

undertake the largest projects, the concert halls and opera houses that are built in some of our larger cities, but they also do a wide range of college and university work. There is another group of perhaps up to 20 firms, with smaller staffs, that undertake a very wide range of work. Finally there are dozens, if not hundreds, of sole practitioners; anyone from the technical director of a local theater who is asked to help out by designing a lighting system for someone, to equipment manufacturers who function as consultants at times. If you spoke to any one of the people providing that service, they would all have a different conception of what the role of a theater consultant actually is, and I'm sure that's also true of the architects with whom we work; they would each view our role in different way.

My own personal view is that very often the role of theater planning and design consultant is misunderstood to be a purely technical exercise and all about equipment specification and integration, about logistics and about moving pianos from trucks to stages and so forth. And unquestionably that's important, as we've heard before here in Conference. There are thousands and thousands of details that can make your life wonderful or make your life a living hell as you try and work in these buildings. My own feeling is that equipment, in a sense, is the easiest thing to get right, and the easiest thing to fix if it's not right, but other things are far more permanent and difficult to correct. So I would say that the equipment is, in a sense, tertiary.

The second most important thing, I would say, is building the right building. If you get the brief wrong, if you build the wrong seating capacity, or the wrong amount of support space, or inadequate office space, or a lobby that's too small, or not enough women's toilets, or have an inappropriate level of donor support – if you get these things wrong, it's not so easy to remedy. These sort of problems will live with that building for its lifetime and can be corrected in some cases only by renovation

Josh Dachs gives an insight to the American view of theatre consulting and is joined by David Staples from the UK, Claude-Andre Roy from Canada, Jean-Guy Lecat from France and Toshiro Ogawa from Japan.

extremely well or you might as well not do the project in the first place. We spend a lot of time with our clients exploring all of those questions, so that we define a brief, and also a budget which will support it, and an idea of how the building will be operated so that it actually can survive beyond its opening year. All these things are critically important to get right, because if you fail at this you've failed at everything, and no amount of good architecture or expensive equipment will save you! So in my view that's the second most important thing.

But the first most important thing – really the central question of theater architecture in my view – is making rooms that are good to perform in, and in which to witness those performances. Theater architecture at its core is how you arrange people together in a room to share an experience. And again, if you get that wrong you've missed the boat on everything. It can be the most technically perfect project and still fail. There are certainly many bad examples in the world today and there are certainly hundreds of projects in which they have all the latest technical equipment, everything runs very smoothly backstage, but they are absolutely dreadful places in which to see a production and in which to perform, for dozens of reasons.

We hear a lot about acoustics. Newspapers write about acoustics, most laymen are familiar with the term, people talk about, "Does a theater have good acoustics, does it have bad acoustics?" But there's not even a word to describe that special quality that a theatre might have that makes it good to perform in or bad to perform in. I've suggested to many groups of people over the years that we need a word so that people take this concept seriously as an idea. I believe it probably has to have a scientific connotation lest it be taken as being frivolous, so maybe *raumgeistology* or something about the 'spirit of the room' is that word. But really these are ineffable qualities; acoustics, you might say, is ineffable – you can't touch it, you can't hold it in your hand, many people can't even judge the difference between, you know, an 8 or a 10 on a scale of 10. However, this room quality is valued, and a lot of money is spent on it. We need a word for this quality that we all value in a room that makes it a wonderful performance space, and for me that's the center of the theater consulting profession, to figure out how to make these rooms with these right qualities.

Joshua Dachs is recognised as one of the leading theatre consultants in America. Trained as an architect and theater lighting designer, he heads FDA's consulting practice and provides strategic planning, space programming and design leadership to its performing arts clients. A graduate of the High School of Music in New York who originally studied the violin, Josh holds a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Cornell University. He has been a key figure in planning and design of the new Hobby Center in Houston; the renovations to Radio City Music Hall in New York and a new Opera House in Taegu, Korea.