



# Our Architects Introduce the New Theatre



O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects are currently engaged in the design of cultural buildings, schools, housing and mixed use buildings in Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK.

Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey have taught at schools of architecture in the UK and USA. Sheila is currently a studio lecturer and John has been recently appointed Professor of Architectural Design at University College Dublin. They represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2004 and 2008 and won the RIAI Gold Medal in 2005. A monograph 'O'Donnell + Tuomey Selected Works', featuring fifteen projects from 1991-2004, has recently been published by Princeton Architectural Press.

The Lyric is sited between the characteristic grid pattern of the surrounding Belfast brick streetscape and the serpentine parkland setting of the river Lagan. Our architectural design concept responds to these conditions by housing each of the three principal functional elements of the building within its own distinctive brick box, with the public circulation spaces and staircases wrapping around the fixed forms of the theatre, the studio and the rehearsal space, standing on the sloping ground of the site like rocks in a stream. The skyline of the building will display the constituent ingredients of the conceptual design. The solid sculpted brick volumes linked by transparent permeable public spaces are intended to visually connect the street through the Lyric woods to the continuous flowing line of the river into the city. All the building materials are selected to endure and will be crafted to weather with age.

The main auditorium houses a 375 seat theatre in a single steep rake, the body of the audience not broken by balconies, with the actors in the same room as the audience. Designed to ensure optimum sightlines, the seating layout is creased along one line, folding slightly, like an open hand to hold the

audience, focused on the stage but within sight of each other. The faceted acoustic lining is in the shape of three timber arches which enclose the audience. The space has been designed to encourage and intensify the intimacy which was the most successful characteristic of the old theatre. The studio space is a six metre high brick 'empty space' warehouse performance space. Its flexible layout provides for end stage, traverse, thrust, in the round, cabaret and promenade performance possibilities. The studio has been sited along the street frontage with a picture window to provide visual communication between street and theatre activities.

Brick, timber and stone form the fabric of the internal public spaces and bespoke furniture throughout the building. The public approach up a gently rising sandstone stair from the street and enter a dynamic foyer space leading from the box office to the bar, with a flowing stairway to the upper foyer which overlooks the River and from which both performance spaces are entered. The spiralling circulation pattern empathises the generating force of the performance spaces at the centre of the plan. O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects.