

Seen and heard: The new Edward and Joyce Linde Music Building

Opening in February 2025, the building will “give MIT musicians the conservatory-level tools they deserve,” says MIT President Sally Kornbluth.

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The three-volume red brick structure of the Edward and Joyce Linde Music Building centers both the natural and built environments of MIT's West Campus. Photo: Ken'ichi Suzuki

Until very recently, Mariano Salcedo, a fourth-year MIT electronic engineering and computer science student majoring in artificial intelligence and decision-making, was planning to apply for a master's program in computer science at MIT. Then he saw the new Edward and Joyce Linde Music Building, which opened this fall for a selection of classes. “Now, instead of going into computer science, I'm thinking of applying for the master's program in Music Technology, which is being offered here for the first time next year,” says Salcedo. “The decision is definitely linked to the building, and what the building says

about music at MIT.”

Scheduled to open fully in February 2025, the Linde Music Building already makes a bold and elegant visual statement. But its most powerful impact will likely be heard as much as seen. Each of the facility’s elements, including the Thomas Tull Concert Hall, every performance and rehearsal space, each classroom, even the stainless-steel metal panels that form the conic canopies over the cube-like building’s three entrances — has been conceived and constructed to create an ideal environment for music.

Students are already enjoying the ideal acoustics and customized spaces of the Linde Music Building, even as construction on the site continues. Within the building’s thick red-brick walls, they study subjects ranging from Electronic Music Composition to Conducting and Score Reading to Advanced Music Performance. Myriad musical groups, from the MIT jazz combos to the Balinese Gamelan and the Rambax Senegalese Drum Ensemble, explore and enjoy their new and improved homes, as do those students who will create and perfect the next generation of music production hardware and software.

“For many of us at MIT, music is very close to our hearts,” notes MIT President Sally Kornbluth. “And the new building now puts music right at the heart of the campus. Its exceptional practice and recording spaces will give MIT musicians the conservatory-level tools they deserve, and the beautiful performance hall will exert its own gravitational pull, drawing audiences from across campus and the larger community who love live music.”

The need and the solution

Music has never been a minor pursuit at MIT. More than 1,500 MIT students enroll in music classes each academic year. And more than 500 student musicians participate in one of 30 on-campus ensembles. Yet until recently there was no centralized facility for music instruction or rehearsal. Practice rooms were scattered and poorly insulated, with sound seeping through the walls. Nor was there a truly suitable space for large performances; while Kresge Auditorium has sufficient capacity and splendid minimalist aesthetics, the acoustics are not optimal.

“It would be very difficult to teach biology or engineering in a studio designed for dance or music,” says Jay Scheib, recently appointed section head for Music and Theater Arts and Class of 1949 Professor. “The same goes for teaching music in a mathematics or chemistry classroom. In the past, we’ve done it, but it did limit us. In our theater program, everything changed when we opened the new theater building (W97) in 2017 and could teach theater in spaces intended for theater. We believe the new music building will have a similar effect on our music program. It will inspire our students and musicians and allow them to hear their music as it was intended to be heard. And it will provide an opportunity to convene people, to inhabit the same space, breathe the same air, and exchange ideas and perspectives.”

“Music-making from multiple musical traditions are areas of tremendous growth at MIT, both in terms of performance and academics,” says Keeril Makan, associate dean for strategic initiatives for the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS). The Michael (1949) and Sonja Koerner Music Composition Professor and former head of the Music and Theater Arts Section, Makan was, and remains, intimately involved in the Linde Music Building project. “In this building, we wanted all forms of music to coexist, whether jazz, classical, or music from around the world. This was not easy; different types of

music require different conditions. But we took the time and invested in making spaces that would support all musical genres.”

The idea of creating an epicenter for music at MIT is not new. For several decades, MIT planners and administrators studied various plans and sites on campus, including Kendall Square and areas in West Campus. Then, in 2018, one year after the completion of the Theater Arts Building on Vassar Street, and with support from then-president L. Rafael Reif, the Institute received a cornerstone gift for the music building from arts patron Joyce Linde. Along with her late husband and former MIT Corporation member Edward H. Linde '62, the late Joyce Linde was a longtime MIT supporter. SANAA, a Tokyo-based architectural firm, was selected for the job in April 2019.

“MIT chose SANAA in part because their architecture is so beautiful,” says Vasso Mathes, the senior campus planner in the MIT Office of Campus Planning who helped select the SANAA team. “But also because they understood that this building is about acoustics. And they brought the world’s most renowned acoustics consultant, Nagata Acoustics International founder Yasuhisa Toyota, to the project.”

Where form meets function

Built on the site of a former parking lot, the Linde Music Building is both stunning and subtle. Designed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA, which won the 2010 Pritzker Architecture Prize, the three-volume red brick structure centers both the natural and built environments of MIT’s West Campus — harmonizing effortlessly with Eero Saarinen’s Kresge Auditorium and iconic MIT Chapel, both adjacent, while blending seamlessly with surrounding athletic fields and existing landscaping. With a total of 35,000 square feet of usable space, the building’s three distinct volumes dialogue beautifully with their surroundings. The curved roof reprises elements of Kresge Auditorium, while the exterior evokes Boston and Cambridge’s archetypal facades. The glass-walled lobby, where the three cubic volumes converge, is surprisingly intimate, with ample natural light and inviting views onto three distinct segments of campus.

“One thing I love about this project is that each program has its own identity in form,” says co-founder and principal Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA. “And there are also in-between spaces that can breathe and blend inside and outside spaces, creating a landscape while preserving the singularity of each program.”

There are myriad signature features — particularly the acoustic features designed by Nagata Acoustics. The Beatrice and Stephen Erdely Music and Culture Space offers the building’s most robust acoustic insulation. Conceived as a home for MIT’s Rambax Senegalese Drum Ensemble and Balinese Gamelan — as well as other music ensembles — the high-ceilinged box-in-box rehearsal space features alternating curved wall panels. The first set reflects sound, the second set absorbs it. The two panel styles are virtually identical to the eye.

With a maximum seating capacity of 390, the Thomas Tull Concert Hall features a suite of gently rising rows that circle a central performance area. The hall can be configured for almost any style and size of performance, from a soloist in the round to a full jazz ensemble. A retractable curtain, an overhanging ring of glass panels, and the same alternating series of curved wall panels offers adaptable and exquisite sound conditions for performers and audience. A season of events are planned for the spring, starting on Feb. 15, 2025, with a celebratory public program and concert. Classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and

technical spaces in the Jae S. and Kyuho Lim Music Maker Pavilion — where students will develop state-of-the-art production tools, software, and musical instruments — are similarly outfitted to create a nearly ideal sound environment.

While acoustic concerns drove the design process for the Linde Music Building, they did not dampen it. Architects, builders, and vendors repeatedly found ingenious and understated ways to infuse beauty into spaces conceived primarily around sound. “There are many technical specifications we had to consider and acoustic conditions we had to create,” says co-founder and principal Kazuyo Sejima of SANAA. “But we didn’t want this to be a purely technical building; rather, a building where people can enjoy creating and listening to music, enjoy coming together, in a space that was functional, but also elegant.”

Realized with sustainable methods and materials, the building features radiant-heat flooring, LED lighting, high-performance thermally broken windows, and a green roof on each volume. A new landscape and underground filters mitigate flood risk and treat rain and stormwater. A two-level 142-space parking garage occupies the space beneath the building. The outdoor scene is completed by Madrigal, a site-specific sculpture by Sanford Biggers. Commissioned by MIT, and administered by the List Visual Arts Center, the Percent-for-Art program selected Sanford Biggers through a committee formed for this project. The 18-foot metal, resin, and mixed-media piece references the African American quilting tradition, weaving, as in a choral composition, diverse patterns and voices into a colorful counterpoint. “Madrigal stands as a vibrant testament to the power of music, tradition, and the enduring spirit of collaboration across time,” says List Visual Arts Center director Paul Ha. “It connects our past and future while enriching our campus and inspiring all who encounter it.”

New harmonies

With a limited opening for classes this fall, the Linde Music Building is already humming with creative activity. There are hands-on workshops for the many sections of class 21M.030 (Introduction to Musics of the World) — one of SHASS’s most popular CI-H classes. Students of music technology hone their skills in digital instrument design and electronic music composition. MIT Balinese Gamelan and the drummers of Rambax enjoy the sublime acoustics of the Music and Culture Space, where they can hear and refine their work in exquisite detail.

“It is exciting for me, and all the other students who love music, to be able to take classes in this space completely devoted to music and music technology,” says fourth-year student Mariano Salcedo. “To work in spaces that are made specifically for music and musicians ... for us, it’s a nice way of being seen.”

The Linde Music Building will certainly help MIT musicians feel seen and heard. But it will also enrich the MIT experience for students in all schools and departments. “Music courses at MIT have been popular with students across disciplines. I’m incredibly thrilled that students will have brand-new, brilliantly designed spaces for performance, instruction, and prototyping,” says Anantha Chandrakasan, MIT’s chief innovation and strategy officer, dean of the School of Engineering, and Vannevar Bush Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. “The building will also offer tremendous opportunities for students to gather, build community, and innovate across disciplines.”

“This building and its three programs encapsulate the breadth of interest among our students,” says Melissa Nobles, MIT chancellor and Class of 1922 Professor of Political Science. Nobles was a steadfast advocate for the music building project. “It will strengthen our already-robust music community and will draw new people in.”

The Linde Music Building has inspired other members of the MIT community. “Now faculty can use these truly wonderful spaces for their research,” says Makan. “The offices here are also studios, and have acoustic treatments and sound isolation. Musicians and music technologists can work in those spaces.” Makan is composing a piece for solo violin to be premiered in the Thomas Tull Concert Hall early next year. During the performance, student violinists will deploy strategically in various points about the hall to accompany the piece, taking full advantage of the space’s singular acoustics.

Agustín Rayo, the Kenan Sahin Dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, expects the Linde Music Building to inspire people beyond the MIT community as well. “Of course this building brings incredible resources to MIT’s music program: top-quality rehearsal spaces, a professional-grade recording studio, and new labs for our music technology program,” he says “But the world-class concert hall will also create new opportunities to connect with people in the Boston area. This is truly a jewel of the MIT campus.”

February open house and concert

The MIT Music and Theater Arts Section plans to host an open house in the new building on Feb. 15, 2025. Members of the MIT community and the general public will be invited to an afternoon of activities and performances. The celebration of music will continue with a series of concerts open to the public throughout the spring. Details will be available at the Music and Theater Arts website.