



CASE STUDY

University of Oxford

SCHWARZMAN CENTRE
FOR THE HUMANITIES

CREATING A WORLD-CLASS
PERFORMANCE VENUE



INTRODUCTION

Stage Electrics is proud to have delivered the full production lighting and audio-visual systems & infrastructure for the University of Oxford's new Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities.

This landmark building brings together multiple departments under one roof for the first time and opens its doors to the public through a purpose-built Concert Hall, Theatre, Cinema, and more.

Appointed by main contractor Laing O'Rourke and working in close collaboration with theatre consultants Charcoalblue and Hopkins Architects, Stage Electrics was involved from the early design stages through to final commissioning. This complex, fast-paced build demanded detailed digital engineering & design, seamless coordination, and expert integration of cutting-edge technologies.

Read on to explore how Stage Electrics rose to the challenge of delivering technical systems for this world-class cultural and academic centre.





THE CHALLENGE

Stage Electrics was approached by the construction team behind the acclaimed Soho Place project in London's West End to contribute to the University of Oxford's most ambitious capital development to date, the Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities. This was the first building of its kind for the University: a public-facing, multipurpose arts venue with no existing precedent within Oxford's campus. The facility would unite several departments into a single, centralised hub, housing a concert hall, theatre, cinema, and multiple performance and teaching spaces.

From the outset, the project presented multiple complexities. The building was entirely new, with no legacy infrastructure to build upon. All construction and technical systems had to be designed from scratch and coordinated within a fast-paced construction schedule.

The building was also constructed using a high level of prefabrication, including containment systems to support wiring of technical infrastructure, modelled in 3D and assembled virtually before committing to manufacture off-site, then installed with precision and efficiency on-site.

Specific technical challenges included integrating a concealed 8-metre-wide projection screen into the Concert Hall, an element weighing 250kg that descends cleanly through a narrow slot, without the option of craning it into position due to temperature sensitivity of the projection surface.

The systems had to accommodate varied uses, from orchestral music to cinema screenings, and support both public audiences and academic purposes. The entire build required careful planning and digital engineering to ensure every element could be safely and seamlessly implemented.

THE SOLUTION

Stage Electrics was brought on board under a Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) in early 2022, following a successful working relationship with Laing O'Rourke and key consultants on Soho Place.

The team played a vital role in the early design stages, supporting infrastructure coordination and routing of services with Hopkins Architects and Charcoalblue.

Working from detailed 3D models, much of the integration was visualised digitally before on-site delivery, allowing for streamlined planning and a high degree of precision in execution.

The key systems delivered by Stage Electrics are detailed in the following pages.



"Delivering this project has been a genuine privilege for our team. The scale and complexity of the technical systems required close collaboration with multiple stakeholders at every stage, from early design integration through to final commissioning.

It's fantastic to see the completed spaces come to life knowing they'll support Oxford's students, researchers and wider community for many years to come."

Keith Samphier
Senior Project Manager
Stage Electrics

THE SOLUTION

Key systems delivered by Stage Electrics include:

500-Seat Concert Hall

A fully flexible production environment supporting orchestral, acoustic and amplified music, musical theatre, and lectures. Much of the equipment and facilities are colour-matched and integrated within architectural finishes.

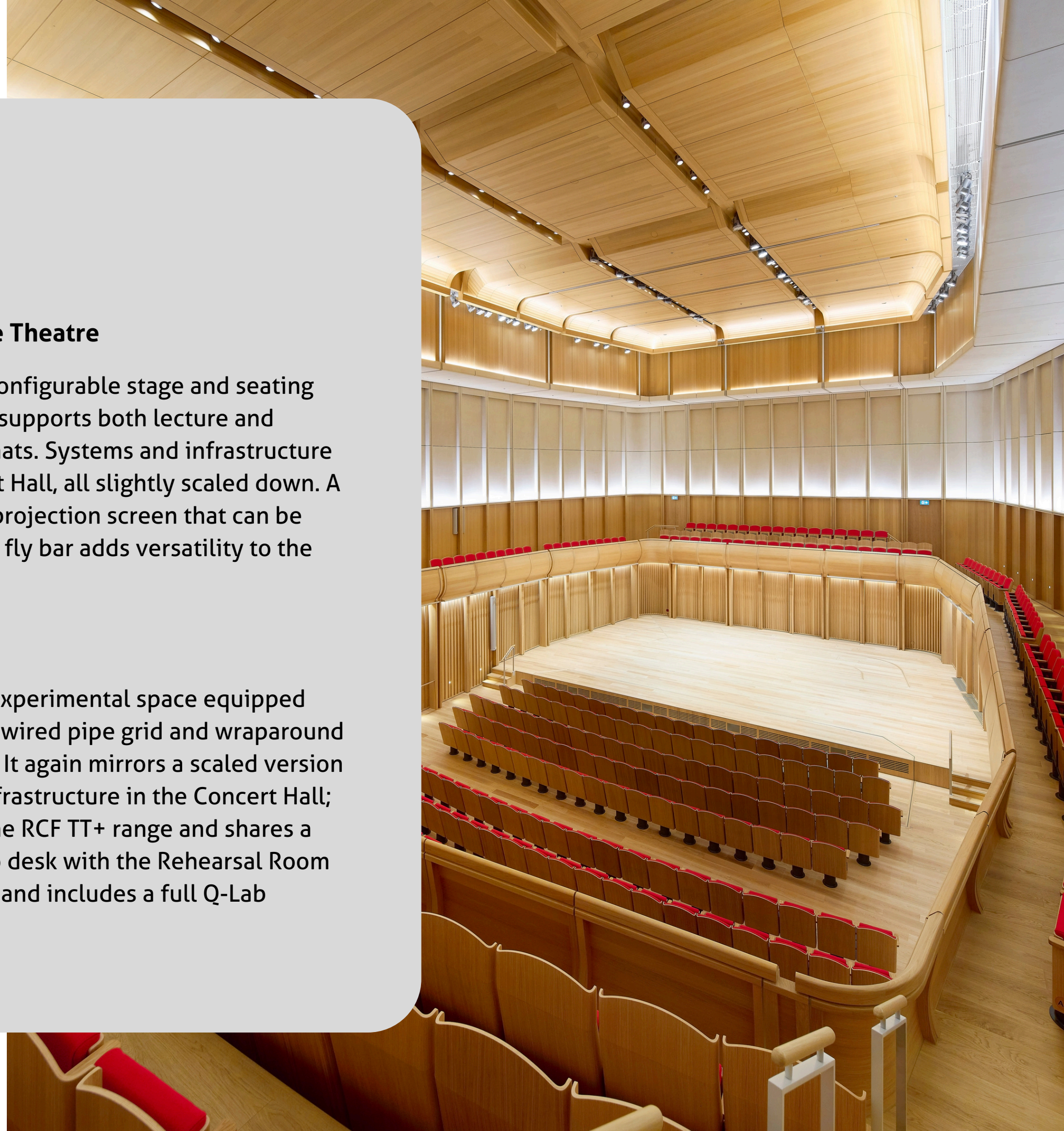
The system includes an 8-metre-wide electric projection screen concealed in the loft with a Panasonic 4K 20,000 lms projector. Production lighting installed includes 44 ETC Desire D60s for overhead platform lighting and 12 ETC Source Four Series 3 for FOH, all under the seamless control of ETC Paradigm & Ion XE Audio systems feature a Yamaha CL3 console, RIO stage boxes, Q-Lab playback with Dante and Renkus-Heinz digitally steerable speakers.

250-Seat Lecture Theatre

Designed with a configurable stage and seating layout, this space supports both lecture and performance formats. Systems and infrastructure mirror the Concert Hall, all slightly scaled down. A 6m wide electric projection screen that can be positioned on any fly bar adds versatility to the space.

Black Box Studio

A highly flexible experimental space equipped with an internally wired pipe grid and wraparound technical catwalk. It again mirrors a scaled version of systems and infrastructure in the Concert Hall; Audio system is the RCF TT+ range and shares a Yamaha TF1 audio desk with the Rehearsal Room in a portable case and includes a full Q-Lab playback rack.





THE SOLUTION

Rehearsal Studio

Fitted with a pipe grid, flexible AV setup, and show relay systems, this room supports both teaching and performance. Control is shared with the Black Box, and it makes use of a portable TF1 console and Q-Lab playback rack.

Cinema

Delivered with a 4K DCI compliant digital cinema projector, bespoke curved 5-metre screen with automatic masking, and a full QSC cinema-grade audio system featuring Dolby 7.1 surround sound installed behind a perforated screen. Integration with the separate teaching AV package is handled via Q-Sys control systems.

Assisted listening & accessibility

All the above venues benefit from the new Auracast assisted listening Bluetooth-based

technology, and seated venues have more traditional induction loops. Audio description equipment is also provisioned in the venues, and control rooms are equipped with adjustable height desks with wheelchair access.

Music Studios

Three separate recording studios were delivered with immersive-ready infrastructure: Studio 1 supports Dolby Atmos mixing and acts as a central hub for audio recording and broadcast; Studio 2 features a hemispherical speaker layout to mimic the Black Box; and Studio 3 supports stereo and 8-channel surround setups.

Active equipment in the studios was supplied under a separate specialist contract.

THE SOLUTION

Building-Wide Paging and AV network

A comprehensive QSC Q-SYS system provides paging, audio and video show relay with flexible user controls via an intuitive GUI. Paging microphones and relay coverage extend across public areas, & BOH supporting building-wide coordination.

A comprehensive 10 Gb Cisco network with fibre backbone supports systems such as technical intercom as well as routing digital signals between venues, and studio spaces alike.

Throughout, a consistent focus was placed on ensuring accessibility, integrating LED technology for energy efficiency, and creating a standardised technical user experience for ease of training and future growth across all venues.



THE RESULT

The Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities is a landmark success for Stage Electrics, delivered on time despite a tight programme and complex requirements.

This case demonstrates the power of early-stage collaboration, digital engineering, and prefabricated construction to deliver highly technical installations efficiently and accurately.

The Centre is expected to serve as a world-class venue for academic and public engagement, blending tradition with cutting-edge performance technology.



How Can We Help You?



Stage Electrics provides technical services and products for venues and production companies. We take care of our clients

through the three specialist divisions of Stage Electrics: Projects, Equipment Sales and Venue Services.

**WE MAKE
PERFORMANCE
POSSIBLE**

Projects

Our Projects Department facilitates a wide range of projects and installations. Our experts look after all aspects of design, installation, and commissioning for both new-build and refurbishment projects. We work on installations of all scales — from village halls and schools to multi-million-pound developments such as the Shakespeare North Playhouse in Prescot and Soho Place in London. Our Projects team is ready to assist with as much or as little as you need.

Equipment Sales

Stage Electrics supports thousands of venues and professionals across the UK with their production technology and consumable requirements. We stock products from over 100 manufacturers in our Bristol warehouse, many of which are available for same-day dispatch. Our online store is quick and easy to use, and if you require personal assistance, our Equipment Sales team will be happy to provide all the help and guidance you need to make a well-informed decision.

Inspection and Testing

The Stage Electrics Venue Services team helps you maintain a fully functional and legally compliant venue or performance space. We are a NICEIC-certified contractor, providing tailored packages for electrical and mechanical inspections in accordance with BS7671, ISITEE, PUWER, and LOLER. Our specialist on-site crew are highly qualified and DBS checked to an enhanced level — the safety and functionality of your venue could not be in better hands.



Let's Talk

If you'd like to learn more about our services,
we'd love to hear from you.

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