

## **Avery Fisher Hall**, formerly Philharmonic Hall

Venue for: *The New York Philharmonic*

Cost: \$21 million

Seating capacity: 2,162 when opened, 2,738 after extensive interior renovations in 1976

Owner: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.

Lessor and operator: New York Philharmonic

Total square feet: 46,800

First architectural schemes drawn: 1958

Groundbreaking: May 1959

Opening: September 23, 1962

Max Abramovitz (1908- ) was chosen by Wallace Harrison and the Philharmonic Society to design the Avery Fisher Hall in 1956. At the time he was Wallace Harrison's partner at Harrison and Abramovitz. After arriving from Chicago in 1931 he joined Harrison's firm and began teaching at Columbia University's School of Architecture. In 1932 he won second place in the Prix de Paris competition and spent the following two years studying at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts on a Columbia fellowship. He returned to the United States and again joined Harrison to work on the United Nations Headquarters Building and Rockefeller Center.

Abramovitz submitted his first plans for Philharmonic Hall in 1958. The design was heavily inspired by Hans Scharoun's Philharmonic Concert Hall in Berlin (1956-63), a revolutionary design with no proscenium and a portion of the audience seating behind the musicians. Above all, Abramovitz wanted the Hall to be spacious and open with large windows evoking a pageant for the whole community.

Avery Fisher Hall consists of a main auditorium, restaurant, and a cafe and bar at street level. It is located on the northeast corner of the site, bordered by West 65<sup>th</sup> Street on the north and Columbus Avenue on the east. The five-story south facade faces the Josie Robertson Plaza. This primary facade is composed of nine 70-foot concrete piers and clad with Roman travertine. The piers taper at the top and bottom supporting the Grand Promenade balcony at their widest point. Together, the piers and balcony extend outward from a glass curtain wall to form a monumental arcade similar to that of the Metropolitan Opera House.

The main entrance from Josie Robertson Plaza leads to the Grand Foyer by means of elevators and escalators. The Grand Foyer is an impressive atrium space 50 feet high, 25 feet wide, and 180 feet long overlooking the plaza. It houses two sculptures, *Orpheus and Apollo*, created specifically for the space by Richard Lippold. From the Grand Foyer, concertgoers enter the seating tiers via elegant staircases leading to the three balconies that wrap around the auditorium. The tiers are set back from the glass perimeter of the building to form a four-story atrium space at the promenade level.

The original design for the auditorium was plagued with serious acoustic problems. This resulted in a gut renovation, led by architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, and acoustician Cyril Harris, in 1976. The renovation transformed the original bottle-shape room to a rectangular shape with a gold-leafed proscenium arch and a stage and orchestra shell of English oak. Suspended from the ceiling are flexible screens composed of hexagonal, gold-colored panels. The changes were a vast improvement acoustically and aesthetically. It was at this time that the theater's name was changed from Philharmonic Hall to Avery Fisher Hall.