Brussel, BrOnks Jeugdtheater
Martine De Maeseneer Architects [MDMA]

The theatre is situated at the Pig Market/Varkensmarkt/Marcé aux porcs. The overall form of a theater is already defined for the larger part by the problem of acoustics; how to solve it.

In essence the Bronks is no more then two large boxes fit together with around it enough margin for circulation and acoustics. Below stage level ‘half under under street level’, we have put the reception, sanitary facilities and techniques. Under the roof top sit the administration and café cum foyer.

Facade and roof are then literally and figuratively spoken loose standing problems that are subject to quite a number of boundary conditions. Building in an historical center is no sinecure. It demands the perfect alignement with the adjacent roofs of neighbouring houses, to keep to the rhythm of windows and façades such displayed in the surrounding block.

Contrary to the surrounding historical houses, we are dealing here with a public building. How can we make it as yet visible?

In contrast to the closed back façade, which shields off the ‘big’ theater hall, we have chosen for an open glazed front façade two meters behind, the wall of the (repetition)hall can slide open. It allows to put a play on stage with ‘real’ street animation at the back. Pedagogy is part of the job of a youth theatre and more precisely working with ‘the street’.

Structurally our front façade is made up out of a plane in which we have cut 2 rectangular holes. What remains is a passe-partout which we have turned inside through and what brings about that specific horizontal partition. We call it the champagne bar being a step up to the café/foyer. It’s not the only partition that we will use.

Between the two ‘O’s that form the theater halls we have introduced a ‘7’, a septum, being a rotative wall partition (at both sides being cladded with mirrors) and what can direct public and private traffic of people into interchangable alleys. For all it’s a plaything, but it tries to meet also to the demand for a flexible multifunctional building. The septum ranges amongst other movable items such as a telescopic seating area, a mechanically heigtened stage floor, in the big hall, the acoustic sliding walls that can turn the front hall into two repetition halls.

By placing two staircases against each other in the central circulation zone, one private, one public including the septum in its middle; the entry to the halls can vary.

The theater can function next to the repetition space or in the festival period two plays can be performed simultaneously. Stage 1 takes the stairs on the right, stage 2 takes the stairs on the left, or vica versa. One can either choose to enter the hall in the center or at the rear and downstairs instead of upstairs (given the fact also whether the telescopic seating area is pulled out or not). The reception below stage level is rebuildable into workshops.

The café has its own staircase and elevator and can function independently from the theater. It offers a great view over the Pig Market and the Brique quays.

Finally other scenario’s of entering the building are possible. For instance through the ‘coach house’. Before, the oldest ‘breedhuis’, literally translated as ‘broad house’ of Brussels was standing on this site and which became demolished in 1989.
basement ‘souterrain’, level -2.50m
1. reception area
2. sanitary facilities
3. main staircase
4. technical spaces
5. stage properties and stock
6. day nursery

ground plan, level 1.00m
1. main theater hall
2. back stage
3. side stage
4. rehearsal halls A and B
5. main entrance ‘coach house”
6. staircase to the reception area
7. side (café) entrance
8. main staircase

first floor ‘mezzanine’, level +5.00m
1. foyer balcony
2. meeting room
3. stage management
4. backstage dressing-room
5. artists' foyer
6. upper entrance to the main seating area
7. void
8. main staircase

second floor ‘bel-etage’, level +7.00m
1. café & restaurant
2. café entrance
3. administration and offices
4. sanitary facilities
5. roof terraces A and B
6. theatre bridges
7. stock lamps
8. void
9. staircase to the kitchen (3rd floor)

client
Flemish Community Commission of the Brussels Capital Region
(project coordinator: Inge Pieters)

architectural design
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Martine De Maeseneer Architects [MDMA]

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ABT Antwerp & BAS Jaspaert Leuven - structural engineers
BEC Brussels – M&E engineers
Daidalos Peutz Leuven – acoustics
TTAS Ghent – theater technics
Jos Van Loon Brussel – safety coordinator

realisation
preliminary design: may 2002
final design: 2003
tender stage: nov 2005
start of construction: febr 2006
opening: march 2009

building costs
(excl VAT & fees)
€ 7.500.000 circa

surface area
3.500 m2
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