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FRANK GEHRY'S MASTERPLAN
FOR A CONCERT HALL IN SW19

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“I think if you make a proper room for music that people want to go to, they’re going to come from everywhere. There aren’t many of those places.”

CULTURE VISION

Plans for a world-class concert hall in Wimbledon, designed by top architect Frank Gehry, are moving a step forward...

Architects whose names are instantly recognised by those outside architectural circles are few and far between. But Frank Gehry is one of them. With his striking design for the Guggenheim Museum he put Bilbao on the map. His other world-renowned projects include New World Symphony, Miami, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. And his next building could be in Wimbledon...

The idea for a Gehry-designed concert hall has been mooted for a while but,

significantly, Merton Council has now agreed to an exclusivity period to work with the Wimbledon Concert Hall Trust to develop proposals for the council’s Hartfield Road car park. The trust is keen not to call on any public funding but is looking for investment from businesses and individuals, with ‘naming rights’ on offer so they can be recognised for their support.

Chair of the trust, Anthony Wilkinson, who has lived in the area for nearly 60 years, is understandably excited: “It’s an opportunity for Merton to become a flourishing cultural

centre, and for Wimbledon, which already has such great assets with its theatres and festivals, to become a cultural quarter for south west London and beyond.”

The trust’s proposals are for a 1,250 seated capacity music venue, with the acoustics optimised for classical music. Yasuhisa Toyota of NAGATA Acoustics has worked frequently with Frank Gehry on his concert halls, and was the acoustician behind Kitara Hall in Sapporo, which Sir Simon Rattle has called, “The best modern concert hall in the world!”

But its potential is much wider than classical music, with plans for the venue to be used for everything from rock concerts (with the seating removed) to intimate jazz sessions in its smaller spaces. There would also be a roof garden and facilities for community arts initiatives. Indeed, much will be done to involve the community and break down barriers to the arts, particularly classical music.

If anyone can achieve it, it is Anthony who has not only brought world-class musicians to perform at his annual Wimbledon International Music Festival but also partners with Merton Music Foundation to enable many thousands of local children to participate in the festival.

It is hoped that philanthropists will step up to support the project. Billionaire Magazine

commented on the opportunity to back the Gehry design: “All [of his projects] were made possible by large-scale philanthropic gifts; all have become famous iconic works of architecture; and all are known by the name of the major philanthropic donor, or the business they represent.” But smaller-scale donations from the community could be as important.

Ballet legend and local resident, Dame Darcey Bussell, is a patron of the initiative. “The great concert halls of the world have the power to change lives and inspire, to leave a strong intergenerational legacy. Wimbledon can offer the perfect site. The Wimbledon Concert Hall proposal is one not to be missed. The residents of the greater Merton area will thank you for years to come.”

The Wimbledon Society supports the plan, adding that it will help differentiate Wimbledon and create opportunities for creative businesses and the wider creative arts.

For Frank Gehry, it is a great passion to realise his design. “Concert hall projects are the most exciting for me, I prioritise them over living, practically! I love the challenge of it. I think if you make a proper room for music that people want to go to, they’re going to come from everywhere. There aren’t many of those places.”

He adds: “I think the secret is to create an intimacy in the building,... make sure the audience connects and feels the musicians. I think it’s going to be a knockout.” [Full](#)

■ wimbledonconcerthall.co.uk