

Finely strung centre for music in Graz

MUMUTH lets architecture ring out

Mozart, Haydn, Mahler, Strauß, Lehár or Franz von Suppé: Austria has music in its blood. The history of this country is steeped in an unparalleled musical richness. With his Magic Flute, Mozart created the first German grand opera, Strauss immortalised the Viennese waltz, and Haydn delighted the world with his famous oratorios. Countless sonatas, symphonies, string quartets and concertos of the most illustrious composers originated here. Ludwig van Beethoven also moved early in his life to Vienna and set standards with his works, whose influence on musical tradition remains unsurpassed to this day. But even far away from the Vienna Opera Ball, the Philharmonic and the charm of waltzes, Austria is characterised by its outstanding appreciation of harmony and musical art. Stately structures from all eras underline the reputation of this Alpine country as a treasure trove of architectural delights. With the Centre for Music and Music Theatre (MUMUTH) in Graz, a new jewel now testifies to this remarkable spiritual kinship of music and architecture. "Real art is uncompromising" said Beethoven, who was celebrated as a master of improvisation in his day, defending the freedom of creativity. The same principle underlies the unique identity of the MUMUTH, which was designed by Ben van Berkel and his acclaimed team of architects at the Dutch UNStudio. Following an international architectural competition in 1998 with 212 entries, and after long years of planning and two years of construction, the building has now been opened and can fulfil its destiny as a centre for the fine arts. A filigree membrane of woven metal mesh by GKD – Gebr. Kufferath AG envelopes the MUMUTH, giving it the look of a finely strung soundbox.

The art of fugue

In his draft, Ben van Berkel picked up on the classical relationship between music and architecture, reinterpreting it with intentional twists. In this way, he created a building that renders the music practised in it physically tangible and makes the architecture ring out. With free-flowing forms and interior spaces, it supports the music in the same way that music itself influenced the form of the MUMUTH. The "TWIST", a central spiral made of decorative concrete, is the dominant organising element, analogous to the art of the fugue. Its design principle of rhythm, serialism and density gives the interior of the MUMUTH its unique distinctiveness. Everything revolves around it and perspectives change constantly depending on where you stand. With an elegant swing, the spiral connects the public entrance via a wide staircase with the actual foyer itself, and with the main hall on the first floor and the rooms above it. As a freely-defined composite structure, it supports the foyer ceiling, while at the same time functioning as the substructure for the stairs. In this way, the form of the building follows the principle formulated by Ben van Berkel: "From box to blob and back again". In a unique architectural gesture, there is a smooth transition of the multi-storey block – the black box of the theatre – into a series of spaces that flow into each other – the blob. Stylised clefs decorate the all-round glass façade. Their three-dimensional counterparts are to be found on the otherwise plain interior walls.

Impressive technology

The core of the three-storey building is the 530 square meter multifunctional hall with its 450 seats and cutting-edge stage equipment. 108 independently controllable hydraulic platforms allow endless varieties of topographies with up to three meters height difference. Two rehearsal stages, diverse rehearsal rooms for orchestras and music theatre, offices

and installations rooms form the flowing arrangement of volumes that complete this 18 million Euro building. While the stage for orchestra rehearsals under the foyer is on the ground floor with a direct view into the park, the rehearsal stage for music theatre is on the third floor. This arrangement, with the foyer in between, provides optimal acoustic separation of the two areas and allows them both to be used simultaneously.

Music transformed into spatial structure

With sophisticated composure, the external form of the MUMUTH also mediates this meticulous translation of musical harmony into architectural form. As a discreet, shimmering monolith, the building only allows a view from outside into the complex musical score of this spatial structure at night. During the daytime, the slightly curved, reflective metallic skin enters into a gentle visual dialogue with its surroundings. At night, LEDs transform the protective membrane into an imaginative fusion of transparency and colours. The woven metal mesh of type Omega by GKD – Gebr. Kufferath AG materialises the glass façade of Graz's prestige project as variations on a theme. Woven in varying densities with smooth transitions, the textile-like skin functions in daylight as both visual and sun protection. At the same time it has the effect that the shadows of the stylised clefs are projected onto the floor of the interior rooms. Depending on the angle from which they are viewed and the position of the sun, these projections vanish, or the notes move across the floor like an inaudible melody. 66 panels of the Omega mesh, each measuring 17.50 m x 3.30 meters, make up the 4,000 square meter translucent skin. The double-curved zones of the façade posed an exceptional challenge to the Dueren-based company. In this case the leading edges of the normally orthogonal mesh were not produce straight, like in conventional applications, but curved to fit the slightly

bulging form of the façade like a second skin. These radial mesh edges had to be finished with special flat profiles and, during tensioning of the mesh façade panels, fastened in a correspondingly elaborate way. The result proves the planners right: the woven metallic veil's rhythm, harmony and proportion cause the interior and exterior of the MUMUTH to coalesce into an enchanting symphony of glass, concrete and stainless steel.

6.024 characters incl. spaces

GKD – Gebr. Kufferath AG

The owner-run technical weaver GKD – Gebr. Kufferath AG is the global market leader for metal and plastic woven solutions. Under the umbrella of GKD – WORLD WIDE WEAVE the company combines four independent business units: SOLID WEAVE (industrial meshes), WEAVE IN MOTION (process belt meshes), CREATIVE WEAVE (architectural meshes) and CompactFiltration (compact filter systems). With its eight plants – including the headquarters in Germany and other facilities in the US, Great Britain, France, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as its branches in Spain, Dubai, Qatar and worldwide representatives, GKD is never far from its customers.

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Picture 1: The slightly bulging metallic skin reflects its surroundings in the daytime.



Picture 2: 66 panels of GKD Omega mesh make up the 4,000 square meter translucent skin.



Picture 3: At night, LEDs transform the protective membrane into a fusion of transparency and colours.

Pictures 1-3 © GKD/ Christian Richters

We will be happy to send you the desired images in printable resolution by e-mail.

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