

# The Opening of Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie (January 11, 2017)

## Abstract

---

Hamburg's spectacular new concert hall opened several years late and construction costs went far over budget, but the dramatic building in Hamburg's former harbor with its unparalleled acoustics has thrilled both performers and audiences since its opening.

## Source

---

### The Elbphilharmonie Has Opened!

*Hamburg and 2,100 guests celebrated the opening of the Elbphilharmonie. The program offered music from many epochs and the premiere of a work by Wolfgang Rihm.*

It's done: After ten years of construction, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg finally opened its doors with a ceremony and a concert. While the building has been partially open to the public since November, its heart, the grand hall resting on springs, has now been put to the test for the first time. It remained to be seen whether the expenditure of nearly 800 million euro and the precise attention to detail by acousticians and architects could actually produce a musical experience unique in the world.

At the opening ceremony just before the concert, President Joachim Gauck said that the Elbphilharmonie had the chance to become what many Hamburgers wish for: "The emblem of a cosmopolitan, diverse metropolis—and a jewel of the German cultural nation."

During the intermission, Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke about the fantastic concert hall. It was, she said, an impressive evening. "One day we will all be very proud that something like this was built during our times, too, that people in 50 or 100 years will still be saying: Look, that was back in 2017, on January 11<sup>th</sup>."

2,100 guests were invited to the opening, including Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz, the architect Jacques Herzog and the artistic director of the Elbphilharmonie Christoph Lieben-Seutter spoke at the opening ceremony. The police secured the event with concrete bollards, sniffer dogs and a large contingent of officers.

The NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, the NDR Chorus and the Bavarian Radio Chorus under the baton of Chief Conductor Thomas Hengelbrock were privileged to perform the first concert in the Grand Hall with its special wall panels. The concert opened with *Pan*, the first of English composer Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*. At the first notes, the hall was bathed in black. Outside, at the same time, a light show attuned to the music was projected onto the building's façade.

The motto of the evening, *Here Time Becomes Space*, was borrowed from Richard Wagner and encompassed pieces from the Renaissance to the present. The important contemporary composer Wolfgang Rihm composed the work *Reminiscenz* for the occasion, and it had its premiere here. The program closed with the last movement of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> symphony and its final chorus, the *Ode to Joy*.

At the same time as the concert, the music was translated into visual form and projected onto the façade

---

of the Elbphilharmonie as a light installation. The concert will be repeated on January 12.

Even before it opened, the so-called Glass Wave on the old Kaispeicher warehouse at the tip of Hamburg's HafenCity was celebrated as an architectural marvel and the kind of building that comes but once in a century. Like Berlin's Philharmonie, the hall, which seats 2,100, is constructed on the vineyard principle, with a stage in the middle surrounded by terrace-like seating. Thanks to the acoustic concept of the Japanese designer Yasuhisa Toyota, visitors should be able to hear equally well from all seats. Apart from the grand concert hall, the building houses a smaller concert hall, a 244-room hotel and 44 condominium apartments.

The foundation stone for the Elbphilharmonie was laid on April 2, 2007, with the opening originally planned for 2010. Construction delays and cost increases made the building a political issue. The costs to taxpayers rose from 77 to 789 million euros. By now, 500,000 people have visited the 37-meter high public plaza, which opened November 5. The first concert season, which ends in early July, is nearly sold out. The NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra will perform around 30 percent of all concerts in the grand hall.

Source: "Elbphilharmonie: Sie ist eröffnet!" ZEIT ONLINE, January 11, 2017.  
<https://www.zeit.de/kultur/musik/2017-01/elbphilharmonie-eroeffnung-livestream>

Translation: Pam Selwyn

Recommended Citation: The Opening of Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie (January 11, 2017), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/ghdi:document-5282>> [December 07, 2024].