SANDY BROWN

New Marlowe Theatre

Complete	Area	Client	Architect
2011	UK England	Canterbury City Council	Keith Williams Architects

This prestigious development in the historic city of Canterbury involved demolishing the existing theatre building, while retaining the fly-tower to create a new, enlarged auditorium. The 1,200 seat theatre extends up to five storeys in height with stalls and two balconies. The redevelopment also includes a 200-seat second space with tiered seating to further increase the capacity.

Cafes, bars, rehearsal and backstage facilities are also incorporated into the scheme which has been distinguished by a host of awards. Among these accolades are a Civic Trust Award, a RIBA award for architectural excellence, the East Kent People's Award, the RICS South East Award for best project in the category of tourism and leisure and the RICS South East Project of the Year.

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Services provided

Sandy Brown provided the full acoustic design for the reconstruction of the New Marlowe Theatre. Alongside general issues relating to noise ingress and egress, specific strategic advice was provided on detailed issues that included:

- auditorium acoustics / room acoustics
- sound insulation
- background and ambient noise levels
- noise control of mechanical services.

Special acoustic features

The flexibility for varied acoustic environment required the development of a multifaceted acoustic design strategy. While the emphasis was towards Lyric theatre use, the design brief specified the need to accommodate a range of performances, including musical productions with amplified sound, drama, classical concerts and theatre.

Computer modelling software was used to specify options for ceiling surfaces to ensure that ceiling reflectors balanced the loudness between music from the orchestra pit and sound from the stage, for example singing. This also provided useful reflections from the stage and orchestra pit, adding to the feeling of the audience being enveloped into the performance.

Another key consideration was the effect of balcony overhangs. Balconies add the potential for a loss of reflected sound to the seats underneath. The majority of the rearmost seats in the main auditorium of the New Marlowe Theatre fall into a category that would be affected by this loss of sound.