

27th August 2004

**Re: School of Music**

This submission is from the Wellington Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington.

Members of the Architectural Centre who are associated with the School of Music proposal, or who are associated with firms involved in the design (and hence may be seen to have a conflict of interest), have had no input into the writing of this submission.

The Architectural Centre supports the proposal for a School of Music to be located on the Circa/Illott site in the Civic Square precinct.

While we recognise the potential for such a project to make a positive contribution to the Civic Square precinct we believe that there are important issues which will need to be addressed in any building located on this site to ensure the proposal becomes a successful reality. These are detailed below.

**1) Support for the Proposal**

The Architectural Centre agrees that the Circa/Illott site is currently not a successful public space. We acknowledge that the proposal would bring a permanent population into Civic Square which would provide a positive impact on this central public space, both during the daytime and at night. We agree that the proposed function of a School of Music would strengthen the existing cultural focus of the precinct (Library, Art Gallery). Serious consideration should be given to providing another green space in the city to compensate for the loss of this green space.

**2) Obligations as Public Space and Architecture**

Any building on this site will have obligations as public architecture because of the council investment in the project, and because of the location of the building in Civic Square. This means that the proposed Music School must assertively engage with the public space of Civic Square, and must have provision for meaningful public access. Strategic public access could also open up viewing opportunities of the city and the sea which currently do not exist. These issues also point to the importance of the interface between the building and Civic Square to both physically mediate public access into the square and provide an architecture which signals this access. As a university building, particular effort will need to be taken to ensure that this is also conceived as a publicly accessible building.

As public architecture, there is an additional obligation that the design must positively contribute to the standard of architecture and urban space in the city. There needs to be a guarantee that the building is a meaningful contribution to public space, as well as meeting the obligations of public architecture in its fullest sense.

**3) The difficulties of building on the site.**

In addition to the above, the site is positioned between two significant public spaces: the waterfront and the civic square, and it currently provides important visual access across these, in particular it is one of the few instances where low level visual connection from the square to the sea occurs. We believe that any building placed on the Circa/Illott site should be designed to respect, and if possible enhance, these visual connections to the sea from Civic Square.

The potential acoustic contribution of the Music School to the Wellington public space is an important and appealing aspect of the proposal, but the location of the site next to a



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heavily used traffic route will create significant problems for the proposed function of a Music School. Successful examples of acoustic isolation exist (e.g. the acoustic testing chambers at Auckland University next to the Grafton motorway) but these are usually in contexts which do not require the building to contribute positively to adjacent public space.

### **3) The Proposed Building**

While this public consultation is in regard to the proposed lease of the site and its proposed use as a Music School, the fact that council has provided information about what such a building might look like invites comments on the proposed architecture.

In this context we note that the proposed building appears to formally mirror the unsuccessful interface the Michael Fowler Centre has with Civic Square. The close proximity of the Michael Fowler Centre auditorium means that the functional requirement of an auditorium needs to be substantiated. The Architectural Centre considers that the presumeably symbiotic relationship between the School of Music and the Michael Fowler Centre needs to be more strongly articulated architecturally.

While the Architectural Centre supports the proposal for a Music School on the Circa/Illott site, it does not support a building of the height of the proposed building. More consideration needs to be given to the visual connection between Civic Square and the waterfront. We also believe that the proposed building would cast an unacceptable level of shade across the square at critical times of the day.

### **4) Related Issues**

The proposal raises more general questions about Civic Square as a public space. Another area of the square which we believe needs reconsideration is the space under the City to Sea Bridge (Capital E). The current discussion surrounding the Music School proposal may also benefit proximal spaces such as this one. A temporary exhibition space could be a productive function for this currently underutilised space.

In summary we support the proposal for a School of Music, and anticipate that some of the issues raised in our submission can productively inform the next stage of the project.

Yours sincerely,

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