

Ostend Kursaal's main hall goes multifunctional

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The large hall at Ostend's Kursaal will forever remain the place where Arno performed his final chord in front of more than 2,000 seated fans. In this near-mythical setting, Ingenium is undertaking the design study for an ambitious reconversion. The client wants to turn it into a multifunctional hall where a seating area for 1,480 people can be flexibly and easily transformed into a flat floor for at least 2,800 standing guests. The stage will be raised around 3 metres higher than today, giving the standing audience a view of the sea.



The basic principle is for as little human effort as possible to be needed to convert the hall every time. Once some essential human preparations have been done to ensure safety, with one push of a button 144 electric motors powering 170 drives under the stage and the grandstand raise and lower the lifts, as well as tilt (store and place) the seats. The various lifts ensure that the difference in level between the rows – necessary for good sightlines with a seated audience – is bridged when converting to a flat hall. In this fully automatic movement, 1,392 seats on the stands are automatically stored. The result is a hall that can be programmed flexibly: a seated audience on Monday can be replaced on Tuesday by 2,800 standing people for a concert and followed on Wednesday by a gala banquet, trade fair or reception.

Needless to say that, with the Covid epidemic, ventilation has recently become an central point of attention. An increase of 1,000 people – with the conversion from sitting to standing – naturally also means an enormous adjustment to the air handling units. A detailed investigation is being carried out into how the existing air units can be used to best effect in the new situation, adding, where necessary, new units to cover any shortfall. The fact that large parts of the interior is heritage-protected naturally creates an additional challenge. The extensive technical theatre installations must be carefully planned in so as to minimise the demolition and re-installation of existing technical equipment. We designed a complex 3D puzzle for placing 26 lifts in the hall and 6 on the stage. This is intended to reduce to a minimum any unforeseen circumstances during changeovers.