

## **Royal Festival Hall**

### **[David Whelton]**

Well, I think it is an iconic building, it is the situation it finds itself in on the Thames that makes it most remarkable. I think that this refurbishment, this rebuilding, certainly on the outside, has actually brought that once more into focus. The hall is now re-connected with the river. It looks absolutely magnificent.

### **[Gillian Moore]**

Well if you come into the Royal Festival Hall you might think "*I wonder what all the fuss is about?*" because so much has not changed. The reason it has not changed is because this is a great architectural building, it is a grade 1 listed building.

### **[David Whelton]**

This building was built in the Arts and Crafts tradition of 1951, so you can now really appreciate the care and the thought that went into the design of this building, the natural materials which were used and the emphasis of relating it to the external environment. These things are now here back for all of us to see; it is a huge pleasure to come here.

### **[Gillian Moore]**

What we have been able to do in the foyers is make it much more transparent, restoring all the space that had been changed over the years and restore it back to its original, beautiful, light transparency. So a lot of shops have gone from the foyers, a lot of the office spaces are gone, and you have got 35% more public space. The key change however, is of course, in the acoustic which had been seen as the big problem of the Royal Festival Hall. The acoustician Larry Kirkegaard has worked for two years to make it more resonant.

When the Festival Hall was built, I think the acousticians then were frightened that it was going to be too resonant, so they filled a lot of the gaps with absorbent materials.

### **[Emily Davis]**

It is a lot warmer, more responsive and actually clearer. We can hear a lot more of what is going on around the orchestra in the different parts.

### **[David Whelton]**

It is much better and we are still finding out how to get the best out of the hall. Although having said that, when you have experienced conductors come in, it just sounds great.

### **[Gillian Moore]**

A very important part of the reopening of the Royal Festival Hall was the idea that we were welcoming back our resident orchestras. All of the orchestras took part in what we call the '*Overture Weekend*', which was a whole weekend of free music and events. We had 250,000 people visiting. The Philharmonia was very much part of that, indeed

they played a performance of the last movement of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony with 1500 singers.

**[David Whelton]**

We always had in our mind *"How were we going to open the Festival hall with Christoph von Dohnányi?"* For me, it was always going to be Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup>, why? Because it was one of the great works which opened this hall, it is a work with which the Philharmonia is incredibly closely associated through Otto Klemperer and Herbert von Karajan, and it is a work that Christoph is very closely associated and does better than anybody.

**[Gillian Moore]**

They are of course going to open their season in October 2007, with Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup>, conducted by Dohnányi. There is no better piece to symbolise all the values that we are working towards together.

**[Emily Davis]**

Well it is very special, particularly now that the whole of Southbank has been rejuvenated with the restaurants and the bars; there is a real buzz here that is very exciting to come to work to, especially with the fantastic London Eye and the river skyline. It is a great place to come. We are very lucky.