

Society of Architectural Historians Sixty Sixth Annual Conference Kleinhans Music Hall Tour Wednesday April 10, 2013



Kleinhans Music Hall
3 Symphony Circle, Buffalo, New York 14201

Tour Leaders: Theodore Lownie, Hamilton Houston Lownie Architects
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Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark, was built at the behest of philanthropists Edward and Mary Kleinhans. Constructed during the height of the Great Depression, Kleinhans received additional funds from the Public Works Administration. World-renowned architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950), with assistance from son Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) and Charles Eames (1907-1978), designed a modern masterpiece destined to become the home of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Acoustical considerations affecting Saarinen's design and the resulting acoustics of the hall will be discussed. This tour explores the music hall, including its backstage areas and other behind-the-scenes spaces, as well as the hall's picturesque setting on Frederick Law Olmsted's "Symphony" Circle.

Itinerary: 1:30 p.m. Depart Convention Center
1:45 - 3:45 p.m. Tour Kleinhans Music Hall (2 groups)
4:00 p.m. Return to Convention Center

Kleinhans Music Hall Overview

In the residential Allentown Historic District on Buffalo's west side is found a striking scene of pastoral beauty contrasted with sculptural architecture, the marriage of the artistic expression of America's greatest landscape design team and one of the twentieth century's premier international architectural firms. At the intersection of Richmond Avenue, Pennsylvania Street, Porter Avenue, North Street and Wadsworth Street is Symphony Circle, a circular greenspace and an integral component of Buffalo's parkway system. It was designed in 1868 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and constructed in 1874. Crowning the parkland is Kleinhans Music Hall, appearing from afar to be a sculpture of a violin or cello. The hall was designed in 1938 by Eliel & Eero Saarinen (the Michigan-based internationally famous Finnish architects). Its construction, which occurred during 1939-1940, was directed by the Saarinens in association with the Buffalo-based architectural firm Franklyn J. & William A. Kidd.

The music hall was originally built for, and is currently home to, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, formed in the mid-1930s. The building constructed for them is one of Buffalo's most significant buildings, a treasure of international importance.

In 1934, Edward L. Kleinhans, proprietor of The Kleinhans Company, a gentlemen's clothing store, passed away and left a provision in his will that the bulk of his estate should be used for the construction of a new music hall to be given to Buffalo in perpetuity. Kleinhans' wife, Mary Seaton Kleinhans, died a few months later and the process of constructing a music hall officially began.



Music Hall under construction, 1939.

Several years passed before the estate was liquidated and by 1938, the music hall building committee was in the process of searching for a low-cost site for the new building. Heirs to the estate of Mrs. Trueman Avery, who had lived in her Newport-like palatial mansion situated on three and one-half acres of Symphony Circle, offered the mansion to the building committee for a nominal amount. The music hall committee was impressed with the park-like beauty of Symphony Circle and selected the site over other proposed locations.



Eero and Eliel Saarinen, 1940.

The building committee recruited Eliel Saarinen and his son Eero to design the music hall, working in association with Buffalo architects Kidd & Kidd, who supervised construction. The hall's groundbreaking took place in October 1938 and the Saarinens were selected as designers in December 1938. Construction began in March 1939 with M. Shapiro & Sons Construction Co. being the building's general contractor. The hall's cornerstone was laid in September 1939, and the building was officially opened in October 1940.

The music hall was designed in a modern style with International and Arts & Crafts style influences. The Saarinens studied Symphony Circle at great length and intended the hall to be an organic design that complemented Symphony Circle.

Named by Edward Kleinhans as a memorial to his wife, Mary Seaton Kleinhans and his mother, Mary Livingston Kleinhans, Kleinhans Music Hall has outlived the company that provided the fortune to create it: the Kleinhans Co. announced its demise in 1992.

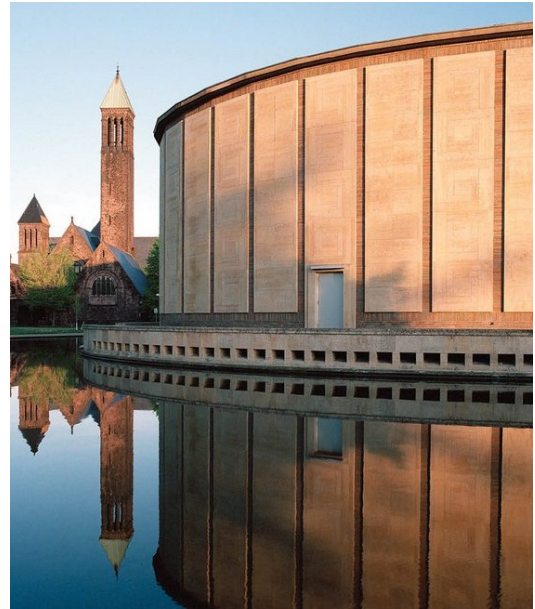
Kleinhans Music Hall was one of the first important American commissions on which Eliel and Eero collaborated. It was also one of the few such buildings erected during the Depression years. Its budget was \$1,335,379; constructed with Edward and Mary Kleinhans' funds of \$751,704, and augmented with a grant from the federal Public Works Administration in the amount of \$583,675.

The building was designed to contain two significant halls: a Mankato-limestone faced chamber music hall/multipurpose space that seats about 800 (the Mary Seaton Room) and a rough rose-colored brick faced main auditorium that seats approximately 2,800 people (main floor approximately 1,500 and balcony approximately 1,300). These two halls are joined by a wide lobby with entrances on two sides of the building, facing both Pennsylvania Street and Porter Avenue. A smaller third hall (Livingston Hall) is also contained within the structure.

The curving shapes of the exterior, which faithfully reflect interior spaces, look forward to Eero's later architecture, while the clean lines, rich woods and careful craftsmanship, evident on the interior, hearken back to the elder Saarinen's devotion to Arts & Crafts ideals.

The Saarinens' concert hall quickly gained renown for its acoustical excellence and became a place of pilgrimage for architects and acoustical engineers from all over the world.

Many post-World War II concert halls, such as the Royal Festival Hall in London, England show its influence. In Buffalo, Kleinhans Music Hall became so well known, the parkland surrounding it, although originally named "The Circle" by Frederick Law Olmsted, was renamed "Symphony Circle" in 1958 because of Kleinhans' presence.

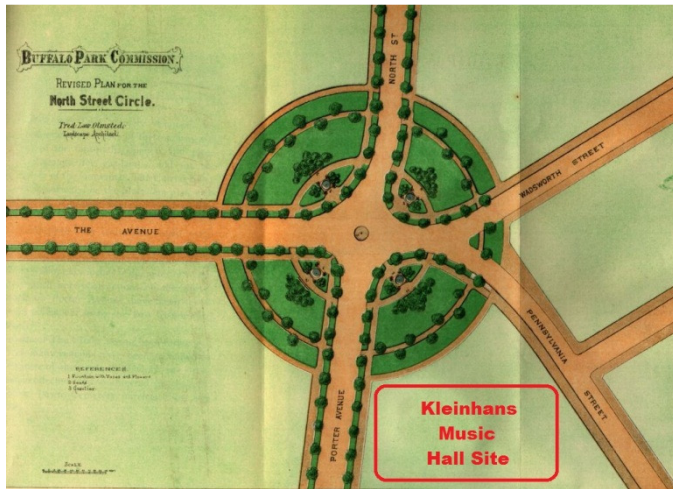


Both Symphony Circle and Kleinhans Music Hall have been restored in recent years. Kleinhans Music Hall has completed a \$12 million restoration within the past decade. Perhaps the most impressive feature of its restoration was the re-creation of the original reflecting pool surrounding the Mary Seaton Room. It was restored in September 2001 after being filled in and turned into a lawn in 1956. At the same time Kleinhans Music Hall was being restored, a ten-year initiative was begun in 1992 to restore Symphony Circle to Olmsted and Vaux's original design. It too was capped off by a dramatic restoration in 2002 with a \$500,000 re-creation of its original center island with ornamental light standard.

In 1978, the music hall was included in the Allentown Historic Preservation District and as a result, exterior changes to Kleinhans had to be approved by the Buffalo Preservation Board. The hall was designated a local landmark in 1980. Also in 1980, Kleinhans Music Hall was listed on the National Register of Historic Places by virtue of being a contributing structure within Allentown. Symphony Circle and Porter Avenue, as part of Olmsted & Vaux's Buffalo parkway system, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. In 1989, Kleinhans Music Hall was designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service, the highest distinction given to a building in the U.S.

Nearly 75 years after its opening, the hall remains one of the most heavily-used buildings in Buffalo. In addition to hosting concerts, the hall hosts weddings, high school and college graduations, and many other civic events. In addition to its impressive architectural history, many famous performers and politicians have graced Kleinhans' stage since its opening in 1940. Popular music legends such as Johnny Mathis, Judy

Garland, and Aretha Franklin have performed there as well as the finest talent from the classical musical world such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Renée Fleming. Marian Anderson said that Kleinhans is “unsurpassed by any other” music hall. In addition to musical performers, many famous Americans have visited Kleinhans Music Hall. Eleanor Roosevelt said “how wonderful if every city in America could have such a music hall.” United States presidents and other famous Americans, such as Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have spoken at Kleinhans Music Hall



Site

- Located on Symphony Circle, parkland designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1868.
- Only major United States music hall in a residential neighborhood, the Allentown Historic District.
- The busts of Chopin and Verdi were moved to Symphony Circle in the 1970s through the efforts of the Chopin Singing Society and Italian Americans of Buffalo.
- Symphony Circle’s innermost circle light standard was originally installed in 1878. It was removed in 1938 because of anticipated traffic demands and restored in 2002.

Kleinhans Music Hall Exterior Features



Mary Seaton Room

- Designed to be the “feminine” portion of the building.

- Roman brick is used.
- Covered in alternating concentric square and flat panel pilasters of limestone from Mankato, Minnesota.
- Surrounded by a 17,000 sq. ft. (1,600 square meters) reflecting pool, turned into a lawn in 1956 and restored in 2001.

Main Auditorium

- Designed to the “masculine” portion of the building.
- Entrance marked by poured concrete canopy and extensive beautiful aluminum work.
- Exterior covered with rough-faced Wyandotte brick from Upper Sandusky, Ohio. The Saarinen selected a color range to make the large areas of brick surface rich and vibrant, and yet restful and mellow.
- Features projecting, stepped section that houses the balcony exit staircases. A tall chimney stack is parapeted above the roof.

Kleinhans Music Hall Interior Features



Entrance Vestibule and Lobby

- Entrance doors made of aluminum frame with glass panels.
- Vestibule floors and walls of Winona travertine.
- Ticket offices are located at Pennsylvania Street and Porter Avenue entrances with lettering in the Art Deco style.
- Lobby is a long arc, 40 feet (12 meters) wide and 185 feet (56 meters) long.
- Walls of the lobby covered with mahogany veneer. The wood trim is white oak as are the doors to the main auditorium.
- Curved opening coatrooms and entrances to the main auditorium are located on the first floor foyer.
- Symmetrical twin grand staircases with broad treads and the low risers lead to balcony.

Mary Seaton Room

- Multi-purpose room designed to seat more than 800 people.
- Home to the Buffalo Chamber Music Society.

- The 5 pairs of grand doors leading from the lobby to the Mary Seaton Room are 22 feet high and 8.5 feet wide (6.7 m by 2.6 m). They are veneered with East Indian Rosewood on the lobby side and covered in sound absorptive material on the inside.
- Walls are covered with an inlaid pattern of zebra wood in which are recessed lights for illuminating the ceiling. Also contain wood grilles designed by Saarinen utilizing Finnish folk art motifs.
- Aluminum framed windows provide natural light.
- Oak parquet floor is level.
- Stage is acoustically shaped with curved wings sheathed in Rosewood for proper sound reflection.
- Wavy ceiling is designed to decrease reverberation and conceal ventilating grilles and pin-hole down lights, used for illuminating the floor.
- Eero Saarinen and Charles Eames designed furniture for Kleinhans Music Hall, including the Kleinhans Chair for the Mary Seaton Room, the first “gang seating” type of chair.

Main Auditorium

- Four pairs of doors lead to the main auditorium.
- Auditorium seats more than 2,800 people with an additional 100 to be seated on the orchestra lift.
- Has a clear span of 81 feet (25 meters) created by a series of lattice steel trusses.



- Charles C. Potwin was the hall’s acoustical consultant. Stage area utilizes 3/4" resonating honeytone Primavera veneered plywood and the grand balcony is “open throat” with the front tilted slightly upward while the underside sloped down toward the rear. The design captures and funnels sound to even the furthest reaches of the auditorium.

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- Stanley Russell McCandless, the “father of modern lighting design,” was the hall’s lighting consultant. He designed recessed lights for the main auditorium to resemble a starry nighttime sky.
- Walls are curved acoustically and together with the stage are covered with primavera flexwood with vertical strips of perforated transite occasionally backed with acoustical blanket. The ceiling is also curved for acoustical effects.
- Rear of the stage is a semi-circular ambulatory containing musician’s lockers lit by continuous panels of glass block. At the rear of the platform to the right is Livingston Hall.
- To the left of the stage (Pennsylvania Street side) are offices, star dressing rooms and baths, a room for the conductor, and a “green room” for performing artists to receive congratulations.

Livingston Hall

- Third music hall/multipurpose room seats about 200 people and was originally designed as a rehearsal and recital room.

Lower Level

- Contains storage for instruments and bar/restaurant.

Praise for Kleinhans Music Hall

After being designated a National Historic Landmark, Kleinhans Music Hall’s accolades continued to grow. In an article published in 1998, the *New York Times* said “Of all the buildings that have gone up in Buffalo in the last 75 years, the most influential by far is the Kleinhans Music Hall...” In 2006, *Buffalo News* art and architecture critic Richard Huntington said Kleinhans Music Hall “sits on the earth with an incredibly light touch. Simple curved forms, step-down geometry and a long, low porch join in effortless harmony. The outside telegraphs precisely what is within; the only surprise is the greater freedom of the sweeping curves. The hall itself, famous for its marvelous acoustics, is like some giant, flaring musical instrument constructed of the finest crafted wood. Sight and sound are perfectly matched in this extraordinary building.” In 2007, architectural historian and critic Jayne Merkel said “Kleinhans Music Hall is significant because it’s one of the few mature works that Eliel and Eero Saarinen worked together on. It’s also one of the few modern concert halls of its period.” Architect Richard Dattner, in his book *Civil Architecture: The New Public Infrastructure*, said “Kleinhans Music Hall is a major concert hall that fit perfectly into the surrounding residential neighborhood. It is a great work by one of the pioneers of American architecture. It is like a hidden gem.”