

# PREFACE

**I've had the great fortune to make my living playing the bass on Music Hall's stage for more than two decades.**

From a musician's perspective, I'm intimately familiar with two sides of Music Hall: the inelegant world behind the scenes and the crystal and velvet view from the stage.

A few weeks before the hall was slated to lose for renovation in spring 2016, I realized I had a rare opportunity to see Music Hall from another vantage. Not as a musician, but as a photographer.

I asked the CSO public relations office for permission to take pictures during the renovation, and they approached the construction manager, Messer Construction Co., on my behalf. Messer generously granted me hard-hat access on the condition that I abide by their safety rules, and 3CDC, the developer on the project, gave me their blessing.

Three days after I walked out of the hall with my bass, I returned with my camera. At that point I had no idea where this project would lead. I thought I'd visit the hall a few times, scratch the itch and move on to something else. As you can see, things didn't work out that way.

Over the course of the next 16 months I spent hundreds of hours in the hall and took more than 10,000 photographs. The spark of

blowtorches, the haze of dust-laden sunbeams, the opaque glow of work lights through plastic curtains: the light was irresistible. In Corbett Tower I'd feel like I was in a Vermeer painting. Then I'd head downstairs and stumble into an Edward Hopper scene.

Like a curious 10-year-old, I wanted to see what everybody was doing. I explored from the basement to the attic and asked a lot of basic questions of a lot of patient people. It fascinated me to see crews plow up the auditorium floor, snake conduit through the most unlikely spaces and cut cement board to shape Springer's graceful curves.

From the beginning I shared my photos on Facebook. I could tell from the feedback I received that others were as curious about the renovation as I was. The more I posted, the more people asked when the book was coming out ... which brings us to where we are. I didn't set out to publish a book, and the only reason one exists is because I received abundant support.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Wilson, the most poetic photographer I know, for his time and encouragement and to Greg Eckel, a wonderfully talented designer, who dedicated himself to this book. Thank you to Jack Rouse whose enthusiasm and know-how helped me turn a pipe dream into pages. Thanks to Brian Campbell, Messer Construction Co.'s project

executive on the renovation. When Brian granted me access to the building neither one of us imagined I would become a fixture. Busy as he was, Brian was gracious and helpful every step of the way. Finally, thank you to the men and women who poured so much sweat and soul into renovating Music Hall and who welcomed me into their community. It was a privilege.

This book isn't a comprehensive documentary: There are holes and hundreds of missing faces. Nor is it an architecture or history book. I'm a photographer and a musician. I'll quickly point anyone interested in Music Hall's provenance to the Society for the Preservation of Music Hall. They understand the building in a way I won't pretend to.

This is a picture book and, like all picture books, it tells a story. It's a story about a beautiful old building and what happened after the musicians, singers and dancers left, when the principal player onstage was the hall itself. This is Music Hall's story, the way I heard and saw it.



– Matt Zory



# HANDS: AN INTRODUCTION

**Choosing the first photo for this book was a fraught process.**

Should we start chronologically with a classic “before” picture or, because the book focuses on the months’ long renovation itself, jump right in with a construction shot? Maybe we should open with a huge spread of the finished product? After all, the community waited more than 16 months to see the results of the \$135-million effort.

But in the end, the choice seemed obvious.

This photo nearly didn’t make the book. It’s not a great shot. Just a passing curiosity, really. A snapshot of a dusty wall in the lobby of Music Hall covered in handprints. They may belong to one person or several. Whoever left them may have done so with whimsical intent or they may have simply been cleaning their hands. Like so many of the vignettes discovered while traipsing through the construction site, we’ll never know the story behind those handprints. Music Hall will always keep some secrets to herself.

Although they offer little in the way of facts, those handprints — numerous, anonymous, unassuming — are rich in allegory. They encapsulate the story of the Music Hall renovation.

So many people from so many different walks of life were responsible for this renovation it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive list

of their contributions. It took legions including volunteers, donors, lawyers, bankers, developers, designers and craftsmen and women from myriad specialties to bring this project to fruition, and they did so because they knew that if Music Hall were to flourish in the 21st century, she needed to evolve.

“Music Hall is an iconic Cincinnati landmark,” said Mike Prescott, U.S. Bank Cincinnati market president. “It’s part of the city’s history and a critical part of our thriving arts community. At U.S. Bank, we’re passionate about investing our time and resources to support the communities where we live, work and play. So for us, taking a leading role in making the renovation possible was a no-brainer.”

They say many hands make light work, but there was nothing light about this job.

The design team alone included two architectural firms — Pittsburgh-based PWWG architects and Washington, DC-based Martinez + Johnson Architecture — as well as structural engineers from Cincinnati-based THP Limited Inc., mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineers from Philadelphia-based Pennoni Associates Inc., acoustical engineers from Norwalk, Conn.-based Akustiks and theater planners and lighting designers from Chicago-based Schuler Shook. Among the challenges they faced: unify a space



that consisted of three different structures with varying elevations, make it comply with current building and accessibility codes, and do so while squeezing in modern necessities that didn't exist when construction began in 1877.

By reclaiming space from underused rooms and abandoned carriageways and creating two separate floors where there was once a soaring two-story set shop, the team was able to add nearly 32,000 square feet of space throughout the building. It created room for such important features as a new rehearsal space, an expanded library with high-density storage, much-needed restrooms and concessions and for larger, quieter mechanicals.

"Wi-Fi systems and merchandising areas were never intended for the original building. Those may seem like small details, but they are very important to today's audiences," said Gary Martinez, president of Martinez + Johnson Architecture, which specializes in performing arts venues. "Our goal was to redesign the space to meet the long-term viability of the arts groups performing there while still being respectful of the original space."

In Springer Auditorium, the design team faced the challenge of creating a flexible space to accommodate the distinct needs of five different resident companies in terms of seating capacity, volume and sight lines.

"We did everything we could possibly think of to ensure the things we were doing were done with an eye for improving the situation for the patrons and the performers so they can carry on at the highest level of their art," Martinez said. "So many of the changes happened under the skin and behind the walls. The hall is like an instrument itself, and we've been able to fine-tune that instrument so the performers can really express themselves."

The construction challenges were equally daunting given the building's age.

"I have guys that have been framing for most of their lives, and they told me this is the hardest thing they ever had to frame," recalled Mike Strawser, CEO of Valley Interior Systems, whose crew framed the new, steeper rake for the gallery and balcony. The team had to construct a sloped frame on a radius while hitting exact landing and stair elevations. "Everything had to be at the exact same level all across the hall, and you're working on top of an existing structure that was built 125 years ago when they didn't have the benefit of computers or lasers. There wasn't anything typical about the project."

What's more, Music Hall may look like a monolithic 225,000-square-foot building, but prior to renovation it was a warren of broken-up spaces, many tucked away behind brick walls and drop ceilings. Surprises — some wonderful, many



less so — were inevitable. For construction crews facing a compressed schedule, the questions were when those discoveries would take place and how long they would take to resolve.

"Our job was to be true to the design team's intent, to do the investigation, see what the challenges were and come up with a way of solving the problems," said Gary Millard, senior project executive with Messer Construction Co. Whether it was finding a way to reinforce wooden newels in the lobby "well" so they could accommodate torchiere lights or making adjustments to a staircase to ensure adequate clearance beneath the escalator to the third floor, "everyone had their eyes open and was engaged in solving the problems."

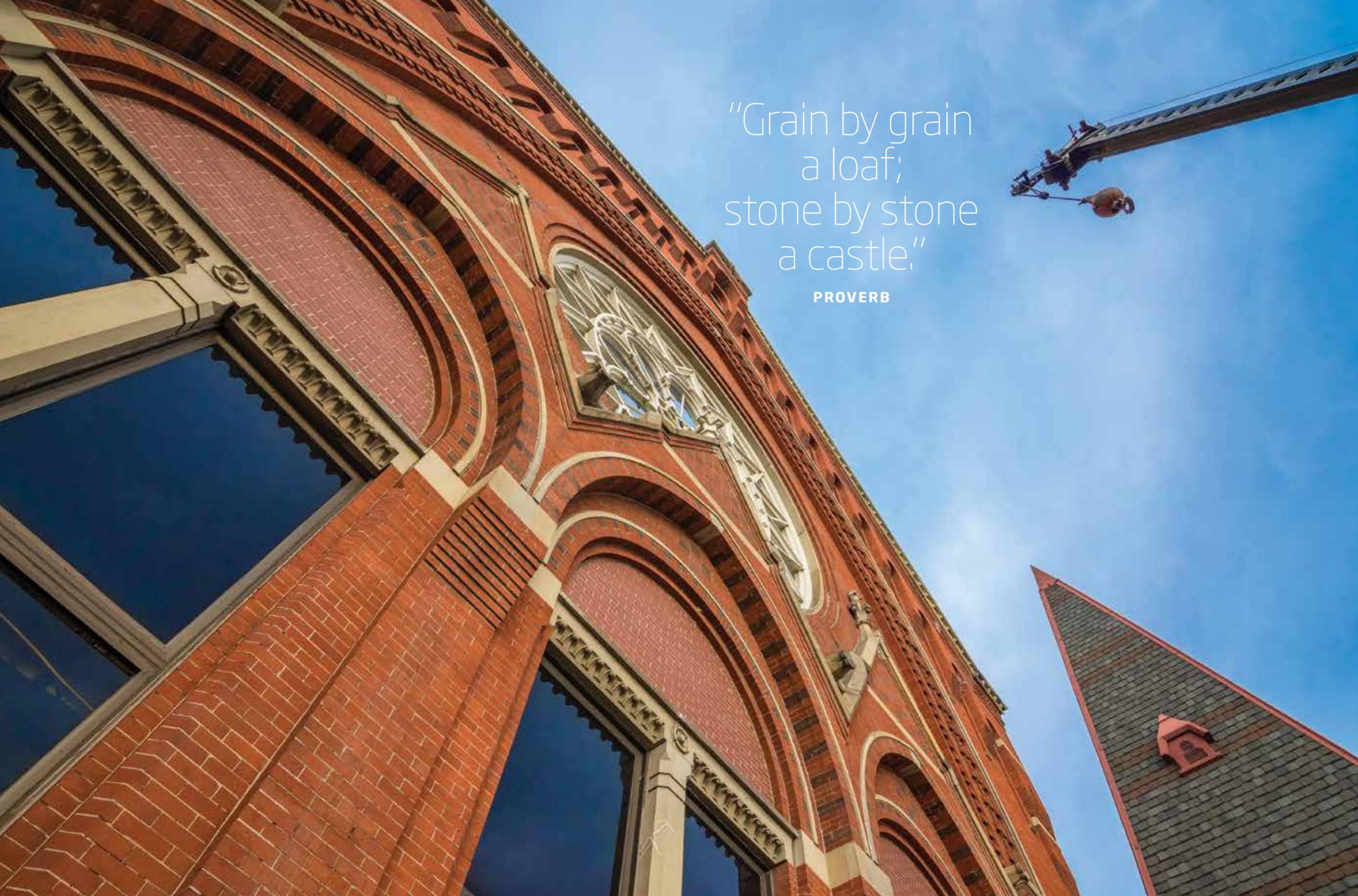
"It was a complete team effort, and the solutions may have come from a carpenter or an ironworker in the field," Millard said. "That was the exciting part of the job. Everyone — from the resident companies to the guys hammering the nails every day — was involved, and it wasn't necessarily the guy who sits in the biggest chair who was coming up with the solutions."

But renovating Music Hall wasn't just about overcoming a mountain of technical challenges. For everyone involved the project was about honoring traditions, living up to community expectations and preserving a legacy.

"Music Hall is a revered building. Almost everybody has some connection with it whether it's for a prom or a wedding or a musical performance," said Mark Luegering, senior vice president with Messer. "Having an opportunity to restore it to its former glory — to be part of a building that people's families in the past were connected to and that their families in the future will have a connection to — that's pretty exciting."

So ladies and gentlemen, a round of applause. Here's to everyone who helped ensure Music Hall would not become a moldering relic of the past but would instead emerge as a vibrant, viable and historic treasure for the future.

Whether they signed a check, drove a nail, or welded a plate, here's to the hands.



“Grain by grain  
a loaf;  
stone by stone  
a castle.”

PROVERB

**Emptying Music Hall wasn't a cardboard-box affair. It was a strategic, incremental and painstaking process.**

Months before the hall closed for renovations, its tenants — including the CSO, May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Opera — had moved their administrative offices to temporary quarters. The million-piece orchestra library, the largest in the world, had been packed off to the basement of the main branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, and the resident companies were ready to stage their upcoming seasons at the Taft Theatre and the Aronoff Center.

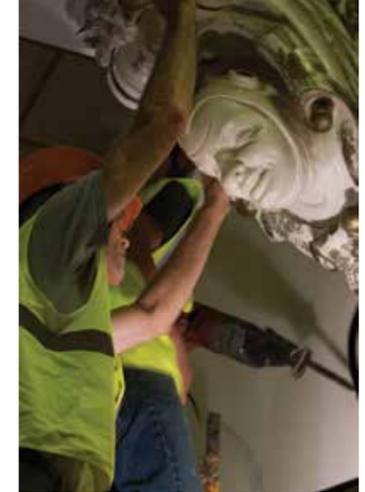
Following the final May Festival performance on May 28, 2016, a crew descended on the hall to tackle the big and the bolted down. They spent days removing corbels, wall sconces, massive wooden doors and brass door plates. Decorative elements were carefully removed so they could be sold, donated, stored, duplicated, or refurbished.

If your only point of reference is a residential move, think of the care you took in bubble wrapping and boxing grandma's china. Add a few hundred pounds, and you'll have a sense of what went into relocating the marble statue of Reuben Springer or the crystal chandeliers from the lobby. Removing the auditorium seats alone represented a massive undertaking. Clearing out 3,417 seats, bolted to the floor in sets of four, required some 850 trips out of the hall, through the lobby, to the curb and into trucks.

Over the course of a week, step-by-fastidious-step, workers turned Music Hall into a blank slate.

A breath, waiting to exhale.

On Saturday, June 4, 2016 demolition began.



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