittee make the Concert Hall Committee comfortable with the selection? At the December 5 presentation, they let the diplomatic Getty director John Walsh close the case for Gehry:

48 Weinstein, interview.

49 Walsh, Report of the Architectural Subcommittee.

50 Weinstein, interview.

51 Hans Hollein, narrative, Walt Disney Concert Hall design commission, 1988.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Weinstein, interview.

55 Stegeman and Kastner, memorandum.

56 Walsh, Report of the Architectural Subcommittee.

57 Ibid.

58 Leon Whiteson, "Frank Gehry 'Always Wanted to Work Big,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1988.

59 Michael Maltzan, interview by authors, Pasadena, CA, 26 October 2002.

60 Frank Gehry, narrative, Walt Disney Concert Hall design commission, 1988.

61 Stegeman and Kastner, memorandum; Weinstein, interview.



MODEL OF FRANK GEHRY'S
COMPETITION-WINNING
DESIGN FOR WALT DISNEY
CONCERT HALL, 1988

MICHAEL MALTZAN:

*I remember leaving that meeting and...walking down
past the site and thinking...I was about the luckiest architect
I could possibly imagine on the planet... because we were
doing a project and were actually producing something that
was living up to the aspirations of the city.*

from left: FRANK GEHRY
WITH HIS COMPETITION-WINNING
MODEL AND DIANE DISNEY MILLER,
FRED NICHOLAS, AND ERNEST
FLEISCHMANN, 1988



For me, Gehry wins this competition hands down, by a wide margin. This is both for the qualities he's shown in his career, and for his entry, which seems to be much the best, and frankly the only one I'd really want to see built for the Philharmonic.

Because some of you are still uneasy at the idea of Gehry on this job, I just want to say something about why I think he's such a logical choice—in fact the safest choice on the list.

Gehry's popular reputation is a funny thing, and he's partly to blame. For you, like a lot of people, his trademark may be chain link and plywood, cheap materials and a kind of bohemian thumb-your-nose attitude. And you may think of him as on the fringe artistically. Actually his biggest clients see him quite differently. Gehry takes a lot of pride in being a reliable, down-to-earth, businesslike builder of buildings that work. Don't forget that he started with shopping centers and malls and commercial developments—Santa Monica Place is just one—and he's done building after building on time, on budget.⁶²

"We waited five, six days and gradually [the Concert Hall Committee] came around," says Nicholas, as the subcommittee was able to explain its reasons for selecting Gehry.⁶³ Once the subcommittee had given their recommendation, the leadership of the Music Center and Architectural Subcommittee made a persuasive case for Gehry. They reminded the press and the Concert Hall Committee that you choose an architect, not a design. Furthermore, it was reasoned that the architect should be a problem-solver and someone responsive to the context of Los Angeles. The Music Center leadership involved in the process (Frost, Kozberg, Franklin Murphy, and others) as well as Nicholas met with individual members of the Disney family and the Concert Hall Committee to encourage them to accept the Architectural Subcommittee's decision. Gehry's selection was announced on December 12, 1988.

Reaction to the selection was swift and largely positive. Leon Whiteson, architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, called the design "quintessentially Angeleno" and chronicled the rise of Gehry's star.⁶⁴ Gehry himself described the event as "more than a little miraculous."⁶⁵ An editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* praised his plan for the Concert Hall as "marvelous, a brilliant and innovative addition to the Music Center" and stated "it is not surprising that his plan was the unanimous choice."⁶⁶ The good times continued for Gehry; a few months after receiving the Walt Disney Concert Hall commission, he was named the 1989 recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. Ada Louise Huxtable, a member of the Pritzker jury, cited Gehry's gifts as an innovator: "He takes chances; he works close to the edge; he pushes boundaries beyond previous limits. There are times when he misses the mark, and times when the breakthrough achieved alters everyone else's vision as well. And he believes, as most architects do, that it is always the next project that will realize his aims."⁶⁷ Walt Disney Concert Hall was poised to be that next project.

62. Walsh, Report of the Architectural Subcommittee.

63. Nicholas, interview.

64. Leon Whiteson, "Gehry's Disney Hall Design 'Quintessentially Angeleno,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1988.

65. Whiteson, "Frank Gehry Always Wanted to Work Big."

66. Editorial, "Creativity at Work," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 December 1988.

67. The Pritzker Architecture Prize, 1 April 2003, www.pritzkerprize.com.

CONTINUED DESIGN PROCESS

Gehry's competition-winning project for Walt Disney Concert Hall marked the beginning of the design process. Now, with the architect named, the client group could begin to better address the complex set of issues involved in the Concert Hall's planning and implementation. Among the key concerns were the acoustics of the hall, use of the overall site, urban planning beyond the immediate site, and the contractual agreements among the entities involved.

The most straightforward and critical factor influencing the design of the Concert Hall was the choice of the acoustician. During the architectural competition, it was understood that the subcommittee was recommending the architect, not the project, as the design of the project would likely undergo considerable change once an expert acoustician (to be selected in part by the architect) and the orchestra's music director became truly collaborative partners in the hall's design. A good working relationship between architect and acoustician was crucial. During the research tour to Japan, the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee was most impressed by the bright, clear, yet warm sound of Tokyo's acclaimed Suntory Hall, which had been built in 1986. The acoustician of that hall was Dr. Minoru Nagata, a pioneer of architectural acoustics who had designed more than sixty halls and theaters during a forty-year career.⁶⁸ In December 1988, Gehry flew to Tokyo to meet Nagata, who commented on their instant rapport: "I liked Mr. Gehry immediately for his frankness."⁶⁹ For his first major project overseas, Nagata and his assistant, Yasuhisa Toyota (who became chief concert-hall acoustician upon Nagata's retirement in 1994), traveled to Los Angeles monthly and worked with Gehry by fax machine. Gehry's office started the design for the Concert Hall from scratch and made eighty-two models at one-sixteenth-inch scale, with four concert-hall prototypes: Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam, and Boston. Gehry, Fleischmann, and Nagata chose the workable models, none of which had balconies, elite seats, or boxes.⁷⁰ The design of the hall and the acoustics evolved together.

At the same time, Gehry began to redesign the entire project, which led to a more troublesome matter: Who was the client? The Los Angeles Philharmonic—the resident company of the Concert Hall—was but one of the various constituencies that made up the multi-headed client, which also comprised the County of Los Angeles, the Music Center, the Disney family, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee, all of which were pulling in multiple directions. Nicholas continued to serve as the project's "glue," joining the boards of both the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Music Center. He also met daily with the project manager Fred Stegeman, weekly with the County's lawyers, and regularly with Mrs. Disney.

With multiple constituencies, the governance of the project became very complicated, and the decision-making, cumbersome and lengthy.⁷¹ Furthermore, each group had its own ideas about the project. The Los Angeles Philharmonic wanted to relocate its offices there. The County's objectives were more problematic and contributed to various program changes—and delays. Despite the strong support of Supervisors Edelman, Kenneth Hahn, and Deane Dana, the county

68 Nobuko Hara, "Acoustician Sounding Out New Ideas for Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1989.

69 *Ibid.*

70 Craig Webb, interview by authors, Santa Monica, CA, 13 December 2002.

71 Kozberg, telephone conversation; Larry Gordon and Diane Haithman, "Early Start on Disney Hall Project Was Calculated Risk," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 1994.

sought to protect taxpayers, and insisted upon an income-generating use of the public land. A chamber music hall, included in the original program, was replaced by a 350-room Ritz-Carlton Hotel, which was also designed by Gehry. The addition of the hotel to the site led to further changes in the site plan, the Concert Hall design, and the size of the parking garage, all of which increased project costs and delays. A labor dispute between the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA) and the hotel developer later terminated the deal, and the hotel was off the boards.⁷² Gehry's office designed, redesigned, and then redesigned the project again.

Significantly, the commission for Walt Disney Concert Hall arrived in the Gehry office at a transitional moment. A year after the award, the office began to transform itself into a global operation, growing from a staff of thirty to seventy-five and implementing new computer applications.⁷³ In 1989, the office typically worked with executive architects on major projects—a problematic relationship, as executive architects can be indifferent to design and are often inclined to commit their best resources to their own projects. For the Concert Hall, Gehry chose the firm of Dworsky Associates. But the competition-winning design that Dworsky agreed to oversee was to evolve radically into one of unprecedented complexity. In 1991, led by Gehry's partner Jim Glymph, the Gehry office began to use CATIA (Computer-Aided Three-dimensional Interactive Application), a computer program that originally had been developed for the French aerospace industry to translate complex three-dimensional objects into construction documents. Dworsky Associates had difficulty using and trusting the software and were cautious legally and architecturally.⁷⁴ The resulting working drawings were poorly organized, confusing, and unfinished.⁷⁵ Only during the bidding for the project were the drawings found to be virtually useless, and contractors sought to protect themselves with exorbitantly high bids.

THE COMPLEXITY OF PRODUCING AMBITIOUS ARCHITECTURE

A complex mesh of political, planning, management, and bidding problems led to the construction shutdown of Walt Disney Concert Hall in November 1994. Insiders cited delays caused by the complicated negotiations with the County and numerous redesigns related to acoustics. Others pointed to the difficult nature of the decision-making process, which had come to include Dworsky Associates, a construction consortium of three companies, an acoustics firm, other management and consulting entities, as well as music director Esa-Pekka Salonen.⁷⁶ The project had been fast-tracked—a common, if sometimes risky, strategy in which construction is begun before detailed drawings and a maximum building cost are finalized—so that ninety-two-year-old Lillian Disney could see progress. The official groundbreaking had taken place on December 10, 1992—just days before the five-year deadline for the start of construction, a condition that had accompanied Lillian Disney's founding gift. The project had braved civil unrest, a major earthquake, and a recession that struck Los Angeles in the early 1990s. The 1994 Northridge earthquake caused the structure of the Concert

72 Nicholas, interview; Kozberg, telephone conversation; Barbara Isenberg, "Disney Hall Background," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1991.

73 Joseph Giovannini, "Scissors, Papers, Stone: Frank Gehry and the Making of the Disney Concert Hall," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 22 November 1992; Maltzan, interview; Webb, interview.

74 Webb, interview with authors, 13 December 2002.

75 Joseph Giovannini, "Disney Hall and Gehry in Deal," *New York Times*, 7 August 1997; Maltzan, interview.

76 Gordon and Halthman, "Early Start Was Calculated Risk."

RONALD GOTHER:

The county envisioned us, the Disney family entities, as if we were a developer and assumed that we were developing for our own private benefit a building on county land. They never could understand that this was their building.... And so they imposed restriction after restriction.



ROBERT B. EGELSTON:

What I kept in mind were two things: Great cities do great things, and this is a great city. I cannot imagine this project failing. I suppose I said that a thousand times: Great cities do great things, and this project cannot fail.

from left: COUNTY SUPERVISOR
DEANE DANA, COUNTY SUPERVISOR
GLORIA MOLINA, SHARON LUND,
ERNEST FLEISCHMANN,
FRED NICHOLAS, JAMES THOMAS,
FRANK GEHRY, EDMUND EDELMAN,
DIANE DISNEY MILLER AT THE
GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY
FOR WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL
DECEMBER 10, 1992

Hall to be changed to a steel-brace frame, which further increased costs since eighty percent of the steel was already purchased.⁷⁷ Costs for construction and materials and for professional and consulting fees continued to escalate.

In August 1994, the project reached a new nadir, raising fresh doubts about its future, when Walt Disney Concert Hall officials announced that the hall, estimated at \$210 million in 1992, would now cost an additional \$50 million.⁷⁸ In response, Richard S. Volpert, an attorney for the County, stated that the County was not committed to the complex and costly design: "If you throw enough money at it, you can build an atom bomb, fly to the moon, build the [Walt] Disney Concert Hall."⁷⁹ Four months later, County officials threatened to declare the project in default of its lease agreement and called for making the County-owned parking garage a stand-alone structure.⁸⁰ The Music Center leadership, now under Chairman Robert B. Egelston, quietly regrouped. They brought in a Houston-based management company, Hines Interest, to reassess cost estimates. They also appointed Harry Hufford, a former Music Center acting president and County chief administrator, as a new full-time volunteer chief executive officer to oversee Hines and fund-raising.⁸¹ But still the project lay dormant, with obstacles so great its recovery appeared nearly impossible. By 1996, despite an array of international commissions including a new Guggenheim Museum under construction in Spain, Gehry said the floundering Walt Disney Concert Hall project made him feel like a pariah in Los Angeles.⁸²

CHANGE OF MOMENTUM

With its construction on hold for nearly two years, Walt Disney Concert Hall began to show signs of life in 1996 through press articles and other key events that sent emergency signals to Los Angeles's civic leadership. Newspaper reportage and editorials were vital to the advocacy of the Concert Hall throughout its long gestation and particularly during the prolonged delays.⁸³ In November 1992, architect and writer Joseph Giovannini helped to counter superficial criticism of the Concert Hall's exterior by explaining Gehry's design process and the underlying principles behind its unusual forms in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*.⁸⁴ The next month, Herbert Muschamp, architecture critic for the *New York Times*, praised the project to a national audience as a "magic democracy": "For once, an architectural imagination soars to the level of the highest civic hopes."⁸⁵ In October 1996, Nicolai Ouroussoff, the newly appointed architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote a front-page article heightening attention to the hall's increasingly precarious status.⁸⁶ Each of these articles—especially Ouroussoff's challenging piece—not only raised public awareness about the Concert Hall and its architecture, but more important, heartened members of the Disney family who were very discouraged by this time.

77 Webb, interview.

78 Gordon and Haithman, "Early Start Was Calculated Risk."

79 Ibid.

80 Diane Haithman and Carla Rivera, "Disney Hall Site in Danger of Lease Default, County Warns," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 1994.

81 Diane Haithman, "Unfinished Symphony? The Dream of a 'World-Class' Music Facility Is Entangled in So Many Financial Problems that Its Future May Be in Jeopardy," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1995.

82 Larry Gordon, "Gehry Tries to Rebuild Image After Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 May 1996.

83 Among the particularly persuasive editorials that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* were commentaries by Frederick M. Nicholas ("In the Spirit of Our Times," December 21, 1992), Richard Weinstein ("Great Cities, Great Public Works," August 30 1994), "A Different Kind of 'City on a Hill,'" June 12, 1996), Esa-Pekka Salonen ("Beyond the Building, February 1, 1995), and Michael Webb ("A Grand Public Building for a City Sadly Lacking," April 16 1995).

84 Giovannini, "Scissors, Papers, Stone."

85 Herbert Muschamp, "Gehry's Disney Hall: A Matterhorn for Music," *New York Times*, 13 December 1992.

86 Nicolai Ouroussoff, "MOCA Becomes Advocate for Disney Hall Construction," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1996.

From a different perspective, *Los Angeles Times* music critic Mark Swed alerted the Los Angeles music community to the benefit Walt Disney Concert Hall would bring to the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In two articles, also published in early October 1996, Swed described how the Philharmonic had enchanted audiences in Paris during their three-week residency at the Stravinsky festival that fall. At Théâtre du Châtelet, the orchestra played in the same room as the audience, just as it would in the proscenium-less Walt Disney Concert Hall. He wrote:

[I]t is notable that the voice [the Philharmonic] did finally find was a voice the hometown crowd at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion never hears. In the live, intimate acoustic of the [Théâtre du] Châtelet, the Philharmonic sound has an arresting immediacy.... And the word around Paris, at the moment, is that if more Angelenos could hear sound like this, they would be just as ecstatic as the Parisians were Tuesday, and there would be no stopping the building of the new [Walt] Disney Concert Hall.⁸⁷

In a subsequent article, Swed argued that the opportunity to hear the Philharmonic in a superior, vivid acoustical setting was a reason "to lobby hard" for the Concert Hall: "Players, patrons and management are sounding newly optimistic about the troubled hall, for which \$150 million must be raised (a third of that by June 1). With this residency, one Philharmonic supporter announced, ice cream bar in hand during an intermission, everything is changed."⁸⁸ Fleischmann believes that the residency at the Théâtre du Châtelet marked a turning point in the fund-raising campaign and in the attitude of Los Angeles towards the Concert Hall, by showing the absolute necessity of a hall that would match the artistry of the Philharmonic.⁸⁹

Directly on the heels of this media push came the first Los Angeles exhibition of the design materials for Walt Disney Concert Hall, which were shown on MOCA's plaza from October 27, 1996, to April 27, 1997. MOCA director Koshalek organized the exhibition *Walt Disney Concert Hall: A Celebration of Music and Architecture* as a blatant act of cultural advocacy and public education. Presented free and open to the public around the clock, the exhibition comprised Gehry's large-scale models, computer renderings, a large collection of working models, a full-scale mock-up of a limestone wall, and a specially designed pavilion containing a huge model of the Concert Hall's interior. Some of the work had previously been on view at the 1991 Venice Biennale, where it had captivated international audiences.⁹⁰ The Los Angeles presentation was an intentionally "aggressive move to help rescue the financially embattled" Concert Hall.⁹¹ Fund-raising was critical to meet a new deadline set by the County to raise at least \$50 million of a \$150 million shortfall by June 1997.⁹²

In an exceedingly rare display of professional support, the international architecture community also rallied behind the yet-unbuilt work. "Build It and They Will Come" read the headline of a full-page advertisement for Walt Disney Concert Hall in the front section of the *Los Angeles Times* on March 4, 1997. A long list of architects—local, national, and international—followed, as well as the names of curators, editors, publishers, critics, and designers who

87 Mark Swed, "The 'Rite' Springs to Life Under Salonen's Baton," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1996.

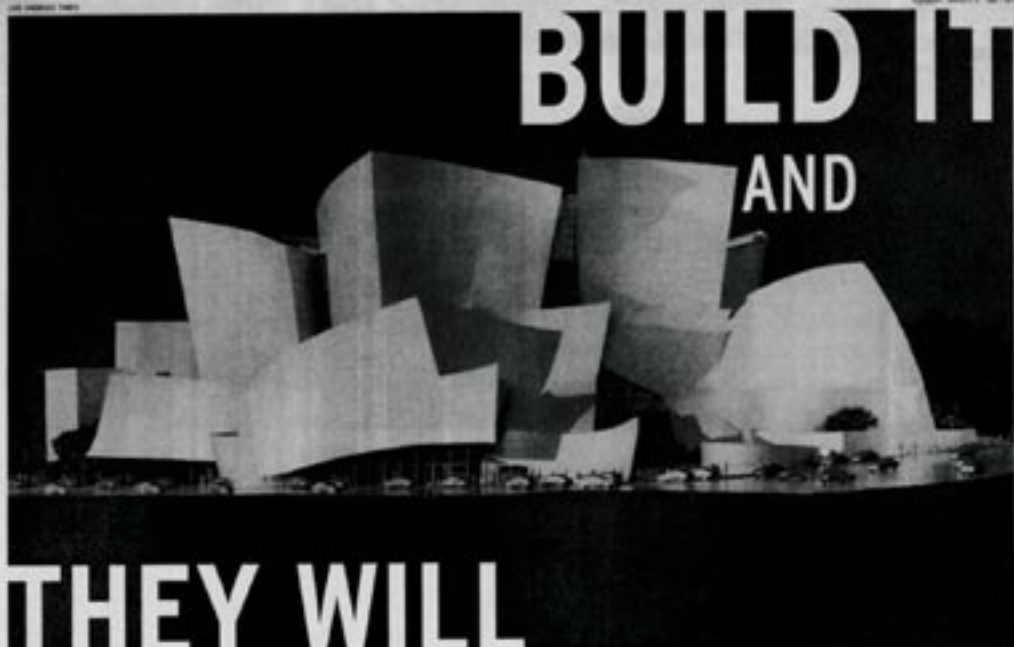
88 Mark Swed, "Philharmonic Making No Mistakes as Tourist," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1996.

89 Fleischmann, interview.

90 Giovannini, "Scissors, Papers, Stone."

91 Ouroussoff, "MOCA Advocate for Disney Hall"; Diane Halthman, "Disney Hall Seeks Funds as Deadlines Draw Closer," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1996.

92 Ouroussoff, "MOCA Advocate for Disney Hall."



THEY WILL COME

As the deadline for funding the Disney Concert Hall approaches, the architects and designers of Los Angeles, and their colleagues in the U.S. and abroad, wish to offer their support for this visionary design by Frank Gehry and to recognize the generosity of the gift made by the Disney family.

All of us who love music and the arts and who care about the place of our city in the next millennium understand the central importance of this building and the role it will play in the cultural life of our community.

Kenneth Abrahamson, New York
Trevor Alexander Architects,
Santa Monica

William Adams, FGA, Santa Monica
Rajiv Arora, FGA, Santa Monica
Harold B. Brown, FGA, Los Angeles
Zachary Brantley, New York
Matthew Ames, Atlanta
Susan Ando, Seattle
Piero Antonicelli, New York
Kirkwood AIA, Tokyo
Walt Aron, Manhattan
Joseph A. Balsano, Los Angeles
Her Robinson & Derek Soffel,
Los Angeles

Barbara Berlin, AIA, Los Angeles
Aronson, Los Angeles
Robert N. Black, Santa Monica
John Brundage, Santa Monica

Lance Bird, AIA, Fountain
Wes + Be James, Santa Monica
Tom Barnick, Santa Monica

Cheryl Brantley, Los Angeles
Bill Brantley, Phoenix

Michael Burch, Los Angeles
Bernie Burt, Los Angeles

Bob Caffery, Los Angeles
Hessell Caffery Design/Build
Associates, Inc., Beverly Hills

La Conada Design Group, Pasadena
Victoria Canales, Venice

Walter Charney, AIA, Los Angeles
James Cho + Rick Seidling, Los Angeles
Henry K. Cobb, New York

Ramona Dal Co, Venice, Italy
Daly Gank, Los Angeles
Jeff Daniels, AIA, Los Angeles

Francis DeWitt, New York
Gary K. Dempster, AIA, Los Angeles

Katherine Diamond, FGA, Los Angeles
Jonathan S. Dornick, Editor-in-Chief,
Architecture Magazine, Washington DC

Daniel Ross Johnson + Woodruff,
CINEMA, Los Angeles

Stephen J. Downing, Star
Steven J. Downing, FGA, Los Angeles

Steven Ehrlich, FGA, Santa Monica
Homer Eisenberg, New York
Julia Eisenberg + Hank Kesting,
Santa Monica

Harold Eisen, Atlanta
John Enright, Washington, Santa Monica
William H. Fair, Jr., FGA, Los Angeles

Thomas H. Farrago, Culver City
Walter Feinberg, Berlin
Frederick Fisher, Los Angeles

Allen Fox, Hong Kong + Associates,
San Francisco

James Ingo Freed, New York
Wickey & Wertz Architects, New York
Craig Froberg, + Ingo Witzberg,
Santa Monica

Yusef Ghalayeh, Tokyo
Yusef Ghalayeh, Tokyo
Francisco Garcia-Morgado,
Associate AIA, Mexico City

Shawn Gendron, Columbus
Gendron Architects, Pasadena,
Design Worldwide, Los Angeles

Joseph Givens, New York
Jonathan Glantz, Architecture + Design
Edlin, The Independent, London

Jerome Goldstein, Buenos Aires
Ron Goldstein, FGA, Los Angeles

Wes Graub,
Architect & Writer, New York
Augustus Graham Architects,
Los Angeles, Zurich

David Lawrence Gray, FGA, Santa Monica
Steve Green, Los Angeles
Ray Green, Washington, Santa Monica

Jana Haddad, London
Bob Hahn, Los Angeles
Hugh Harris, AIA, New York, Los Angeles

Clare Harris + Morgan Harris, New York
Robert S. Harris, FGA, Los Angeles
Laurie Heasler/Henry Smith-Wilder,
New York

David Herz, AIA, Santa Monica
Thomas Hines, Los Angeles
Marc Hinkley, San Francisco

Neil Hoffman, Los Angeles
Steven Hill, New York
Alan Holman, Venice

William Hollnagel, Venice
Katherine Holman, AIA,
New York, Los Angeles

Frank E. Hollman, AIA, Laguna Beach
Michael Hurak, FGA, Los Angeles
Joker Design + Engineering
Associates, Santa Monica

Arata Isozaki, Tokyo
Michael Jaffe, Chicago
Bennett Jacobs, Paris

Charles Jencks, London
David Jenkins, Editorial Director,
Phaidon Press, London

The Joint Partnership International,
San Francisco, Los Angeles
James Johnson, Houston

Philip Johnson, New York
Steve Johnson/James Lewis, Los Angeles
Scott Johnson, FGA, Los Angeles

Walter Jorjaniello John Kralik,
Architecture and City Design,
Santa Monica

Ray Kapper, Portland, Oregon
Richard Keating, FGA, Los Angeles
Carol Keating King, Los Angeles

Jeffrey Kimm, Columbus
Flores Kimm, FGA, Los Angeles
David Kimm, New Haven

Ben Kofman, Rotterdam
Richard Kohn, Los Angeles
Phyllis Lambert, Montreal

Laboratory/Laser Architects, El Segundo
Sandra Levin, Los Angeles
Steven D. Levine, Los Angeles

Marlene Logarotto, Mexico City
Michael E. Lotwin, AIA, Los Angeles
Lori Long, Princeton

Andrew Long, Frank Zeno Architectural
Books + Gallery, Santa Monica

Prof. Dieter Lubowitz, AIA, for the
Los Angeles Forum for Architecture
and Urban Design, Los Angeles

Richard Luffe Landscape, Los Angeles
Philip Lyall, New York
Greg Lynn, New York

Samuel Malachuk/Michael J. Wardlaw,
New York
Brandon MacFarlane, Paris

Richard MacLeod, Boston
Mark Mack, Venice
Dimitrie Mak, Venice

Robert Manaster + Marc Kim Hee,
Culver City
Jo Mann, Los Angeles

Antonio Marotti, Los Angeles
David Marks, FGA, Los Angeles
Christopher E. Marks, AIA, Los Angeles

Dean S. Marler/Marc, Santa Monica
Mark May, Los Angeles
Mark Meyer, WDC/Los Angeles

Carl F. Meyer, AIA, Los Angeles
David Michaels, AIA, Santa Monica
Sagid Miller Public, Pasadena

Eric Miller + Benedetta Tobbia,
Beverly Hills
Robert Moore, West of

Alan Morrison, AIA, Los Angeles
Myranda, Santa Monica
David Moros, New York

Eric Owen Moss, Culver City
Professor John E. Moulton, FGA,
Los Angeles
Herbert Muller, Los Angeles

Lois Muller, FGA, Los Angeles
Susan Murakami, Venice
Robert Nease, AIA, Los Angeles

James Nelson, Los Angeles
David J. Newman, FGA, Palo Alto
Robert J. Newman, AIA, Los Angeles

Ben Nicholson, Chicago
Peter Novos, Director AIA + Academic
Institute of Applied Arts, Vienna

Clay S. Norman, AIA, Los Angeles
Murray Norris, Los Angeles
George Norton, Mexico City

Lorcan O'Herlihy, Santa Monica
Ove Arup + Partners, Los Angeles
Paul A. Papadakis, London

Walt Park, FGA Managing Partner,
Orange, Australia, Los Angeles
William Pedersen, New York

Norman Pfeiffer, AIA/P, New York,
Los Angeles
Baron Phelps, FGA, Los Angeles

Renzo Piano, Torino
Pulvis + Sottili, Los Angeles
James S. Poirier, FGA, New York

Elizabeth Potts + Stephens/Pollock,
Architects and Interiors,
Los Angeles

James F. Pritzker, AIA, Los Angeles
Peter Puck, Seattle
Antonio Piretti, Alessandro

Michael Pold-Wells, Washington
Wall D. Price, Civic Renaissance, Venice
Rob Shapiro, Los Angeles

George Rando, New York
George Rand, Los Angeles
Karl Rauch/Lise Anne Coulson, New York

Clifford S. Rathbun, Los Angeles
Thomas and Carol McMichael Reese,
Los Angeles

Mark Rice, Los Angeles
Tony Robbins, Sacramento
Ian S. Robertson, Santa Monica

David S. Rockefeller, AIA, Los Angeles
Richard Rogers, London
Robert Rosen, AIA, Santa Monica

Michael Rotundo, AIA Architects Inc.,
Los Angeles
Stephen S. Rowland, Los Angeles

Paul Rudolph, New York
Gale + Rey Currier and Robert Rowang,
AIA, Los Angeles

Walter Saxe, Los Angeles
Shelley Seidwitz, San Francisco
Linda Sanders, Cal Poly Pomona, Pomona

Ashley Scott Gables, Berkeley
Richard Schragman, Chairman,
Phaidon Press, London
Frederic Schwartz, New York

Jack Schweitzer, Los Angeles
Mark Seppel, Florida
Denise Scott Brown, Philadelphia

Shirley Sharr, AIA, Los Angeles
Ally Sheel, Los Angeles
Jorge Sivetti, Berlin

The Partners of Skidmore, Orange
& Merrill, Chicago, New York
San Francisco, London

Richard S. Smith, Los Angeles
Neil Sak Tan, Santa Monica
Michael Sarkis, New York

SCMR, Pasadena, Los Angeles
Julio Scajola, Los Angeles
Ronald J. Seidling, Portland

Ramon D. Sierra, New York
Robert S. Sims, Los Angeles
Clark Stevens, AIA Architects Inc.,
Los Angeles

William Strick, Los Angeles
Ted Ho Suk, Seoul
Elizabeth Swartz/Baron,
AIA + Architecture Editor,
The Denver Magazine, New York

Harold Takahashi
Craig Tamm/Robles, Venice
Shin Takemoto, Kyoto

Yasui T. Tanaka, FGA, Mexico and New
Stanley Taperman, Chicago
USLA Department of Architecture
+ Urban Design, Los Angeles

U.C. School of Architecture Faculty,
Los Angeles
Susanne Torro, New York

Clara Torres, FGA, Sacramento
Bernard Torkan, New York
New Underground, Venice

Philippe Troncy, Paris
Kurt Van Dongen, New York
John Van Tilburg, FGA,
Santa Monica

Robert Venturi, Philadelphia
Anthony Vitale, Venice, Italy
John Walsh, Los Angeles

Oliver Weinstein, Santa Monica
Richard Weinstein, Santa Monica
Lorraine Witt, Los Angeles

Sam Williams/Willie Toon, New York
Nancy Will Green, Los Angeles
Ludwig Wittgen, New York

Car-Tung Yi, Seoul
Brian S. Yoo, Los Angeles
George C. Yu, Vancouver

Boyo Yuzuki, FGA, Los Angeles
Paul Zanker, Los Angeles

THOM MAYNE:

I think my instinct in supporting the design wasn't literally based on the specifics of the building itself... it's really about representing the artistic freedom and expression of an architect... acting on dreams and aspirations and potentialities...that seemed from the onset somewhat unrealizable.

The piece of work realized is something that is benefitting the whole architectural community...it lifts the bar. And I think that most architects realize this.... Finally the city's well-known architects—all very different—are all now reaching the public work—it's huge."

ADVERTISEMENT IN THE
LOS ANGELES TIMES
MARCH 4, 1997

endorsed Gehry and the Concert Hall project. The ad's organizer, Thom Mayne, principal of the Santa Monica-based architecture firm Morphosis, recognized the building's importance for architecture and culture, and for the city of Los Angeles, and encouraged architects to speak out in support of the project.⁹³ To raise funds for the advertisement, he first contacted the local architectural community and then reached out to the East Coast. The response was immediate. Even major architects who did not like Gehry's building contributed.⁹⁴ Mayne also enlisted the support of architects around the world, as he felt it was extremely important to acknowledge the city's global culture and its position as a "mecca for architecture."⁹⁵ Coming at a low point for the project, the advertisement also raised the spirits of supporters, especially Lillian Disney.⁹⁶

The strongest backing for the building came in the form of Gehry's own work. In 1996, reports began circulating about an architectural marvel taking place in Bilbao, Spain. When the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in October 1997, it was declared a masterpiece and an instant landmark; Gehry and the industrial port city in northern Spain soon became household names. As Muschamp observed, people now recognized Gehry as an architect who could bring a major project like the Guggenheim in on time and on budget, regardless of his work's ability to arouse a range of associations and projections.⁹⁷ And the best news was that the one-hundred-million-dollar Guggenheim Museum was entirely the product of the Gehry office, which designed and completed all of its own construction drawings. Bilbao, finally, was the proof that Los Angeles's civic leaders needed that Walt Disney Concert Hall could be built.

NEW CIVIC LEADERSHIP

As much as any single factor, a leadership vacuum in Los Angeles caused the delay in building Walt Disney Concert Hall. By the mid-1990s the great philanthropic business leaders active in the 1970s and 1980s—the Franklin Murphys, the Robert Andersons, the Edward Carters, the Thorton Bradshaws, the Carl Hartnacks—were gone and no one had truly replaced them yet. The delay in the project allowed time for new leadership in Los Angeles to emerge.

Then-mayor Richard Riordan and his friend Eli Broad, then-chief executive of SunAmerica and a major art collector, joined forces in 1996 to save the project, which one potential donor labeled a "black hole."⁹⁸ The mayor and Broad arranged fund-raising meetings with prospective contributors over "many breakfasts, lunches, and dinners," and were able to initiate corporate and business interest in the project. In March 1997, they launched a fund-raising campaign called "The Heart of the City."⁹⁹ The Concert Hall supporters now looked to its importance as an agent and beacon of urban revitalization in the Downtown core. "I see Disney Hall as one of seven pearls in a new Downtown necklace," Riordan said in a statement. "Disney Hall will be a major part of the renaissance of the heart of the city."¹⁰⁰ Broad, who was later appointed chairman of the project's oversight committee, saw the Concert Hall within a larger urban context and part

93 Thom Mayne, interview by authors, Santa Monica, CA, 6 November 2002.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Miller, interview.

97 Herbert Muschamp, "The Miracle in Bilbao," *New York Times Magazine* (7 September 1997): 57.

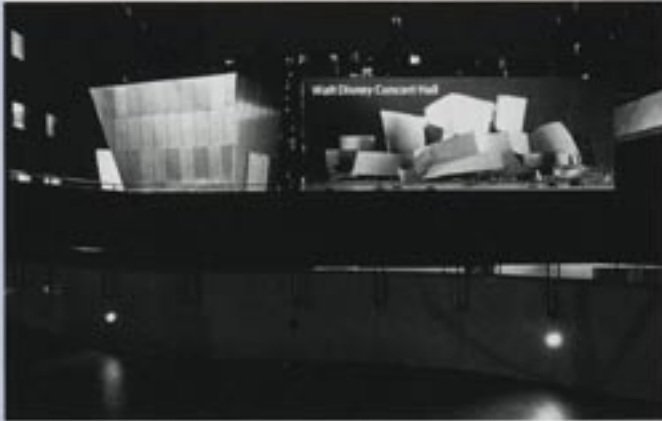
98 Eli Broad, interview by authors, Westwood, CA, 14 October 2002.

99 Broad, interview; Diane Halchman, "Disney Hall Hangs Its Pitch on the Future of Downtown," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 March 1997.

100 Halchman, "Disney Hall Hangs Its Pitch."

JAMES GLYPH:

The story of Disney Hall is complicated because Disney Hall is old and new. And basically a lot of it is old technology. What we've been able to do with the computer—what we could do at the beginning of Disney and what we do today, the way we did the documents and the computer models for even the current iteration of Disney—are different things because the technology has been evolving during the entire fifteen-year life of the Concert Hall.



EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR VIEWS
OF THE EXHIBITION
"WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL:
A CELEBRATION OF MUSIC
AND ARCHITECTURE"
(SHOWN AT THE MUSEUM
OF CONTEMPORARY ART,
LOS ANGELES, FROM OCTOBER 27
TO APRIL 27, 1997)



CRAIG WEBB:

Nobody at that point had ever built a building like this at this scale; it's a very big building. There's a lot of complexity to it.... We were also introducing the use of CATIA, which is the surface modeling program that we use to make shapes.

of a future cultural corridor. He stated: "It wasn't about Disney Hall. It was really about the city.... No one seems to care about the center, the hub of the city, the Downtown. And we said no city can be great today or in world history without a vibrant hub or center."¹⁰¹ The County had requested a fund-raising plan for the estimated \$264.9 million needed for the hall, and the goals were to raise \$52 million by July 1997, \$89 million by December 1997, and \$142 million the next year.¹⁰² By the end of 1997, they had brought the fund-raising total to \$168 million—almost double the stated goal—with the help of many new contributors, among them, Mark Willes of the Times Mirror Company, Mike Bowlin of Atlantic Richfield Company, Ron Burkle of Ralphs/Food 4 Less, David Coulter of Bank of America, and Paul Hazen of Wells Fargo. To the credit of Music Center chairman Andrea van de Kamp and community leader Stanley Gold, the year concluded with stunning news: The Walt Disney Company, which up to this time had not pledged any funds to the project, planned to make a challenge gift of \$25 million, with a first matching gift from Roy E. and Patti Disney—another major step toward the full financing of the project.¹⁰³

Just as its financial prospects were dramatically revived, Walt Disney Concert Hall headed toward another crisis. In response to constant pressure to lower costs, the Concert Hall's fund-raising leaders contemplated a "design/build" process in which other firms would complete the design and working drawings, with the building's design architect relegated to a consulting role. In June 1997, Gehry balked and announced that he was willing to leave the project. Then an important early supporter stepped in. Diane Disney Miller had played a prominent role in the early planning and served as the family's spokesperson throughout the project. She and her sister Sharon Lund acted resolutely in late 1992 as the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee debated the question of fast-tracking. Miller stated: "It was our job to support this project."¹⁰⁴ Learning five years later that Gehry's design could be compromised, Miller was furious. She intervened at once to ensure the architect's continued participation. She arranged for dedicated funds from the Disney family to pay Gehry's office to complete the working drawings (Gehry donated his time through the end of construction).¹⁰⁵ From that point on, it was agreed that she would co-chair a new oversight committee. "We promised Los Angeles a Frank Gehry building, and that's what we intend to deliver," she said.¹⁰⁶ Her stalwartness, tenacity, and imagination—characteristics she shared with her father—guaranteed that Walt Disney Concert Hall would remain true to the vision of the architect.

101 Nicolai Ouroussoff, "Bringing Business and Art Together for Disney Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1997.

102 Halthman, "Disney Hall Seeks Funds."

103 Broad, interview; Diane Halthman, "Disney Gives \$25 Million to Downtown Concert Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 1997; Bernard Weintraub, "Disney Concert Hall Gets a Pledge," *New York Times*, 2 December 1997.

104 Miller, interview.

105 Giovannini, "Disney Hall and Gehry in Deal."

106 *Ibid.*

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105 Giovannini, "Disney Hall and Gehry in Deal."

106 *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

In the end, what matters most, of course, extends beyond the people and details of its making to the future life of the building itself. Walt Disney Concert Hall will engage audiences with the greatest ideas in music and architecture. The space of the Concert Hall—where, as Weinstein notes, “you feel the joy of creation in the work itself”¹⁰⁷—will challenge conductors and musicians to rise to another level of performance, as Pierre Boulez, Zubin Mehta, Isaac Stern, and others have said of the world’s great concert halls. Walt Disney Concert Hall will be transformational both for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, inspiring them to be daring, and for the city, becoming what Deborah Borda terms a “convener” of intellectual thought and discussion.¹⁰⁸

It is a building, therefore, that links abstractly, yet potently to the vision of its namesake. As was noted years ago during the architecture competition, Gehry is perhaps the one architect alive whose imagination has so much in common with Walt Disney’s. His work gives a sense of wonder and delight with serious undertones, “just what we got as kids from Disney movies.”¹⁰⁹ Like Disney, Gehry has an intuitive ability to understand what people want, with an immediacy that connects to all types of people.¹¹⁰ Finally, Walt Disney Concert Hall is what Lillian Disney envisioned and more: a concert hall with outstanding acoustics and a garden in the heart of the Los Angeles—symbolic of the city’s hard-earned achievement and the worthy struggle to realize works of creativity that can communicate intuitively for all time. We feel that, without any doubt, Walt Disney Concert Hall is the most astonishing masterpiece of public architecture ever built in Los Angeles.

107 Weinstein, interview.

108 Deborah Borda, interview by authors, Los Angeles, 18 December 2002.

109 Walsh, “Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee Report,” 5 December 1988. Frank Gehry met Walt Disney around 1962 when Pereira, Luckman, Williams had a joint venture to design the Los Angeles International Airport. The group had brought in Walt Disney to discuss the idea of

building a small version of Disneyland near LAX’s theme building. Disney said it was a bad idea—if the venture succeeded, there would be terrible traffic problems. Gehry recalls, “I remember I liked him and I didn’t expect to.” (Frank Gehry, interview by authors, Santa Monica, 26 November 2002).

110 Weinstein, interview.

ERNEST FLEISCHMANN:

*A hall gives an orchestra its soul, its character...
This is the first time the musicians will be playing in the same
room as the audience. With a proscenium stage there
is a kind of psychological curtain between the performers
and the audience, and that's going to be removed.*

from left: ESA-PERKA SALONEN,
FRANK GEHRY, FRED STEGEMAN,
YASUHISA TOYOTA, ERNEST
FLEISCHMANN, FRED NICHOLAS,
AND CRAIG WEBB, AT THE
GEHRY STUDIO, 1993



ELI BROAD:

*We have demonstrated to the people of Los Angeles—
who do not always believe that they've got a great city
or believe they can accomplish great things—that great
things can be done, that there is some civic leadership
out there. We don't have a tradition of philanthropy,
but perhaps this is the beginning.*

from left: ESA-PERKA SALONEN,
FRANK GEHRY AND
ERNEST FLEISCHMANN
AT THE GEHRY STUDIO,
1993