



SEVERANCE HALL



HAILED AMONG the world's most beautiful concert halls for more than half a century, Severance Hall has recently undergone a two-year, \$36-million restoration and expansion. The restoration of the Norton Memorial Organ completes the project. This landmark building was one of the most modern, up-to-date concert facilities in America when it opened in 1931 as The Cleveland Orchestra's permanent home. The Renovation Project was undertaken with the following goals: to restore the hall's original detailing, expand its patron amenities and services, retain and enhance its legendary acoustics, restore and reinstall the organ, and once again offer its resident ensemble state-of-the-art performance and support spaces. At the heart of the project, designed by David M. Schwarz Architectural Services of Washington D.C., was the preservation of Severance Hall's acclaimed beauty and architectural integrity.

Building a Dream 1928-31: Design and Construction

When announced in 1928, the construction of a permanent home for The Cleveland Orchestra was intended as a gift from John Long Severance and his wife, Elisabeth. Severance, whose father had served as treasurer of Rockefeller's Standard Oil, was then president of the Orchestra's board of trustees (he served from 1921-36). Since its founding in 1918, the Orchestra had led a nomadic existence, performing in auditoriums and theaters throughout the city and on tour.

Shortly after the announcement of the Severances' initial \$1-million pledge, Elisabeth Severance died unexpectedly. In the months and years that followed, Mr. Severance devoted his energies and

finances toward the new hall as a memorial to his wife. He spent nearly three times his initial pledge toward the building's design and construction. The overall cost of the hall represented a total investment of nearly \$7 million from Severance, other benefactors, and the public.

The Cleveland architectural firm of Walker & Weeks was chosen to design the Orchestra's new home. As the city's leading architects, they were responsible for much of Cleveland's visual character during the expansion years during and just after World War I. Their work was founded on beautifully-crafted, monumental buildings, and featured the synthesis of a variety of popular and classic styles into harmonious meldings of complementary ideas.

When selecting a site for their new hall, the Orchestra chose a location in the heart of Cleveland's University Circle area, an idyllic setting on the city's east side that still serves as home to an unrivalled concentration of major cultural, medical, and education institutions.

Construction began in December 1929 and was completed by early 1931. The building as a whole reflects John L. Severance's determination to create an elegant structure of the finest materials, incorporating the most advanced features available at the time of its construction. The Georgian exterior was chosen to harmonize with the classical architecture of the Cleveland Museum of Art and with the graceful gardens and pond in front of the museum. Ohio sandstone was used in the terrace and base of the building, while upper sections were built of Indiana limestone.

The interior rooms and areas reflected a planned and harmonious eclecticism. Certain design elements used throughout the hall helped to unify and tie together the diverse styles of Art Deco,

French Nouveau, Classicism, Egyptian Revival, and Modernism found in various interior areas. One unifying design motif was the lotus blossom, said to have been the favorite flower of Mrs. Severance. Lotus flowers and papyrus leaf patterns appeared in many shapes, formats, and sizes in nearly every public area of the hall.

The architectural significance of Severance Hall has been recognized by local and national preservation societies, including the Cleveland Landmarks Commission and the National Register of Historic Places.

The hall's opening concert, conducted by Nikolai Sokoloff, the Orchestra's founding music director, took place on February 5, 1931. The organ, built by E.M. Skinner, was finished just prior to the opening of Severance Hall, and was dedicated in a recital a month after the opening concert.

At intermission of the opening night concert, Dudley S. Blossom Sr., vice president of the Musical Arts Association, recognized John L. Severance's generosity and declared that Severance Hall was, "in the last analysis, a gift to all the people of Cleveland. It is they who are the real beneficiary; it is they who are going to come here day after day and year after year to enjoy the comfort, the charm, and the loveliness of this beautiful hall."

Building an Orchestra: The Cleveland Sound

From the day it opened, Severance Hall helped to shape The Cleveland Orchestra into the ensemble it is today. Among the first concert halls designed and built with radio broadcasting capability, Severance Hall helped to carry the name of Cleveland across the country. Having its own home provided the Orchestra with the ability to rehearse and perform in a single acoustic.

It quickly became apparent, however, that Severance Hall's original acoustics were not ideal for a symphonic concert hall. At George Szell's insistence after his first decade as music director, the first major changes to the auditorium were completed. With consultation from Heinrich Keilholz, who had just completed renovations at the Vienna State Opera, a new stage shell was erected inside Severance Hall during the summer of 1958. Its curved maple side panels were filled with sand to a height of nine feet in order to create an especially solid and reflective surface. Matching wooden panels overhead completely enclosed the stage

to reflect sound into the auditorium. As a result, the Norton Memorial Organ was silenced.

The original installation of the organ had placed it in a large catwalk area high above the stage, but the resulting sound was thought to be somewhat distant and less than ideal. The new acoustical stage shell effectively entombed the organ and, since the mid-1970s, it had gone unused.

The debut of the new Severance Hall sound in the fall of 1958 was deemed an unqualified success. The new acoustics helped The Cleveland Orchestra quickly refine and polish its distinct and characteristic sound under Szell's expert guidance.

Preparing for the Future: Restoration and Expansion

Artistically, The Cleveland Orchestra has remained among the world's top ensembles. The appointment in 1982 of Christoph von Dohnányi as music director brought renewed vigor and accolades, as well as renewed recording activity and increased touring.

In 1997, the Board of Trustees endorsed plans for a major renovation and expansion of Severance Hall, including \$2 million for relocation and restoration of the organ. The organ's pipes and machinery were removed from the building during the summer of 1997. After refurbishment by the Schantz Organ Company, the organ was returned in June 2000 for reinstallation and tuning.

In all, the Severance Hall Renovation Project involved the design of a five-story addition to the back of the building, and restoration and renovation work throughout existing public spaces, that respects the historical integrity of Walker & Weeks's original creation.

The renovation, expansion, and restoration of Severance Hall was funded in part through the *Campaign for The Cleveland Orchestra: Our Legacy to the Twenty-First Century*, a comprehensive fund-raising effort under the leadership of Richard J. Bogomolny (president beginning in 1995), John Ong (chairman of the board since 1995 and campaign chair), and Jamie Ireland (vice president and campaign vice-chair). With the successful conclusion of this campaign, the Musical Arts Association raised nearly \$116 million for Cleveland Orchestra operations, endowment, and capital improvements.

Severance Hall Renovation Design and Construction Team

Owner:

Musical Arts Association

Contractor:

Panzica Construction Company (Cleveland, Ohio)

Design Architect:

David M. Schwarz Architectural Services (Washington D.C.)

Organ Consultant:

Schoenstein & Company (San Francisco, California)

Architects-of-Record:

GSI Architects Inc. (Cleveland, Ohio)

Acousticians:

Jaffe Holden Scarbrough (Norwalk, Connecticut)

Restoration Consultant:

Sonya Winner-Smith (Cleveland, Ohio)

Organ Builder:

Schantz Organ Company (Orrville, Ohio)

Theatrical Lighting:

Fisher-Dachs Associates Inc. (New York, New York)

Vincent Lighting Systems (Cleveland, Ohio)

Cost Estimating:

Donnell Consultants (Tampa, Florida)

MEP Engineers:

Bacik Karpinski Associates (Cleveland, Ohio)

Structural Engineers:

Gensert Bretnall Associates (Cleveland, Ohio)

GSI Architects Inc. (Cleveland, Ohio)

Spiegel Zamecnik Shah Inc. (New Haven, Connecticut)

Civil Engineers:

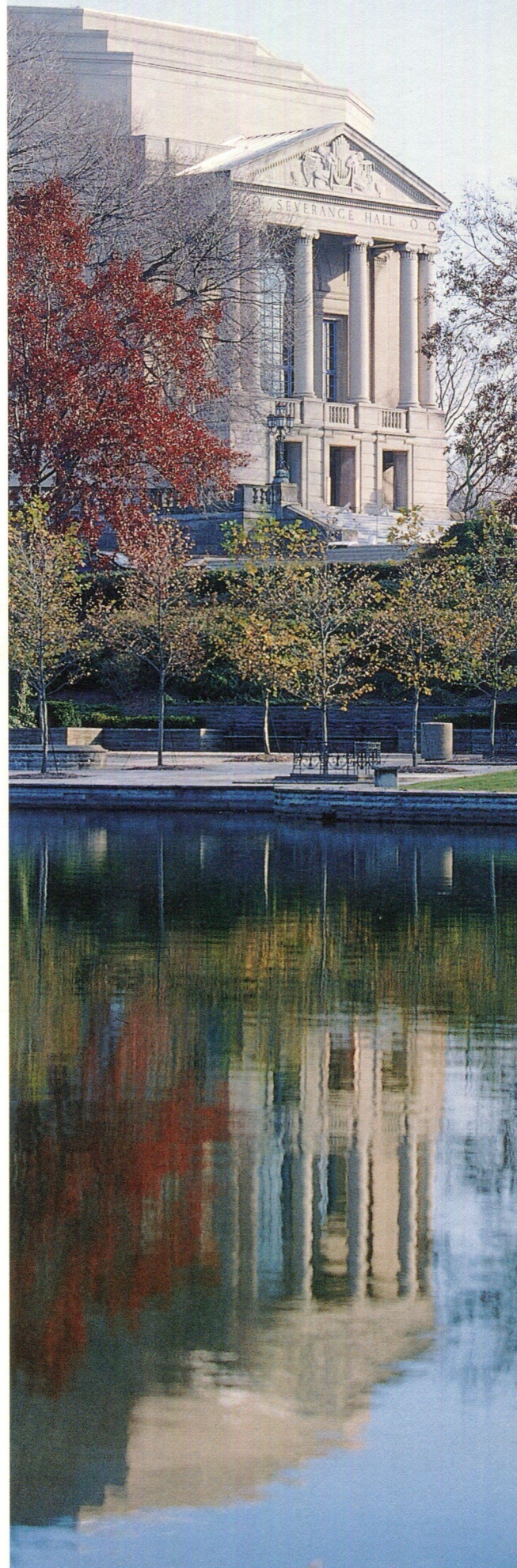
Adachi-Ciuni-Lynn Associates Inc. (Cleveland, Ohio)

Landscape Architects:

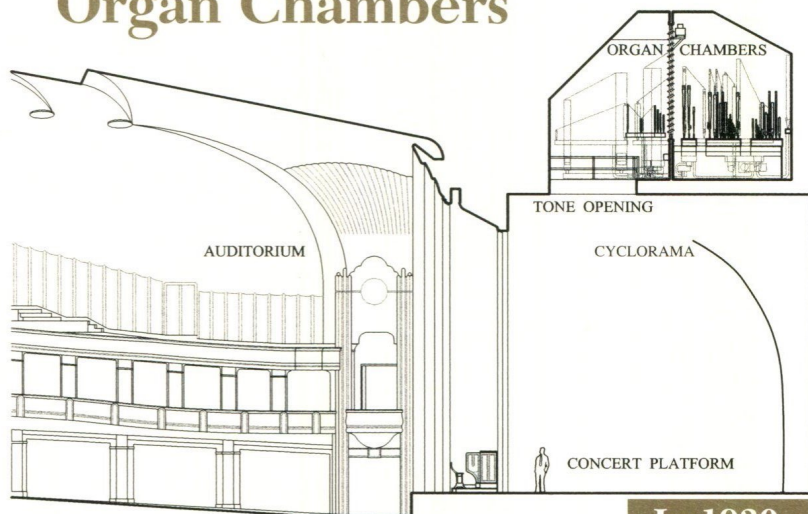
Behnke Associates Inc. (Cleveland, Ohio)

Project Council:

Thompson Hine & Flory (Cleveland, Ohio)



Organ Chambers



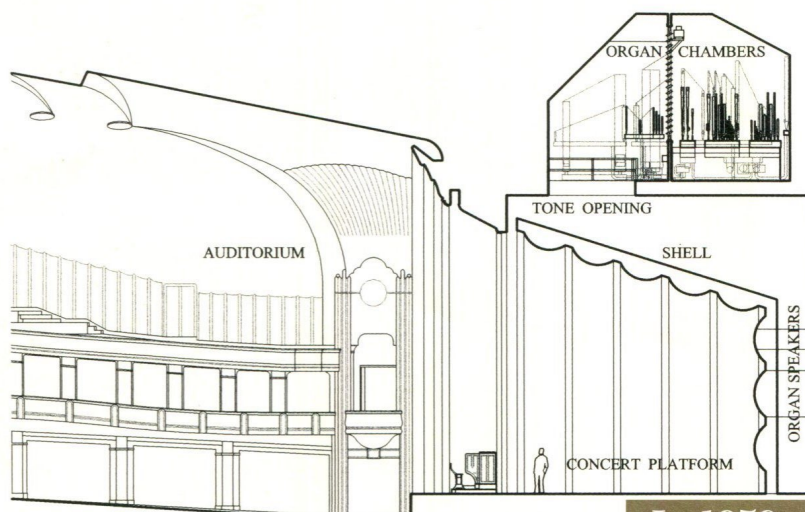
In 1930

These drawings illustrate the evolution of the Norton Memorial Organ's location within — and relationship to — Severance Hall.

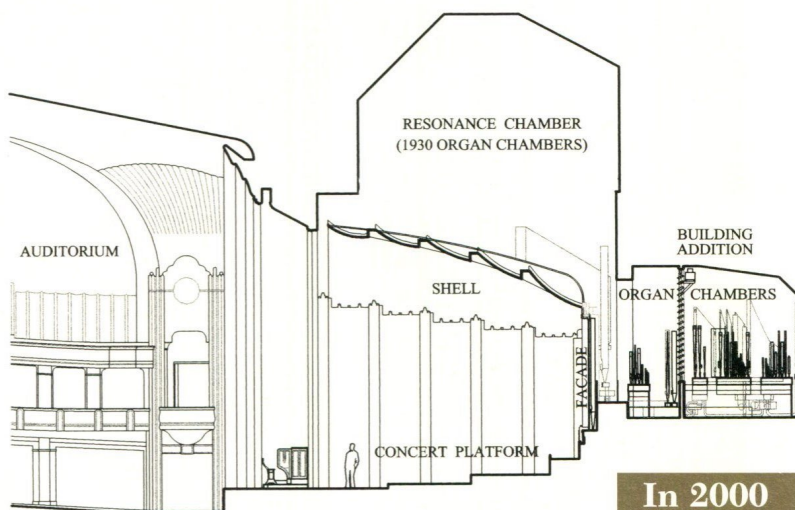
The organ was installed above the stage in 1930, with a door at the top of the stage through which its sound was to travel.

The new stage shell created in 1958 surrounded the stage and entombed the organ, although it was assumed that the instrument's sound would be released through the door at the top of the stage and amplified by speakers at the back of the stage.

The five-story addition to Severance Hall, completed in 1999, provides new organ chambers at stage level and utilizes the organ's original space for resonance. The Norton Memorial Organ can now be heard in full voice.



In 1958



In 2000

TOP, LEFT AND RIGHT:
Organ pipe removal, summer 1997

BOTTOM LEFT:
Organ facade pipe, fall 1999

BOTTOM RIGHT:
Organ console in its storage location at stage right, fall 2000



