

Architecture Becomes Music

An excerpt from the article in Architectural Review, May 2013

One of several of the articles about the connection of Architecture and Music that are all interconnected.

As abstract art forms based on rhythm, proportion and harmony, architecture and music share a clear cultural lineage. Now, through digital expression, architecture can attain new heights of creative supremacy

'All art' Walter Pater famously observed in 1877, 'constantly aspires towards the condition of music.' Why the music envy? Because, the standard answer goes, in abstract music the form and content – or in its case the sound and sense – are one integrated thing. Pater's aphorism became a good prediction of the zeitgeist and the goal for abstract art in 30 years as the painters in Paris and elsewhere pursued a kind of visual equivalent of musical themes, and Expressionist and Cubist architects followed suit. Indeed architecture as 'frozen music' had a long history of tracking its sister, the parallel art of harmonic and rhythmic order. Many qualities unite these two art forms – and quite a few make them different – but it is the former I find compelling today. Their shared concerns can be seen in ceremonial architecture from the ancient Brodgar Stone Circle to concert halls, in structures that heighten the senses and make one perceive more sharply and emotionally. In an era when museums and other building types emerge as a suitable place for musical ornament, and when expressive shapes can be produced digitally, architecture could reach its supreme condition once again and become its own particular kind of music.



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Notre Dame nave, the canonic view experienced as a whole. Its spatial proportions of width to height - 1/2.7 - enhance its spiritual meaning. Music is experienced over time, whereas architecture is grasped as a spatial whole

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Archi-fact:

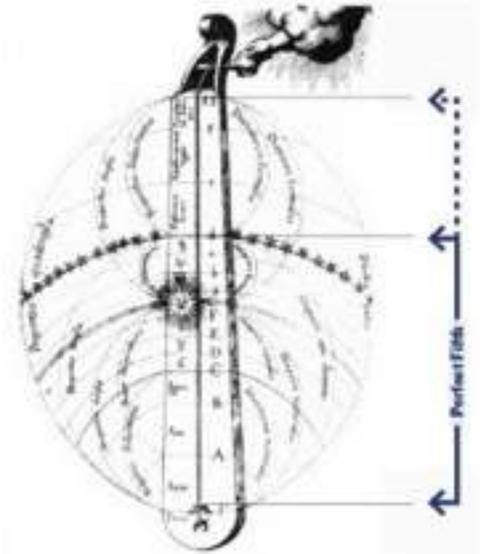
The cornerstone for Notre-Dame was laid in 1163 and completed in 1345. The largest of the bells weighs over 35,500 pounds. In 1905 Notre-Dame as well as 16 other churches became owned by the French State, and the Catholic Church became the designated beneficiary.

Architecture Becomes Music

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The cosmic codes

Since at least the sixth century BC, music and architecture have been intimately joined by a cosmic connection, the idea that they both are generated by an underlying code. This order, revealed by mathematics and geometry, was first espoused by Pythagoras who lived in southern Italy, and it led to many Greek temples designed on proportional principles revealing not only supreme beauty but ‘the music of the heavenly spheres’ – either God or nature. The idea was so appealing that many later designers tried to capture the notion with new materials. For instance, as Rudolf Wittkower argued, Renaissance architects saw the cosmic connections in simple ratios such as 1:1 (a sound repeating itself, or the architecture of a square room), and 2:1 (the octave, a string doubled or halved in length, or in building the double-square front of a temple). So far so simple, one could explain these analogies by vibrating strings and, as Pythagoras was supposed to have heard, a blacksmith hammering away with instruments of different size. He and others compared the harmonic results to the rhythms of a well-proportioned building, and the code of musical architecture was born. Perfect geometrical figures were equated with perfect whole numbers – 1, 2, 3, 4 – and then with the perfect harmonic sounds they produced (called ‘the perfect octave, the perfect fifth (3:2); the perfect fourth’ (4:3) and so on.



God fine-tuning the sun, moon, 'fire, air, water and earth' presiding over the cosmos, architecture was inevitably designed to reflect this music.

This is only part of the original article due to availability of space in this issue of designSpeaks. For the entire article google the May 2013 article “Architecture Becomes Music” in Architectural Review.

Iconic Building of the Month

Each month we select one of the most famous iconic buildings in the world and explain a bit about why it deserves to be in the list...

Notre-Dame de Paris

French for “Our Lady of Paris” also known as Notre-Dame Cathedral the historic Catholic cathedral on the eastern half of the Ile de la Cite in the fourth arrondissement of Paris is our Iconic Building of the Month.



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photo credit: Google Images

Archi-quote:

In his 1323 “Treatise on the Praises of Paris” Jean de Jandun recognized Notre Dame Cathedral as one of Paris’ three most important buildings of the day.

“That most terrible church of the most glorious Virgin Mary, mother of God, deservedly shines out, like the sun among the stars.””In fact I believe that this church offers the carefully discerning such cause for admiration that its inspection can scarcely sate the soul”.

Jean de Jandun



photo credit: Google Images

Archi-speak

How many words can you find?

GARGOYLES BELLS BUTTRESS

CATHEDRAL PARIS ORGAN



Iconic Building of the Month

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Notre-Dame de Paris was among the first buildings in the world to use the flying buttress. The building was not originally designed to include the flying buttresses around the choir and nave but after the construction began, the thinner walls (popularized in the Gothic style) grew ever higher and stress fractures began to occur as the walls pushed outward. In response, the cathedral's architects built supports around the outside walls, and later additions continued the pattern. The interior area is over 51,000 square feet.

Many small individually crafted statues were placed around the outside to serve as column supports and water spouts. Among these are the famous gargoyles.



photo credit: Google Images

Want to speak with the Architect

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About

Marcus Marino, RA, AIA
President



photo credit: Jenna Glatzer

Marcus Marino, RA, AIA is a leading architect in New York City. He received a Bachelors of Architecture from the prestigious Pratt Institute and Masters in the Science of Architecture and Urban Design from Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation. He received his license to practice architecture in New York State in 1981 and is licensed in a number of other States. Presently he serves as the Vice President of Public Advocacy of the New York State American Institute of Architects.

Contact

info@designMgroup.com

212.203.9341

138 West 25th Street, 10th Floor

New York, NY 10001-7470

www.designMgroup.com