



## Chamber Music Origins

A neighborhood composer

A band of merry musicians

A benefactor who commissioned works for events.

The audience (or guests) showed up for social reasons, and likely came to depend on the good taste of the benefactor to provide a good evening through his or her selection of composer.

The whole event was scaled at a “reach out and touch it” level. Musicians and audiences on the same floor – flexible seating, allowing for seated attention, clearing for a dance floor, or just milling about while the show goes on.



Chamber Music performance.  
This is what we think of today.

A designed environment where acoustics, sightlines, technical lighting, stage environment, access and flow are all optimized.

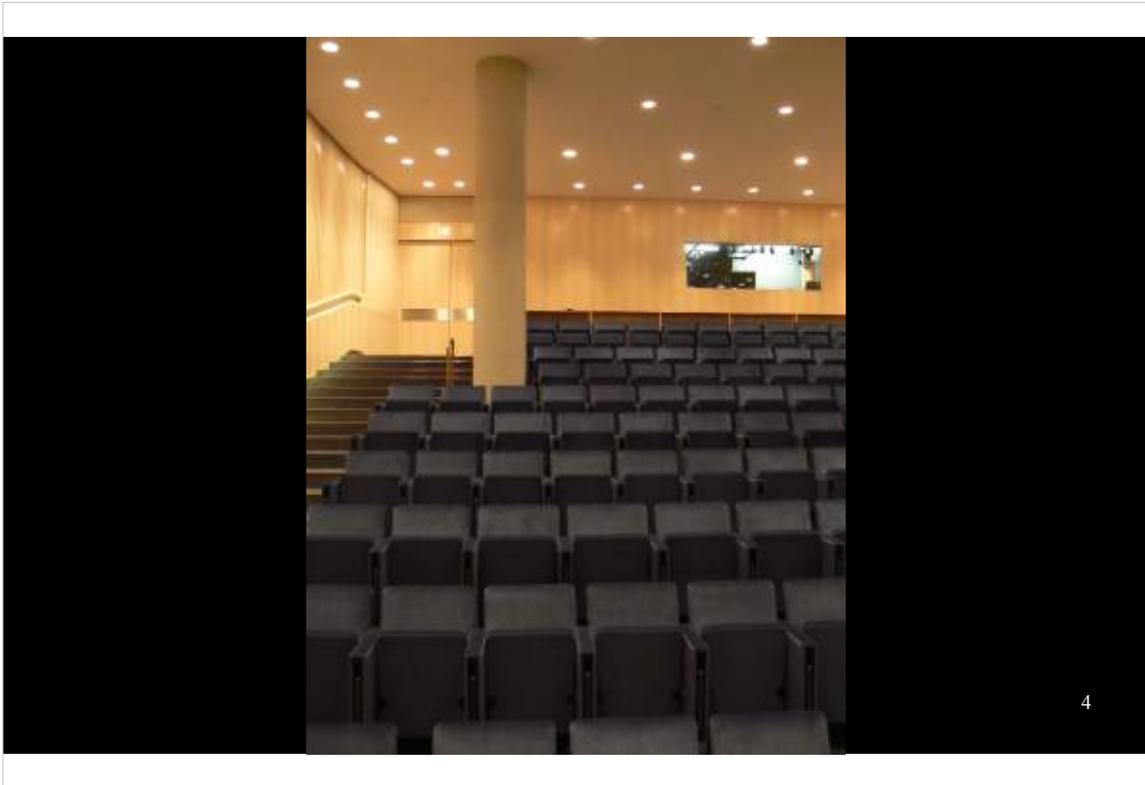
We buy tickets for an advertised program, have dinner with friends perhaps, arrive a little early, find our seat, and enjoy extremely polished and talented performers offer a rendition of the program.

More Ruble Yudell, Ayers Saint Gross, Kirkegaard Associates, and Theatre Projects Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Gildenhorn Recital Hall



Something else is happening though, these days. In an attempt to be cultural destinations, and to bring people in, other non-traditional venues are opening up to music performance. The format moves back towards the original approach. The sequence may be a little disrupted – there is a less strict boundary between the entry and the performance chamber. While the quality of sound, sightlines, lighting, and other production values may take a hit, the connection to the performer is much more intimate. The Stage/house boundaries are reduced, and the impromptu environment brings people into connection with the artist.

San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts  
Hardy Holzman & Pfeiffer (Malcom Holzman/Doug Moss/Nestor Bottino)  
Boner Associates



One real impact of this on our design work has been a desire to design the sound and light lock so that it can be opened up when light control and separation between the lobby and the house are not the primary goal.

Here at the S.N. Shure Theatre, they frequently hold events where they want people to flow freely in and out without causing a distraction, and so that people feel free to wander in when something is going on.

When the sound and light locks at the top of the stairs are opened, the outer doors create a substantially larger opening and the doors pocket into the walls so that it is as if they weren't even there. Here is a circumstance to where the unfortunate column was turned to an advantage, creating space near the entrance.



And so modern examples get built in this tradition.

Less formal presentation, access to natural light, Loose chairs, flexible space, and a good flexible environment for performance.

The connection to the performer is great – the ability to use the room for more than just recital exists, and the barriers between performer and audience, as well as between in the hall and out of the hall are reduced.

University of Northern Iowa – Graham Chamber Music Hall  
HGA, Acoustic Dimensions, FDA



I believe that we are all aiming for an ideal that approaches this kind of intimacy.



In 2006, I presented “Acoustics for the One Percenter” to the ASA in Hawaii.

The topic was large performance venues, and my message was about the importance of making even a large audience feel that they were part of something special.

Everyone wants to be in the 1%. Everyone wants to be a few degrees closer to Kevin Bacon...

*Click to add title*



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The point was there was a reason many more people “remember being at woodstock” than were actually there.

This is the reason people love to point out that they knew Dave Matthews when he was doing coffee shops on the college tour.

Understanding that neither Woodstock nor Dave Matthews concerts are about intimacy, we know that there are other ways of achieving that connection, or the feeling of being part of something special.



Music, especially the traditionally Unamplified kind, does not translate all that well into these massive environments

Not to take away from Successful events that do work like this, but they work because of setting, Star power, Tradition, or something else

These are the venues like the Hollywood Bowl, Ravinia, Millenium Park, Glyndeborne or Proms; artists like Josh Groban, the three Tenors, or Andrea Boccelli;

The tradition or star power reduce the emphasis on the fidelity of the experience.

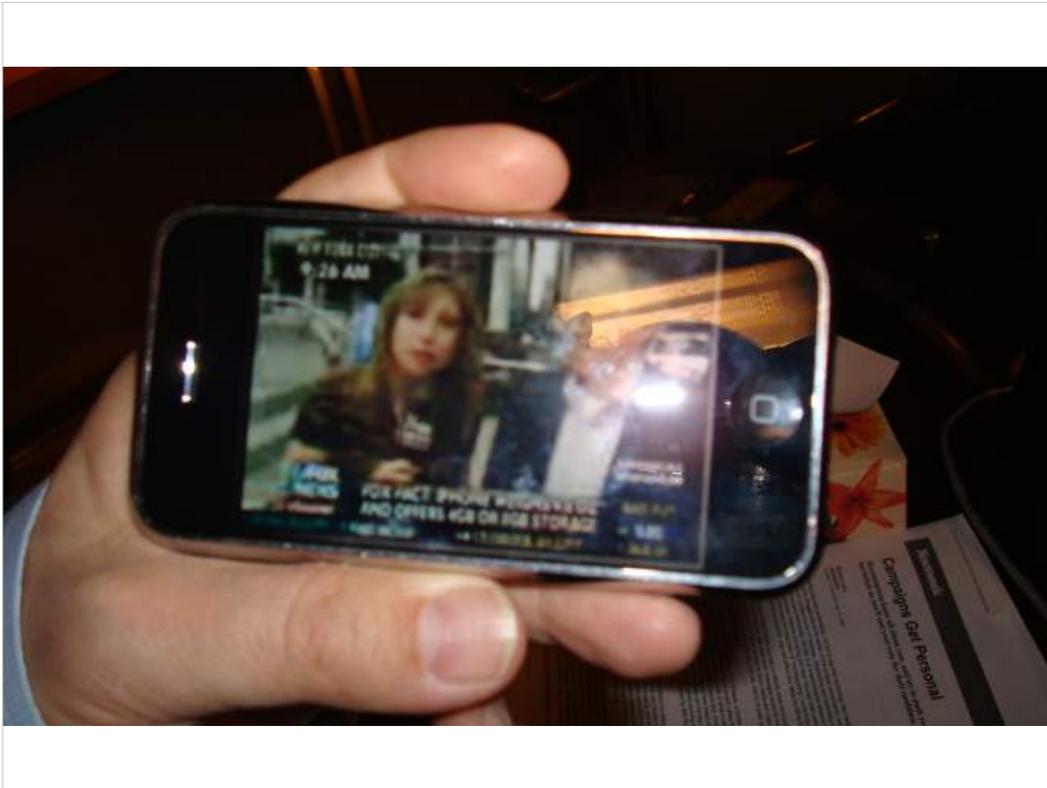


Cirque 'de Soleil overcomes this lack of intimacy with tremendous fidelity and production values, and it clearly works.



This question of fidelity is sometimes used to suggest that we are competing with the home stereo/home theatre environment that raises our audiences expectations that they will be in the sweet spot in any seat in the house, and that we can't deliver the sound with the kind of presence and clarity that they can have at home.

While I enjoy my home surround system, and I believe it does pretty well, it still doesn't give me an experience that compares with seeing it live – so I certainly don't believe it – plus, we hear as loud an argument that audiences don't care about the quality of the presentation.



They put up with YouTube quality on a 4" screen, and listen to compressed music through throw-away headphones.

It is not the fidelity we are competing with however... it is control over consumption, and the excitement of...



# Look what I found!

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Fidelity is not a part of that equation...

The personal connection is the sense of having discovered something in the vast space that is the World Wide Web.

The experience of finding others who share a unique point-of-view – both the pleasure of independent discovery, and the reinforcement that comes with realizing that we are not alone in our appreciation of the content.

This gets to the idea of each of us becoming a curator of our own personal “collection” or experience



Look what

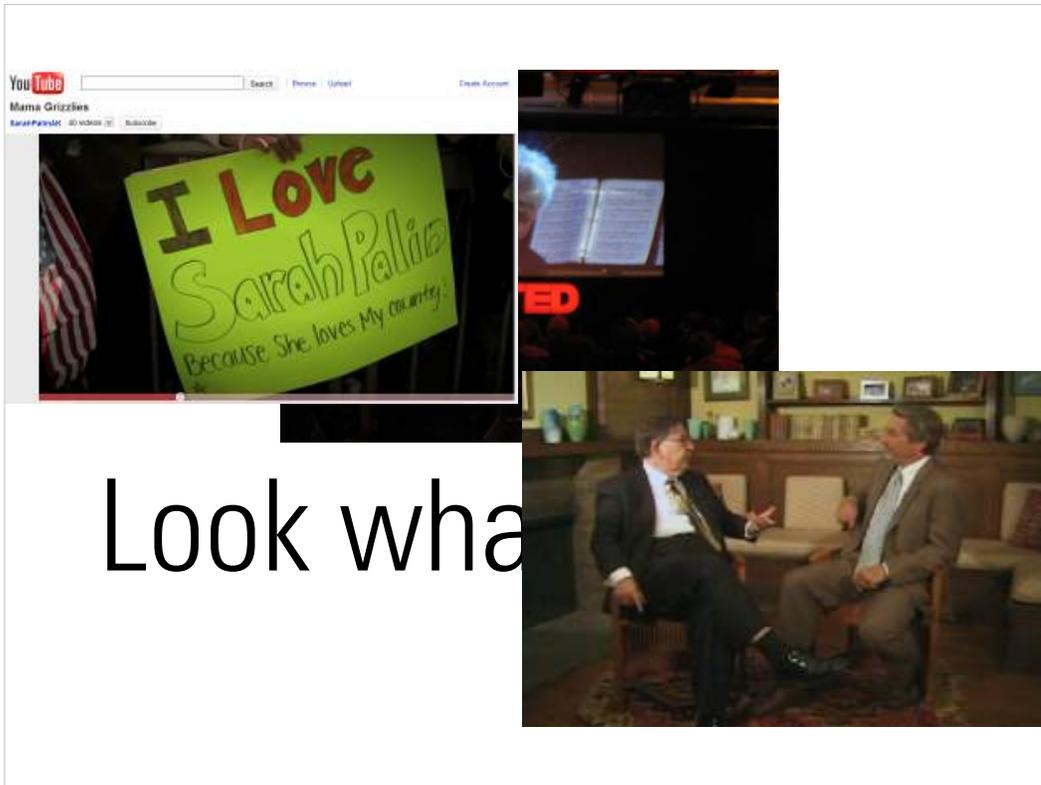


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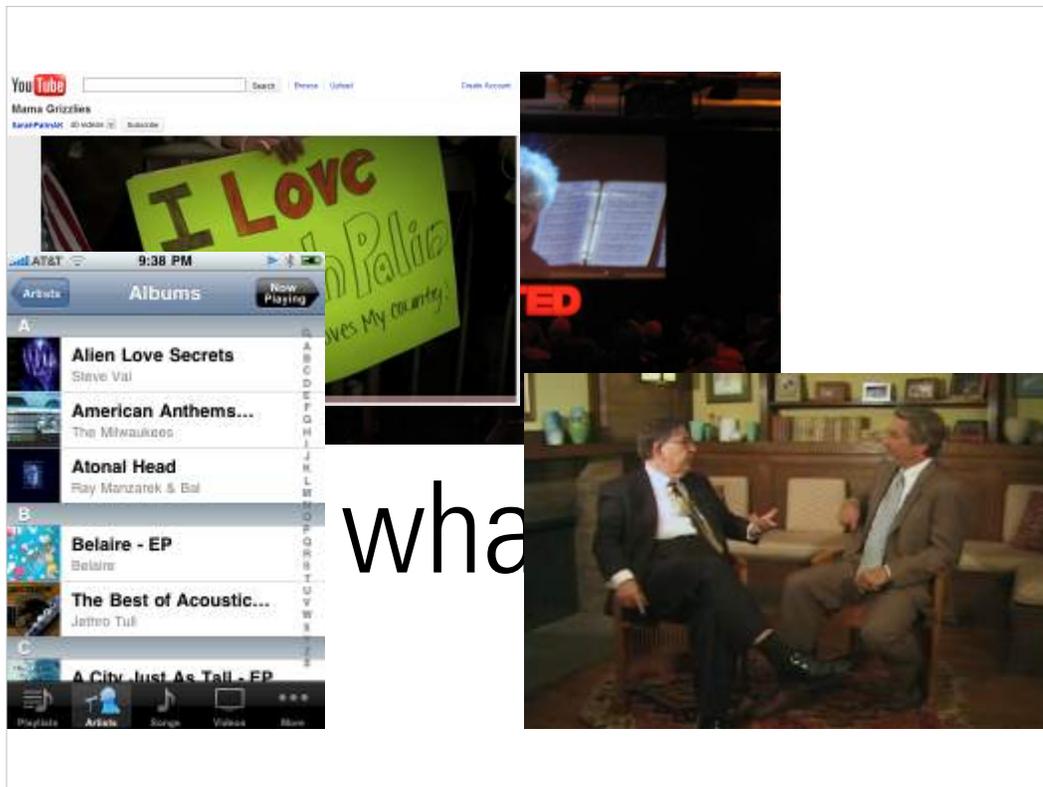
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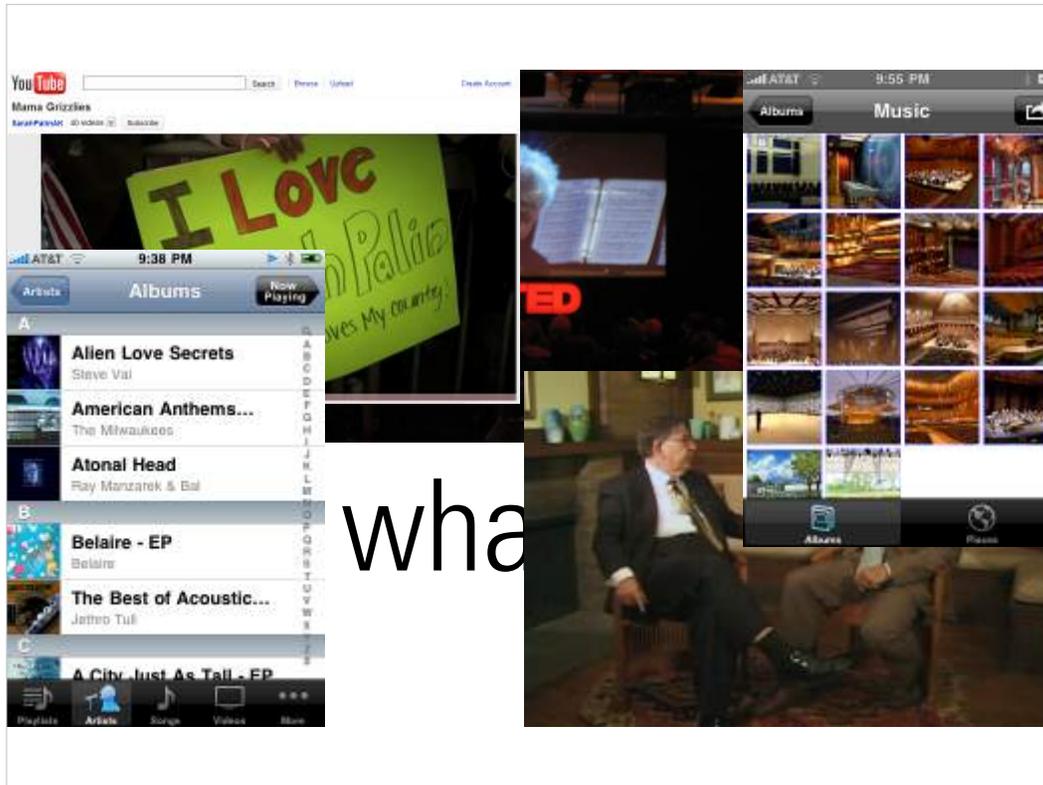


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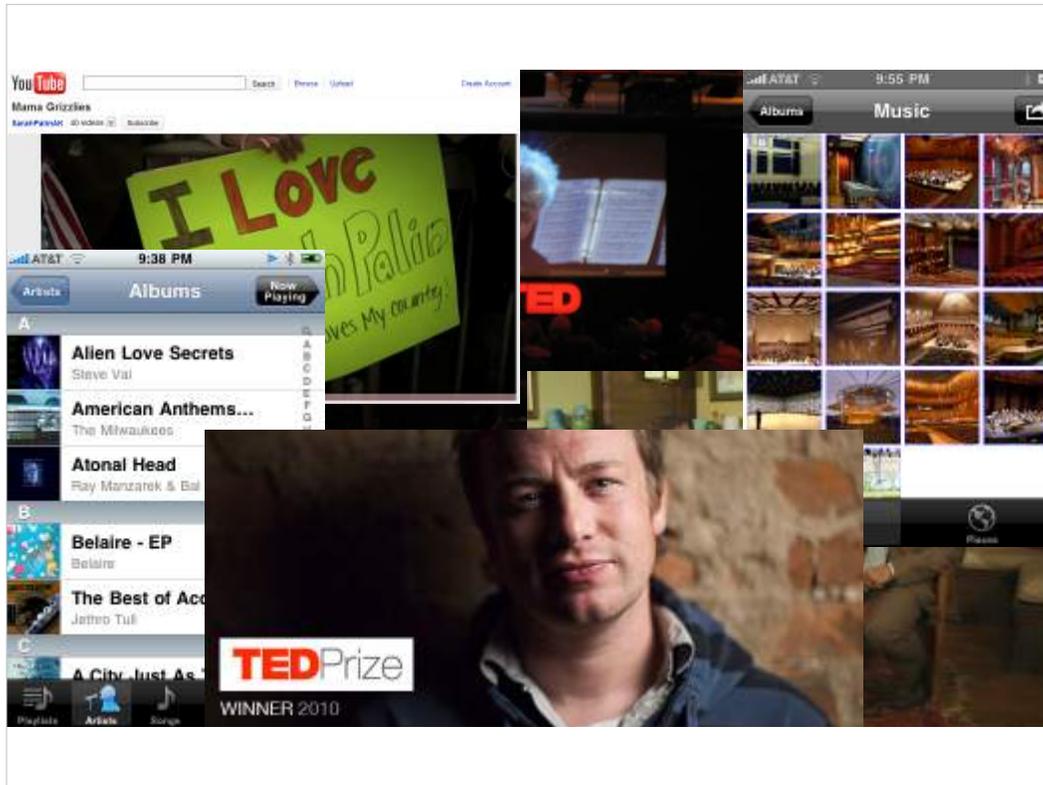


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This is actually the imaging and geospatial society. A tougher audience than we are used to...

But in this mix of low-fi discovery, Hi-fi home consumption, the ability to personally curate one's own artistic experience, and the idea that maybe there is still a place for sharing the creations of today's composers, a place for a reliable benefactor to provide a venue where an intimate experience can happen among friends, within reach of the performer, we need to look at our audience and ask what motivates them.

*We have heard a lot about the  
Echo-boomers...*



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I talked about this on a panel at the USITT with Duncan Webb of Webb Management Services, Alan Brown of WolfBrown, and Jim Lasko of the Redmoon Theatre Company in Chicago.

The session was titled, “Listening to our future audience: the next 50 years of theatre”

Our future audience can be scary to listen to. To summarize some of what was said in that session, and others before and since, our future audience is saying-



They care more about who they share entertainment with than what the entertainment is.

Cli



They tend to favor smaller venues that continue to captivate audiences with a reach-out-and-touch environment and are finding production models that enable this to be an affordable way to present. (FLEA)



They want to show up at the venue and have choices, or be able to count on wandering in if they are drawn in, but try something else if they are not inclined.

As I was writing this, some of the Echo-boomer audience in our office was talking about going to the park that evening, with no idea about what was on...

So the good news is that they are more likely to develop a relationship with a dependable venue than pick and choose based on what's playing.

Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park Chicago

Frank Gehry, Architect

Talaska, Acoustics

Schuler Shook, Theatre

SOM, Masterplan Architect

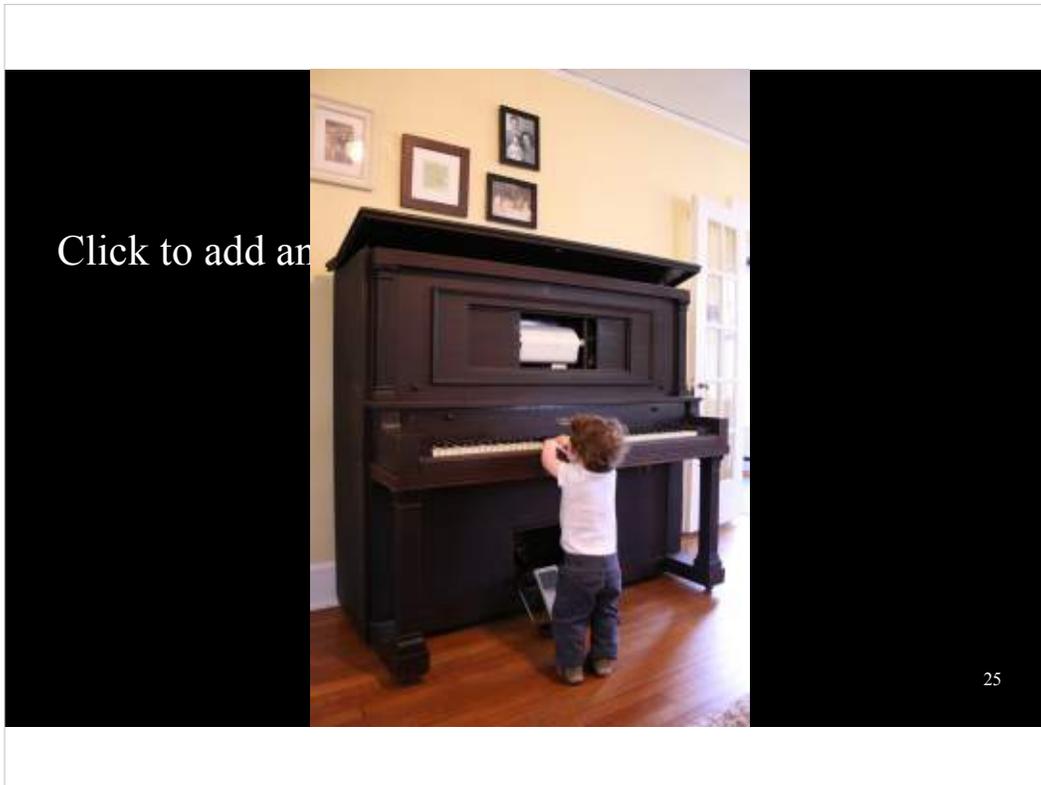
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And perhaps what they are looking for is a gathering of friends that have put together a thing. (maybe Molly at as Susanna from the Bangles)

Or they are looking for an event where they get to hear something new, interact with the people creating it, and show their appreciation to the host that made the evening possible.



Remember too, that this is not our history, it is European History. In this country we got used to an even more intimate experience.

Every house had a piano...

This is, of course, a nostalgic notion. Not every house had a piano, but we all like to imagine that it is so.

Why? Because no one showed up with their own piano. The composers used it to compose, so it was the natural instrument to allow for this contact with the artist when they came 'round for a visit.

The piano is still a requirement, but now we open ourselves up to more ability to share artistic expression by having other tools,



This music around the house is much closer to the roots of truly American music that gets at our own expectations- bluegrass, jazz, barber shop, folk, are all able to be tremendously intimately shared without expecting too much of the venue.

But for our small, intimate, “Chamber Music Venue” where the creative work of today's “composers” can be shared, what are the basic requirements to support this sharing of the curated works? The compositions are no longer written strictly for a predictable complement of instruments, and just having a piano and a large flat floor on which to perform is not enough.



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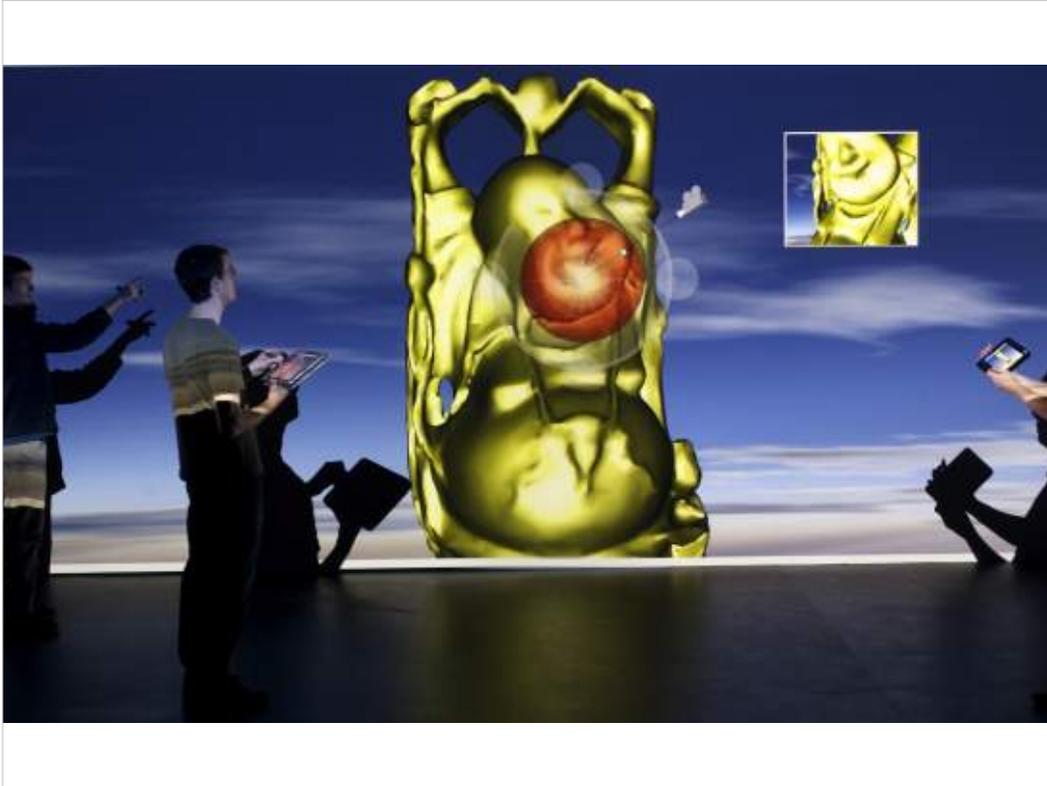
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## Support of technology

Today's creatives use a lot more tools, and today's *chamber music hall* needs to support the easy sharing of the magic that comes from our creative colleagues.

This image is from the French National Institute for Research in Computer Science & Control.

But the composer's tools have changed.

And the stories they are telling involve more media than ever before.

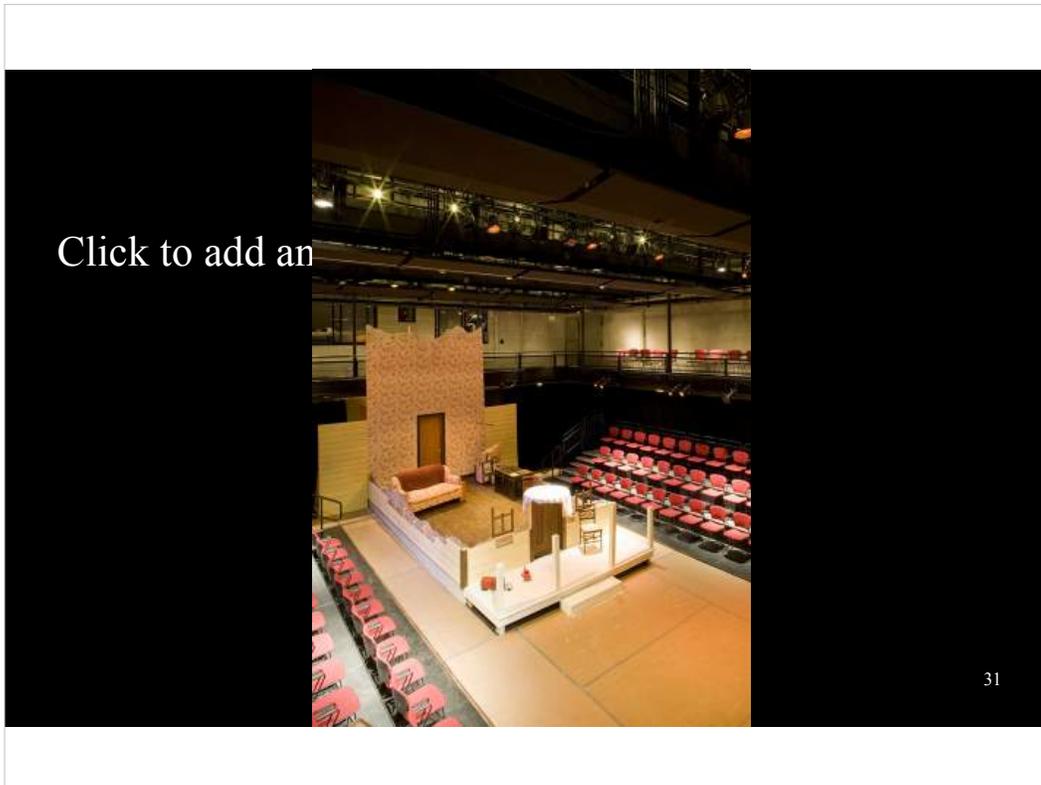
So when they come to call, we need much more to make sharing easy:

Access to the internet (or internet II, or fiber from somewhere else within the same multi-event facility, or...)

A way to share large format images

A way to share small objects

A way to create spontaneously (or dare I say interactively)

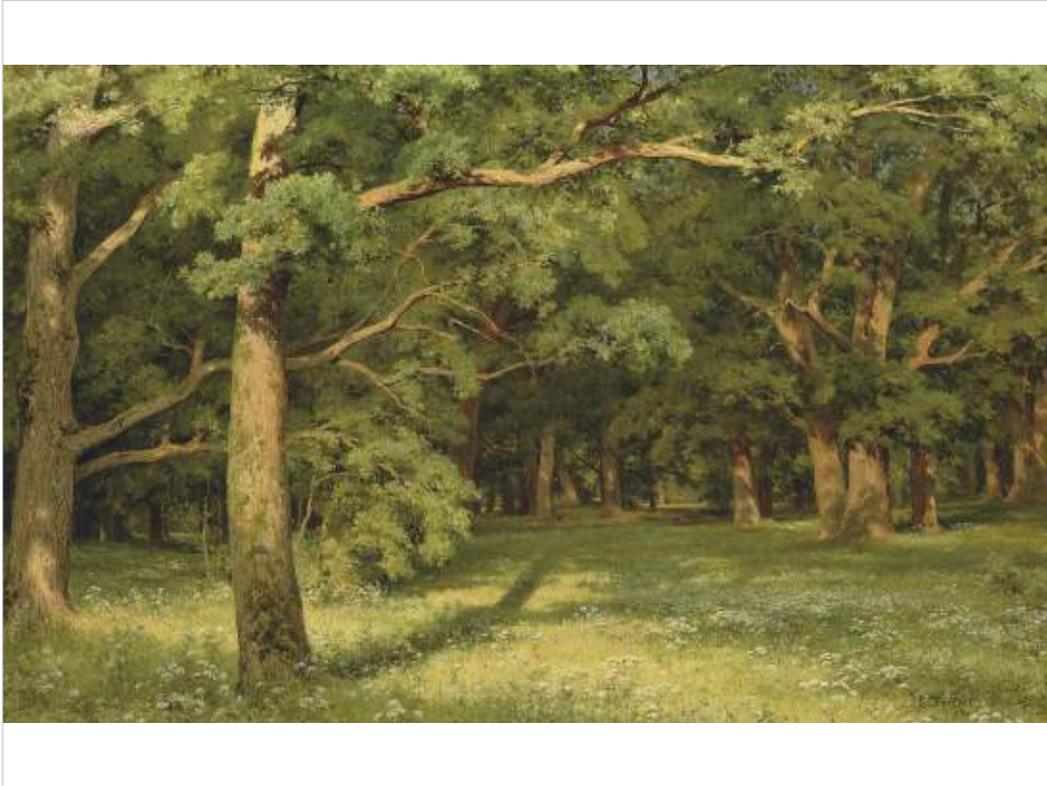


### Trinity Christian College

This is just a black box theatre that is also used for conference-style presentations, a TV studio and teaching facility for teaching Television Production, and is used as a theatre.

The ease in flexibility is provided by making a room that has an architectural character of its own when it is not decked out with a set,

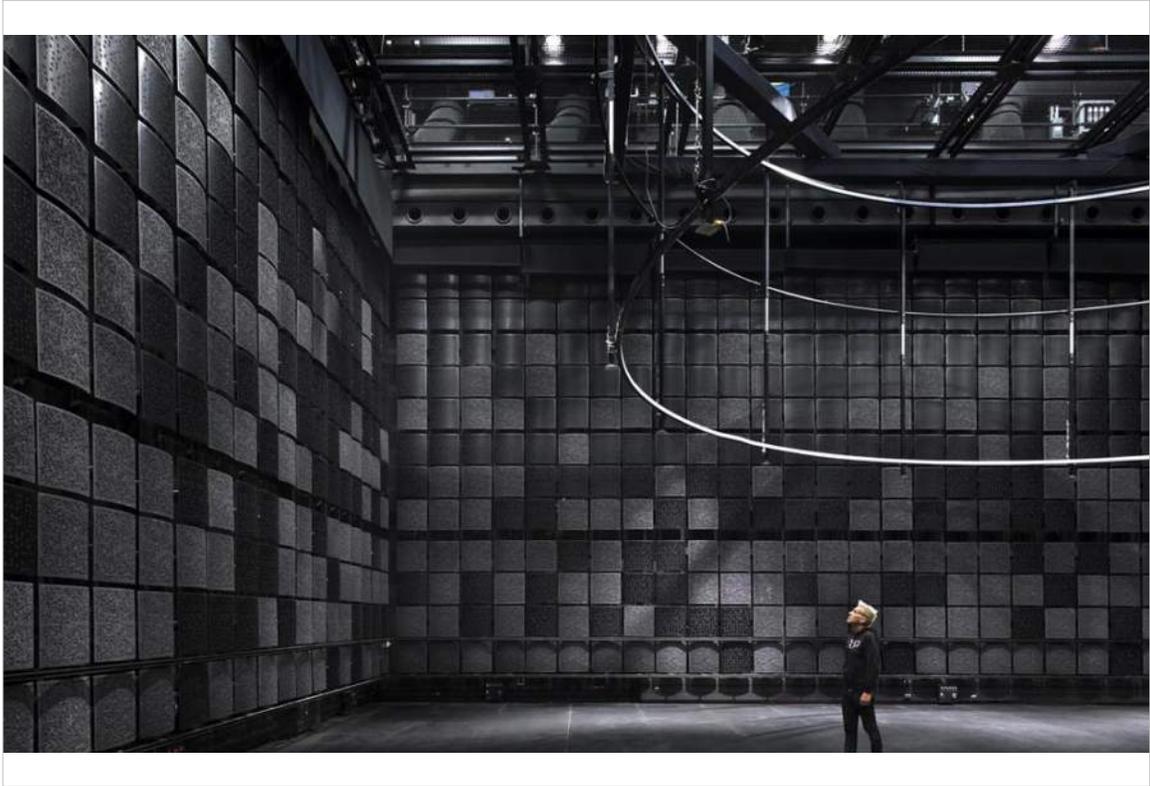
provision of independently managed theatrical, house, and TV production lighting and audio/video systems so that the users don't walk all over each other in their attempt to serve three dramatically different uses.



An environment to interact with (acoustically)

In the creation of the studio spaces at RPI, the client, Johannes Goebel asked for a room that sounded like a forest clearing. The Kirkegaard project team that responded to this request included Larry Kirkegaard, Carl Giegold, Louie Sunga, and Zack Belanger, among others.

It is a useful metaphor in terms of intimacy, diffusion, loudness control, and presence. All topics that have come up in the context of presenting chamber music.



The result at RPI is a pair of studios with substantial diffusion and absorption behind it. There is substantial adjustability, and a corresponding wide range of loudness control and a high degree of support for one's own sound or for ensemble playing in these rooms, whether set up for rehearsal, tracking of both audio and video content for later use in audio/video production use, or when performing to a small audience.



A way to deploy multiple multiple video images  
And to access a composer-in-residence, and. And, and...



One of the aspects of this solution that is critical is a need to get away from this idea that chamber music, opera, or any other musical art form is slave to the acoustical environment for which it was composed. Not every venue has to morph to become a chamber music hall today and a cinema tomorrow.

Our audiences have quite a bit of resilience around evaluating the art and the artist on their own merits without demanding the perfect environment for every performance. Remember our ability to be moved by Ben Zander playing Chopin through an iPhone?

I finally learned to stop insisting to Shure that their theatre was not a recital hall. During design they told me it was not a recital hall – so we designed it for amplified music, with an emphasis on diffusion because of the surround audio, and to provide the room with a nominal amount of liveness to allow people to communicate in the room without the need for microphones if necessary.

They really enjoy the room as a recital hall – and while it is a little on the dry side, it is a quiet environment with room on stage for the performers, where the audience can hear and see well.

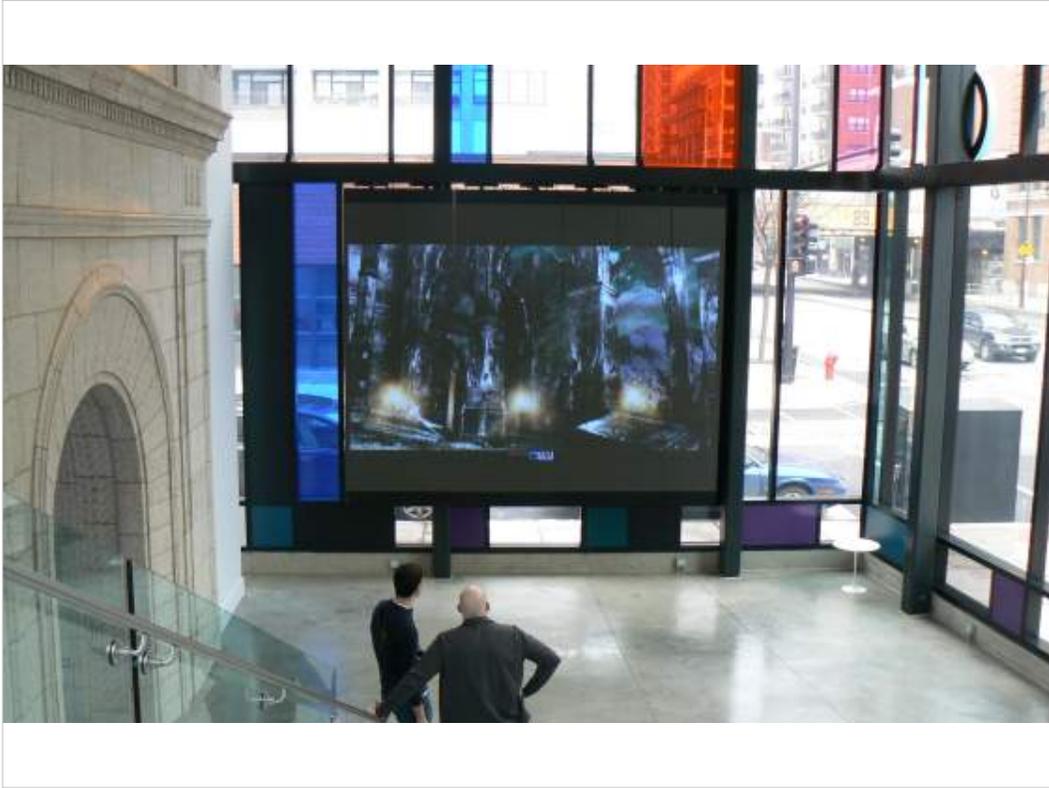
They don't need me “harshing their mellow” as Molly in our office likes to say.



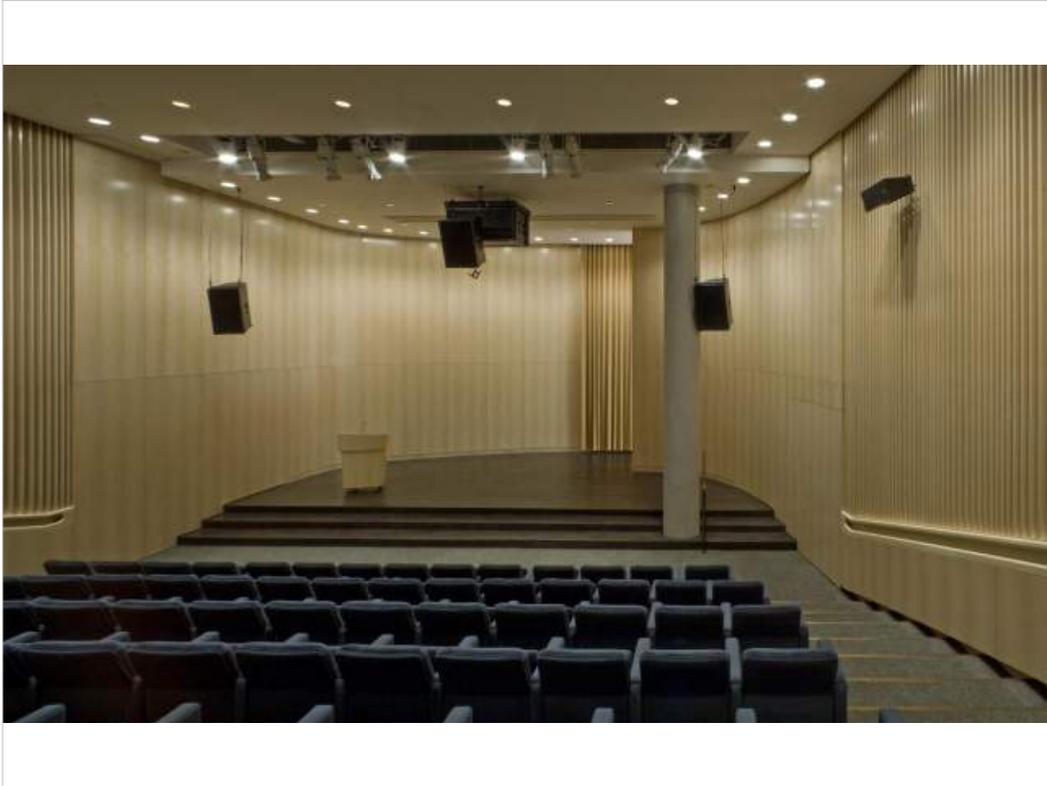
Ready access to amplification (Poetry and voice-lift)



A way to share what happens in the building.



A way for sharing student work.



Ready access to audio playback (including surround)

All in a room that sounds good (for what?)



A way to share small objects and perhaps to share a bit of the process. This can be the Kitchen Show, both literal and figurative. There is clearly a trend towards views into the stagehouse, ability to see the works of theatre, invitations into rehearsals of the works, and other ways to help audiences understand what it takes to bring this event to you.



Kurt Elling did this recently in the venue at Jazz at Lincoln Center in the recreation of the Coltrane/Hartman recording session. The audience was invited in to the whole story, and the making of the new recording. It was more than just a concert, and more than a recording session, it was the sharing of an event.

*Click to add title*

Click to add an outline

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So let's all find a way to create spaces that invite people in, while they do all of the necessary work to provide sound isolation and low background noise.

Let's make spaces that are equally welcoming to quartets, quintets, high power audio and video, recognizing that this doesn't come without advance planning for some adjustability.

As we continue to introduce technology – let's do it well, and agree not to let it come between our performer and our audience.

Let's also get more flexible about the environments in which great performances can happen.

And let's find the ways for our venues to make the work of putting it all together more transparent.

If we do all of this, we will make an environment that invites composition – an environment that encourages social interaction around performance, and perhaps true creative and artistic creation can compete with reality tv.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk to you today.