

Significant MODERN THEATRES:

Auditório Ibirapuera 'Oscar Niemeyer,' São Paulo

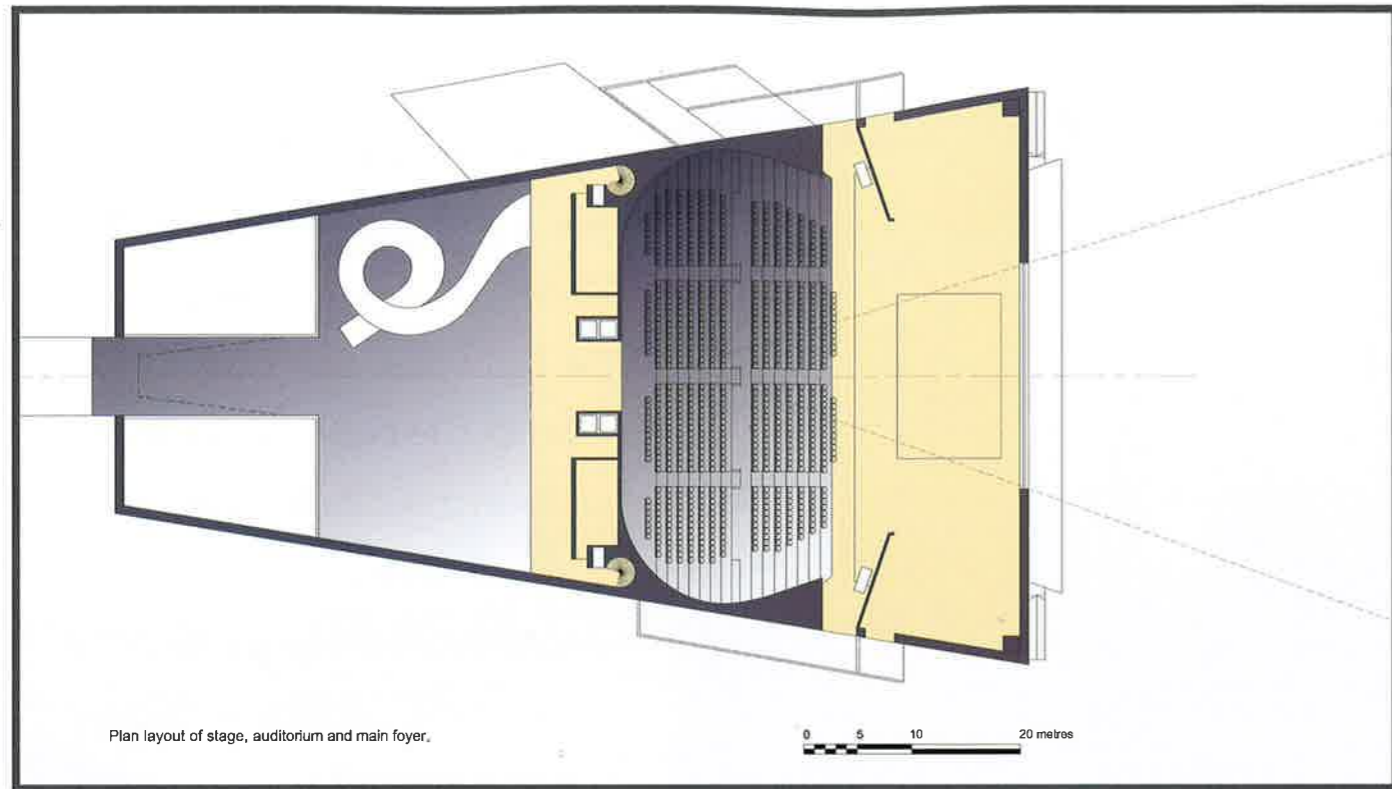
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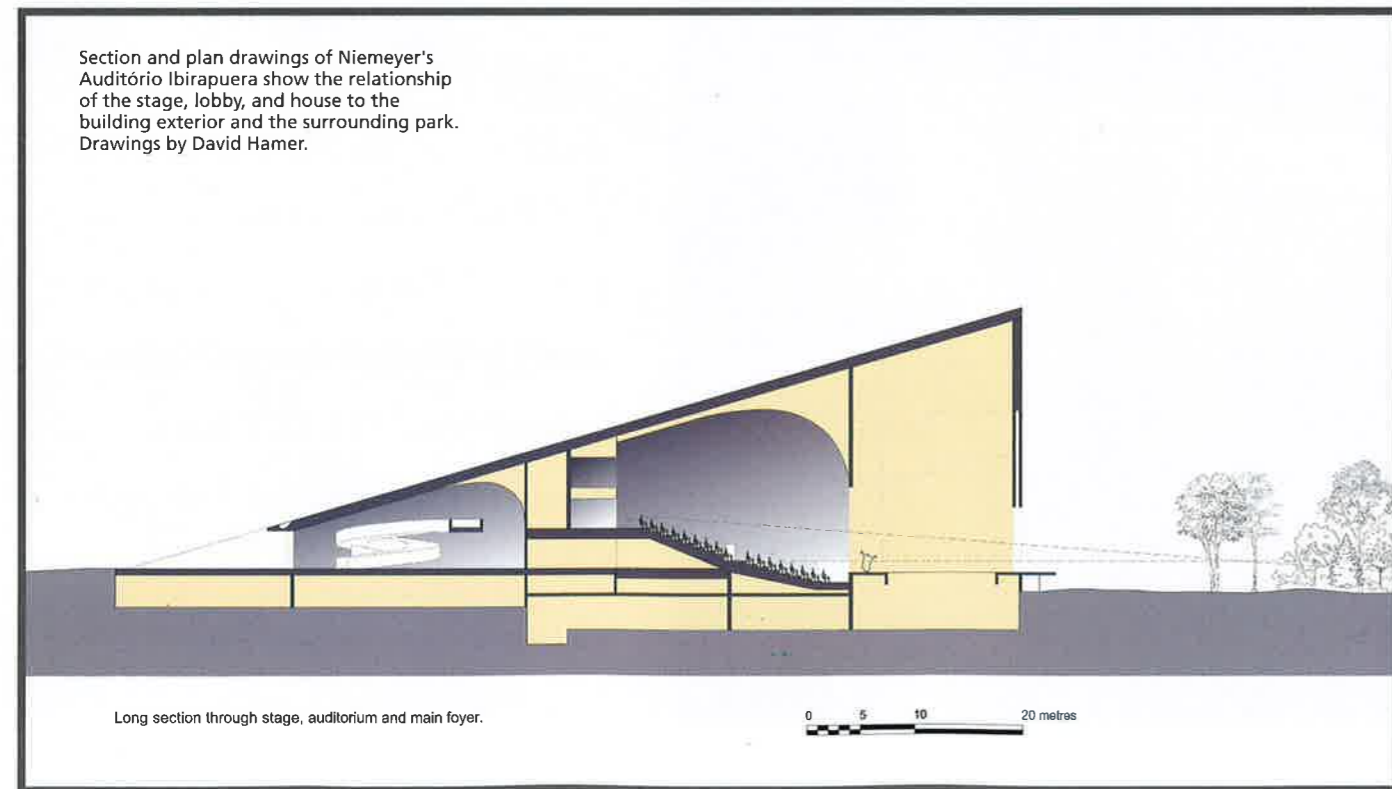
Auditório Ibirapuera
Photo: Pedro Mascaro

TD&T discusses an iconic São Paulo theatre in this issue as part of its multi-year research collaboration with *Bühnentechnische Rundschau*, the journal of the Deutsche Theatertechnische Gesellschaft (Germany's Theatre Technical Society) and *Sightline*, the journal of the Association of British Theatre Technicians. Under the auspices of this project, noted specialists in theatrical architecture are producing an ongoing series of articles celebrating and re-examining some of the most significant theatres that opened between 1950 and 2010. The modern theatres project is led by David Staples, principal consultant at Theatre Projects Consultants in London and ITEAC (International Theatre Engineering and Architecture Conference) editorial board chair, in advance of its inclusion at ITEAC 2018.



Plan layout of stage, auditorium and main foyer.

0 5 10 20 metres



Section and plan drawings of Niemeyer's Auditorio Ibirapuera show the relationship of the stage, lobby, and house to the building exterior and the surrounding park. Drawings by David Hamer.

Long section through stage, auditorium and main foyer.

0 5 10 20 metres



With a population of over 207 million, Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and the second largest in the Americas after the USA. São Paulo is the most populous city in Brazil, with more than 12 million people in its urban area. This makes it the largest city in the Americas and the biggest in the southern hemisphere. The 1950s marked the growth of the city of São Paulo and ensured its position as the most dynamic urban center in Brazil, overtaking the country's capital, Rio de Janeiro, in population and economic prominence. Brazil's surging industrialization started to secure the city's leadership, which stands to this day.

São Paulo had already witnessed the birth of its Visual Arts *Bienal* (which completed its 32nd edition in 2016) and of the *Museu de Arte Moderna* (Museum of Modern Art), but the city still had further cultural ambitions. Its 400th anniversary in 1954 deserved to be celebrated with pomp and circumstance. A Commission for São Paulo's Fourth Centennial festivities was formed in December 1951, and the commission planned to inaugurate the Ibirapuera Park in 1954.

The commission invited Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012) to design the park; the internationally renowned architect was 45 years old at the time. The project included buildings that could host scientific and artistic exhibitions, as well as events that contributed to the state's economic affairs, such as agricultural and industrial fairs. Furthermore, as a capital that wished to be modern, its main park needed to include areas for cultural activities, sports, lakes, a botanical garden, a zoo, playgrounds, and a venue for the installation of an amusement park or circus, and a theatre.

Oscar Niemeyer was born in 1907 and was reportedly still a practicing architect shortly before his death at the age of 104. A key figure in the development of



Photos: Nelson Kon

modern or modernist architecture, his largest and most famous work was the new city of Brasilia, which became the country's capital in 1960. Niemeyer was also part of the Board of Design Consultants appointed to collaborate on the design of the United Nations buildings in New York.

Niemeyer's team for Ibirapuera Park consisted of some of the most important architects in the city, in addition to the renowned landscapist Burle Marx. Most of the designed buildings were constructed, although the original project was not entirely realized. The theatre, however, was left out of the construction



Photo: Pedro Mascaro



Photos: Nelson Kon



plans altogether. Alongside the planetarium—which later turned into the “Oca,” a venue for exhibitions—the theatre would have been located right at the entrance of the park, forming a square. They would have composed the park’s most architecturally complex set of buildings and were Niemeyer’s favorite part. However, the square was never actually built.

Instead, the Auditório Ibirapuera plans went through 12 different versions from 1951 until its eventual construction in the 21st century. The projects varied in size, ranging from 3,000 to its current 804 seats. Niemeyer gave a lot of thought to the theatre conceptually throughout the years, because he could not accept its absence in the park, nor the absence of a performing arts venue of that size in the city. Therefore, by looking at the various theatres he designed between the 1951 Park inauguration and the opening of the auditorium in 2005, we can follow as Niemeyer walks observers through his different attempts at convincing mayors and cultural institutions to construct his project (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999, 2000). Fernando Serapião’s exhaustive research gathers multiple versions of the *Auditório* and their different variations, a recurring theme in Niemeyer’s design record (Serapião 2005).

The auditorium was finally built just in time for São Paulo’s 450th anniversary. It is shaped like a trapeze and features big interspaces/apertures, the largest being that of the stage, measuring 50 meters. Its roof sits upon triangular side walls and two pillars that separate the foyer from the audience.

Dedicated to music, the space is no longer a theater but an auditorium that sporadically hosts dance and theatre performances. It was built of reinforced concrete and it is entirely white. The marquee that gives it access was named *Labareda* (meaning “flame”), also conceived by Niemeyer. Painted red, it marks the *Auditório* and visually distinguishes it from the other buildings in the Park.

Internally, the foyer is located by the entrance, at the lower portion of the building. There, a red sculpture signed by artist Tomie Ohtake (1913–2015) hangs supported from the ceiling and front wall. The monumental aspect of the foyer is completed by a spiral walkway leading up to the audience, giving the space a unique and involving atmosphere.

The audience and stage are situated on the opposite and highest end of the *Auditório*, whereas the dressing-rooms, administrative offices and music school are underground. Wide and not very deep, the

Located in a central region of the city, the Ibirapuera Park is a postcard of São Paulo and hosts thousands of people who visit the multiple attractions gathered there.

audience house is oval-shaped and its walls are lined by wooden slats.

The stage is 50 meters wide, 15 meters deep, and 28 meters tall, and has a 28-meter wide proscenium line. A 20-meter wide red iron door in the back wall offers a surprising experience to the spectators: when triggered, it rises in 50 seconds and offers an exquisite view of the park. This trick allows the stage to be used from both sides, accommodating a 15,000-person outdoor audience seated on the grass that surrounds the *Auditório*.

The decision to dedicate the *Auditório* to amplified

music can be attributed to the nature of the audience area. Its volume could support a 1,500-person audience, but it has merely 800 seats. At 43 meters wide, it benefits poorly from lateral acoustic energy, according to José Nepomuceno, responsible for the hall's acoustic project (Serapião 2005). The sound system is a collaboration with Anthony Nittoli from Akustiks. This characteristic limits the offering of musical programming to the audience. However, the foyer kept to the architect's original plans, resulting in a space with a lot of reverberation and echo.

Located in a central region of the city, the Ibirapuera Park is a postcard of São Paulo and hosts thousands of people who visit the multiple attractions gathered there. Some of the most important Brazilian museums are now hosted at the buildings designed by Niemeyer, and the Visual Arts *Bienal* still takes place in one of his pavilions.

Auditório Ibirapuera's attractions are some of the most sought-after in the city, for they include concerts by popular artists, Brazilian and foreign orchestras, and series dedicated to film, which use the white walls outside the building as projection screens.

Keeping up with a global trend, the *Auditório* maintains a music school that opens daily and guarantees that the beautiful construction is constantly

and intensely used. Its 170 students, varying in age between 12 to 18 years, are taught by 32 teachers of winds, percussion, singing, and theoretical subjects. The course spans 4 years and is dedicated to Brazilian popular music. The school's space includes a central hall presenting a large panel, 16 meters long and 2.5 meters tall, painted by Luis Antonio Vallandro Keating (1940), and individual as well as group classrooms. The students' orchestras and ensembles perform regularly at the *Auditório*.

Niemeyer's interest and dedication to the construction of the *Auditório* reveal his respect and concern about the lack of venues dedicated to the performing arts in São Paulo and in Brazil. Nonetheless, he never liked working in collaboration with acoustics and theatre planning specialists when designing performing arts venues. In general, his designs in this area have always been deficient regarding the needs of the artists, whether musicians, actors, or dancers. To some extent, a good deal of Brazil's underdevelopment in matters of technology, and our failure to measure our theatres to standards of excellence, especially in comparison to so many excellent theatres around the world, can also be credited to him.

Ibirapuera Park was an amazing project for the city's 400th anniversary. It created a large open space similar to the grand parks and open spaces found in other major cities. The park has a series of buildings and interventions of which the most dramatic is *Auditório Ibirapuera*—a dramatic white object in the middle of the park with a red tongue to mark its entrance and a dramatic red door on the rear that can open to reveal the wonders being presented inside. The bold exterior is coupled with a dramatic entrance and foyer. Sadly, the auditorium is not of the same quality as the other parts of the building with its overly wide rectilinear shape. Originally named *Auditório Ibirapuera*, the building was renamed *Auditório Ibirapuera Oscar Niemeyer* to honor its designer after his death in 2012.



Claudia Toni, advisor to the president of University of São Paulo, is a consultant and expert in public arts policy and was honoured in January 2016 by ISPA with the International Citation of Merit for lifetime achievement in the arts.

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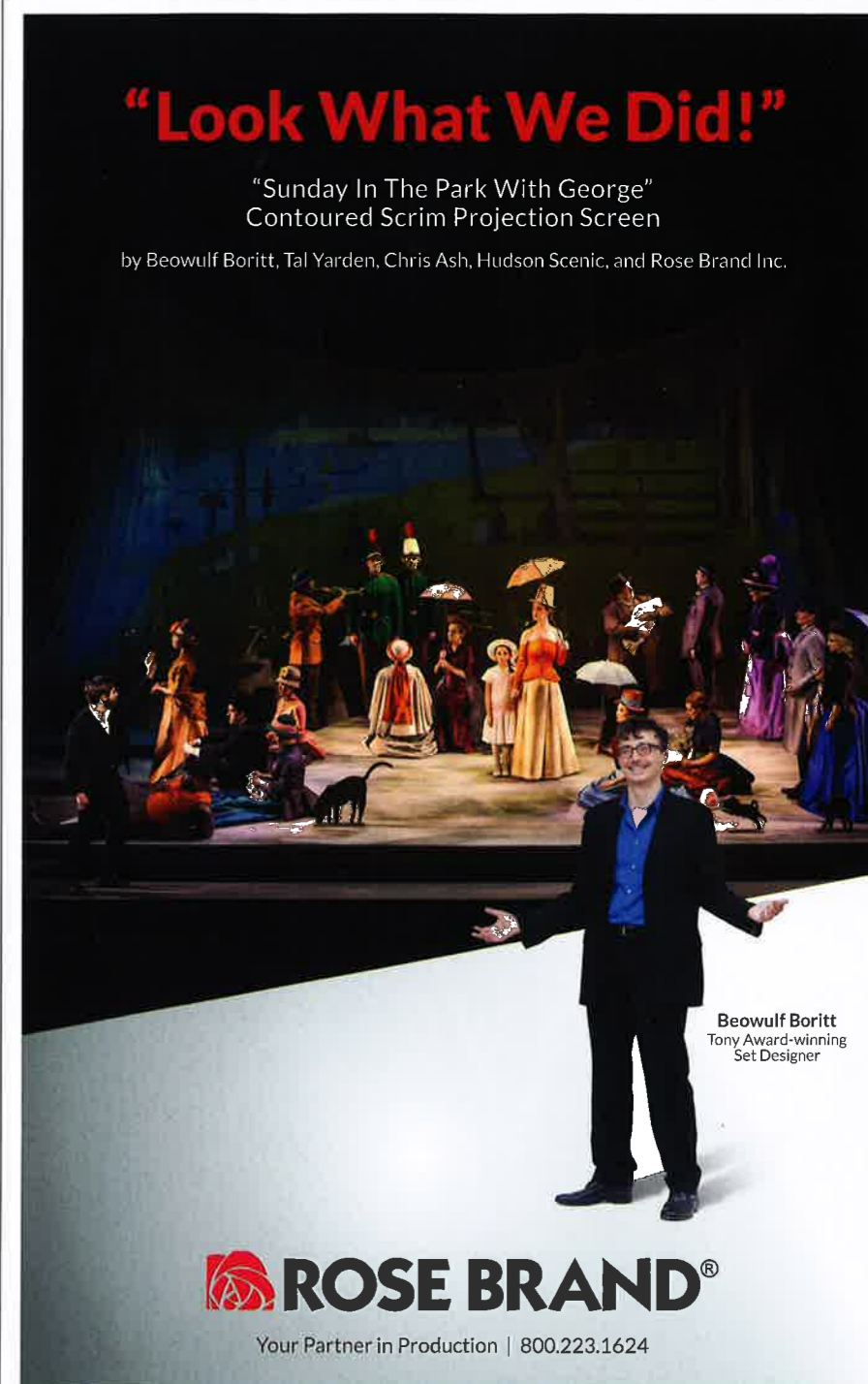
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