

Alley Arts Centre, Strabane

Specialist in Flame Retardant Fabrics. Manufacturer and Installer of all types of Theatrical Drapes and Stage Equipment

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J&C Joel, working in partnership with Strabane District Council and Production Services Ireland, has supplied and installed a stage flying system and mechanical engineering to the new Alley Arts & Conference Centre in Strabane, Northern Ireland.



The project was handled for J&C Joel by contracts manager Tony Griffiths, who assisted in the technical design of the building and in the client's final choice of stage equipment.

The client chose a highly flexible arrangement of 14 3-phase, 250kg, single speed, 4-line electrically operated pilewind winch units, plus six 4-line hemp sets.

The Alley is a new 270 seat multi purpose venue funded by a £750,000 Lottery grant - the areas largest-ever award from the Arts Council for Northern Ireland. It is also the first dedicated arts facility designed for the enjoyment of all the

district's 37,000 residents. A designated link from the adjoining library to the Alley's bright and naturally light foyer leads to the box office and cafeteria beyond, providing full access to a wealth of local services under one roof.

The building is not a traditional box type style and the client needed ultimate flexibility, so a novel scheme was agreed upon between J&C Joel and its clients, "We examined all aspects, and proposed a plan to cover the different uses of the space for choir, music, theatre, seminar and educational activities" explains Griffiths.

portfolio

The pilewind winch units operate in the traditional manner. Any configuration of up to seven units can run simultaneously, operated by a simple hand-held control station that can be plugged in either on-stage or at fly floor level. The grid mounted hemp sets can be quickly de-rigged and re-located as each performance dictates.

Standard black wool serge curtains were also supplied by J&C Joel. These are suspended from Triple E Tab tracks, and were specified by Griffiths as an effective stage divide. Supporting borders, legs and a white cyc give a standard stage feel to the building.



A unique cyclorama track, complete with black wool serge curtains can completely mask the stage, and create a rear 'cross-over', allowing performers to cross from one side of the stage to the other.

Also on the cyclorama track are six braked, swivel arms which allow for the maximum stage width to be utilized, whilst still providing masking for performances. When not required, the swivel arms and curtains can be neatly stored flat in the smallest space possible as the cyclorama track turns to the off stage walls at its extremes of travel.

Onstage, the key to flexibility is the Triple E motorised proscenium track. This opens and closes with a variable speed motor, and can be operated from either side of stage or via a small handset (for educational/seminar style set ups). The master runners can be disengaged from the motor and manually drawn off stage to a storage facility in the wings.

This, together with the cyclorama and retractable seating, enable the whole stage, auditorium and scene-store to be opened out into one clear floor space making the Alley also ideal for trade shows and exhibitions.

Within the auditorium, the multi purpose functionality has again been given precedent with a full track and curtain system at high level. Each of the full 4 sided 8 metre drop curtains can be adjusted to change the room acoustics according to performance requirements.



Even at low levels within the auditorium, the acoustics have been addressed with the use of fixed acoustic panels and 24 custom panels on chicaned tracks. These sit side by side - completely flush – when in use, and glide back into special recessed pockets when not in use. This is no mean feat for Triple E's aesthetically pleasing Unirail track, and special ball raced masters – even more so with each panel weighing 80kg!

Tony Griffiths comments, "It was a real challenge to meet the client's aspirations for the building, and to design, manufacture and install a fully flexible system that can be quickly and easily changed."

Strabane Council is really pleased with the effort and commitment of J&C Joel which exceeded their expectations in delivering first class service.

Content

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