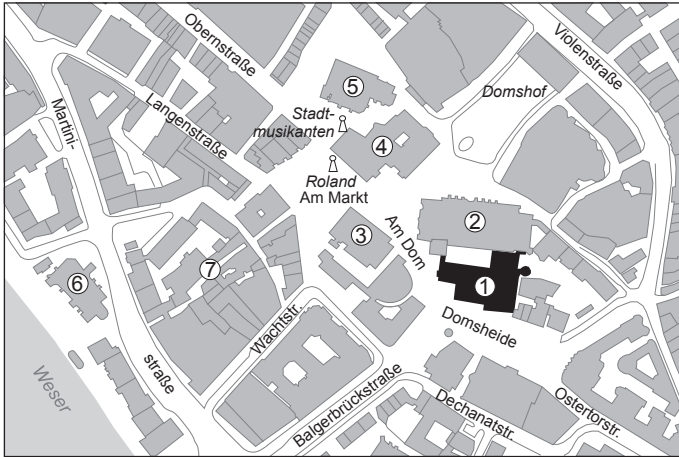


DIE GLOCKE DAS BREMER KONZERTHAUS

ENGLISH
VERSION





① – *Die Glocke* Concert Hall; ② – Cathedral; ③ – Bremen State Parliament; ④ – City Hall; ⑤ – Church of Our Lady; ⑥ – Church of St. Martin; ⑦ – Böttcherstrasse (*Die Neuen Architektur*führer, No. 152)

DIE GLOCKE

BREMEN 1926–1928, RENOVATED 1995–1997

DOMSHEIDE 6–8

ORIGINAL ARCHITECT: WALTER GÖRIG

SUBSEQUENT ARCHITECTS: GERHARD MÜLLER-MENCKENS AND
KLAUS ROSENBUSCH

AUTHOR: BERND HETTLAGE

PHOTOS: MARK BOLLHORST

Concert-goers might not be expected to attach special importance to the exterior of their venue. Their chief concerns are the quality of the music and the acoustics of the auditorium. Nevertheless, many concert halls boast spectacular architecture, as though the exterior were echoing the artistic performance inside. Some, such as the Sydney Opera House and Berlin's Philharmonie, even seem to have landed in the heart of a city like shining spaceships.



The facade with its stepped gable and vertical bays make *Die Glocke* an example of art deco, a decorative variant of Expressionist architecture.

Up there with the best of them is *Die Glocke* (the bell) in Germany's northern port city of Bremen.

Its architecture shows the restraint typical of the Hanseatic cities and yet, both outside and inside, it is a gem of art deco design without equal in Germany. The main hall, moreover, boasts acoustics in the same league as those of the big names mentioned above. The legendary conductor Herbert von Karajan said that Bremen's was one of the three best concert halls in Europe. Furthermore, it is one of only two surviving 'zigzag' halls in Germany, as art deco is referred to there. It is a fitting term, as you can see from a glance at the stepped gable on the facade.

The building's origins lie back in the early days of Bremen's history, although the structure that now stands near the cathedral was only opened in 1928. Since then, *Die Glocke* – after many ups and downs – has developed into a concert and events venue that is known far beyond the borders of Germany.

Outstanding acoustics in authentic art deco – a tour of the building

From the outside, *Die Glocke* appears to be a homogenous ensemble, well integrated with the buildings belonging to St Peter's Cathedral. It is the five-step gable of the concert hall with its sandstone trim, that first catches the eye, along with the vertical emphasis of the facade. Both features recall the cathedral's chapter house, which stood on this site previously, but the newer building is equally a testimony to the Expressionist style of the 1920 s. Here, however, we see Expressionism's decorative variant: art deco, especially in the details.

Inside, the visitor is met by doors of Caucasian walnut, columns of yellow marble and flooring of Solnhofen limestone, which also shimmers in creamy yellow. This "nobility of material," as the critics put it at the 1928 opening, continues uninterrupted throughout the rooms. The only major alteration to have been carried out since then was part of the repair and renovation programme in the 1990 s. This involved inserting a cross-stair and an octagonal gallery on the axis between the entrance and the restaurant. It leads down to the former cellar, which now accommodates cloakrooms for visitors and for the orchestra members. There are two other routes up from the basement: one is a staircase built in 1997, which effectively forms an extension to the east of the building and leads directly to the main concert hall, providing a second means of circulation. On the other side is a stair leading to the foyer, where the cloaks counter stood previously; this is now a bar for pre-performance and interval refreshments. From the foyer, visitors can walk up the original staircase to the first-floor lobby, which serves both the main concert hall and the smaller one.

The wealth of forms in the foyer is impressive: a delight to all lovers of art deco. The eye is drawn to one detail after another: the glossy, polished walnut panelling on walls and staircases; the zigzag ornamentation of the ceilings; the wood-encased columns with metal-framed mirrors; the colourful leaded glazing of the upper floor; the ceiling light fixtures with chrome-

The octagonal gallery and staircase in the foyer was inserted as part of a renovation programme in the 1990s. It leads down to the cloakrooms, accommodated in the former cellar.





The symmetry, geometrical forms and fine materials of the staircase characterise this style.



An impressive wealth of forms awaits lovers of art deco in the lobby on the first floor.

plated armatures and opal glass shades; the geometrical patterns of the upholstery on the benches – the list goes on.

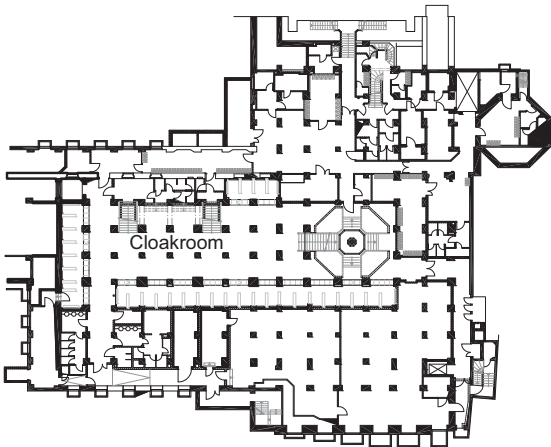
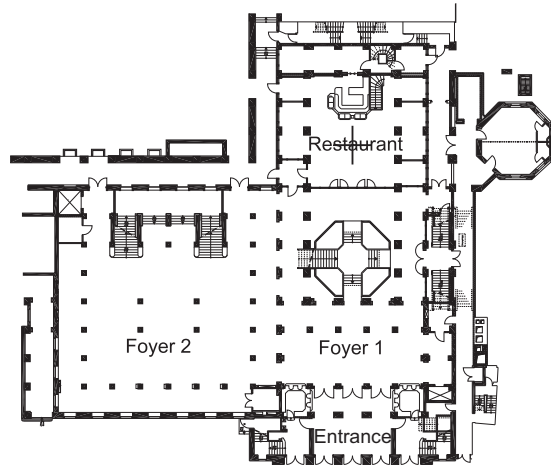
The same consistency of style in the furnishings and the same richness of detail are to be found in both of the auditoriums. Just as in the rest of the building, the interior design employs a vertical transition of tones, with dark colours at floor level giving way to paler ones towards the ceiling. The stalls level of the main hall, with seating for 1400 people, is panelled with cedar so dark as to be almost black, while the seats are upholstered with burgundy-coloured leather, as the originals were. Up in the circle, the walls are brighter, with a coat of mint-green paint. The ceiling completes the sequence with well-lighted, finely chased ornamentation that enhances a feeling of buoyancy. Overall, this lends the auditorium an appearance that is both dignified and extroverted.

The smaller hall is somewhat more playful, with a three-tiered, vaulted ceiling. The light fixtures mounted at the sides bear floral decoration and

imitation candles, while three scantily clad figures are painted on the plaster of the proscenium arch – a man playing the lyre with a woman on each side. The walls are clad with mahogany, while the hall's 432 seats are upholstered with green leather.

The greatest assets of *Die Glocke* are, however, the superb acoustics of the main concert hall, conceived in the traditional 'shoebox' form. Auditoriums of this type are long, comparatively narrow and high, with the stage at one end. This arrangement ensures that a relatively large proportion of the sound waves bounding off the side walls reaches the audience almost simultaneously with the direct sound waves from the orchestra. This gives a crisp overall sound and a sense of being close to the music.

Furthermore, the concert hall itself functions as a single sound box: there is a resonant cavity under the ground floor, and the interior wall cladding is not fixed directly to the structure, but attached in a way that allows it to resonate. The ceiling is suspended from the roof structure by countless



Floor plan of the entrance level (top) and the lower level.

steel cables. Thus the whole hall functions as a resonance box for the music, thus creating a warm, well-rounded sound. The smaller hall is constructed along similar lines.

From chapter house to artists' society – the history of the previous buildings

The square on which *Die Glocke* stands began to take shape in the very beginning of Bremen's history as a city. In 787, Emperor Charlemagne established the diocese of Bremen; in the same year, its first bishop, an English missionary named Willehad, consecrated a cathedral on the city's highest piece of land, which later became known as the Cathedral Rise. From here he worked to spread Christianity throughout the north of the empire, which was still partially heathen. Records dating from not long afterwards also mention cathedral outbuildings, referring specifically to the cathedral chapter, or chapter house. This stood where the concert hall, *Die Glocke*, stands today. In the eleventh century, a catastrophic fire in the city destroyed the cathedral and all of its outbuildings. During the centuries that followed, they were all rebuilt on a considerably larger scale.

The oldest pictorial record of the chapter house dates from 1759. A drawing by Johann Daniel Heinrich shows its characteristic stepped gable, like the one that graces *Die Glocke* today. Sandwiched between the cathedral and the chapter house, stood a small, octagonal building. This was called *Die Glocke*, the bell,, for reasons that are unknown; we cannot even be certain that a bell hung there. Nevertheless, thanks to the musical connotations, it is from this octagonal building that Bremen's concert hall took its name.

Over the centuries, the property passed through many hands, sometimes through the use of force. In the early nineteenth century, the ground floor of the chapter house was even used for a while as a storeroom for tobacco. Finally, in 1857, the building was leased to the Bremen Artists Society by the then-owner, the cathedral parish of the Lutheran church. The society commissioned an architect, Heinrich Müller, to carry out large-scale structural alterations. In his aesthetic changes, he removed the stepped gable from the facade and extended the Gothic windows upwards over two



The stage of the main hall with the Sauer organ, restored in 2005 – 2007. Its 76 pipe ranks with over 6,000 pipes played from four manuals and pedals makes it Bremen's second largest organ, after the main organ of the cathedral.

storeys. Inside the building, the hall of the old chapter house was transformed into a double-height concert hall with an organ and an orchestra podium. This was the starting point on the Cathedral Rise for the musical tradition that continues to this day.

Fire damage and a new Expressionist building – *Die Glocke* rises from the ashes

On 26 January 1915, fire broke out under the roof of the chapter house. The building was completely gutted by the flames and the roof collapsed, taking the gable with it. Shortly after the end of World War II, a competition was held to design a new building, with only Bremen architects invited to take part. In 1920, after two rounds of judging, a design by Walter G6rig was selected, but neither the cathedral parish nor the artists' society had the capital to build it. The parish administrators finally decided to set up an early kind of property investment fund. Shares in it were sold to well-heeled private



The legendary conductor Herbert von Karajan praised the acoustics of the concert hall, saying that it was one of the three finest halls in all of Europe.

investors, with the cathedral itself functioning as security. The loans were to be repaid with income from the sale of concert tickets. This financing plan was reportedly a success; in December 1926, 11 long years after the fire, the ruins were finally demolished and work could begin on the construction of a new concert hall.

Walter G6rig was 35 years old when he won the competition for *Die Glocke*. For an architect who usually designed straightforward residential and commercial buildings in the city, this was to prove his most outstanding work in every respect. Time and again he altered the design – almost until construction was due to start. The characteristic stepped gable of the facade, for example, did not appear in the drawings until the end of 1926. In his design for the main hall, G6rig may have drawn inspiration from the new

Centre spread:

Die Glocke is one of only two surviving concert venues in Germany with the entire interior conceived in pure art deco style: Here is the main hall, as seen from the middle balcony.





The foyer with its bistro tables and counter for the interval refreshments. Before the renovation in the 1990s, the cloakrooms were here.

Civic Centre of Mülheim, in the Ruhr valley, designed by Emil Fahrenkamp, best known for his undulating Shell building in Berlin. The two auditoriums, of which the Mülheim one no longer exists, resembled each other right down to the details of the furnishings.

On 20 October 1928, after 22 months of construction, *Die Glocke* was opened to the public. Görig had rebuilt the octagon from which it took its name in the same place as before, albeit in a modern form. In order to strengthen the concert hall's new identity, a writer with the pseudonym *Eka* was commissioned to compose a 'legend' for it that included mention of "delicious dishes" being brought to the monks in the former chapter house by "little she-devils". Murals in the restaurant illustrate this naughty-but-nice tale. The legend also inspired the new symbol for *Die Glocke*, a putto on a bell rope; today, in a bas-relief, he still watches over the main entrance.



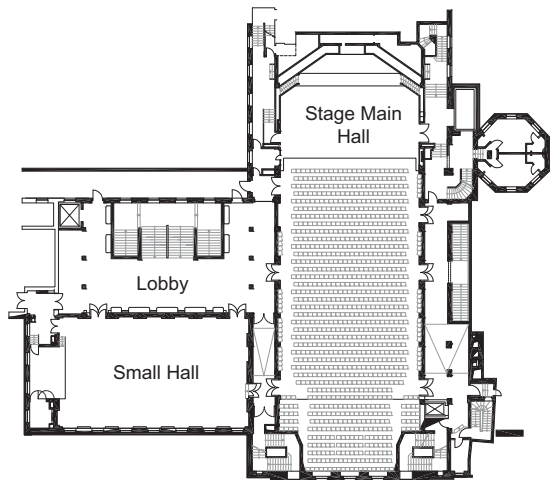
Noble materials: doors of Caucasian walnut wood, columns of marble and flooring of shimmering Solnhofen sandstone await the visitor in the foyer.

Concert house, cinema, club and a major renovation – the years up to 1995

Word soon spread about the outstanding acoustic qualities of the new hall and its stylish atmosphere. Concerts by the Bremen Philharmonic State Orchestra were always sold out, and figures of international stature, such as Béla Bartók, made guest appearances.

This golden age, however, was all too short, temporarily brought to a halt by World War II. But as if by a miracle, the building survived the war years almost undamaged. The orchestra and the choir, however, lost so many members that *Die Glocke* was used as a cinema from autumn 1944 until the end of the war in Europe in May 1945

After being liberated by Allied forces, Bremen ended up as an American enclave in British-occupied northern Germany. *Die Glocke* housed an army club, amongst other things. Jazz and blues were mostly played there but classical music also was performed, by a small ensemble. After the mili-



Floor plan of the Hall level.

tary had left the premises in 1950, Walter Görig renovated the building, and soon the state orchestra was playing there at full strength again. *Die Glocke* became a focal point of social life in the city, along with the Bremen Civic Centre and the Congress Centre.

For many years, though, it served as a kind of multipurpose space, with its users including dancing schools and an Alpine club. *Die Glocke* nevertheless remained a first-class venue for concerts, featuring both international stars of classical music, especially that of the twentieth century, and pop and jazz luminaries that included Louis Armstrong, Oscar Peterson and the Swedish group ABBA.

This variety of uses took its toll on the building's substance over the years. The original charm of the art deco interiors with their shellacked wood panelling could only be guessed at, while the technical systems had become hopelessly out of date. The building lacked lifts, artists' changing rooms and an adequate ventilation system. At last, in 1990, the Bremen Senate com-



The smaller hall is most suitable for chamber music concerts, cabaret and receptions.

missioned Gerhard Müller-Menckens and Klaus Rosenbusch to renovate *Die Glocke*.

The architects inserted new stairways and opened up access from the ground floor to the cloister and garden, allowing these to be used by the restaurant and for concerts. Amongst other things, the building services and technical systems were brought up to contemporary standards, and nearly 2,000 square metres of wood panelling were refurbished. Beginning in 1995, this extensive work was completed in little more than a year, during which the building was closed to the public. *Die Glocke* was ceremonially reopened on 31 January 1997.

Page 18/19:

A vaulted ceiling, mahogany wall panelling and a proscenium arch with scantily clad figures: the smaller hall has a more playful atmosphere than the main concert hall.



Local Centre of Culture with an International Reputation –

Die Glocke Today

Since its reopening, *Die Glocke* has been operated by an event management company, which belongs to the state of Bremen, its parent company. Although it receives state subsidies, *Die Glocke* has to generate the greater part of its income itself. The premises are generally leased to the artists appearing there or to their tour promoters. The two 'house orchestras,' the long-established Bremen Philharmonic and the German Chamber Philharmonic of Bremen, also pay a fee to perform there. The main hall is generally used for concerts by symphony orchestras, whereas the intimate atmosphere of the smaller hall is better suited to chamber music.

Although classical music continues to be a central element of the programme, *Die Glocke* also hosts chanson, world music, musicals, cabaret, lectures and literary readings. In addition to these are its own series, with titles such as *Glocke vocal* and *Glocke jazz nights*. There is an extensive programme of entertainment aimed at children and teenagers, considered a model of its kind within Germany. Its features include concerts for families, programmes for the school holidays and the possibility of hiring rooms for children's birthday parties. Around 360 events take place here each year, attracting around a quarter of a million visitors – a number that keeps rising.

Today, *Die Glocke* is a cultural centre of the city of Bremen, and its outstanding acoustics make it a popular venue with many international stars of classical music. Perhaps from time to time it occurs to a member of the audience, while listening to a symphony concert, that the plainsong chant of monks resounded through a mediaeval chapter house on exactly this same site over 1,000 years before.

Die Glocke forms a harmonious ensemble with the outbuildings of St Peter's Cathedral.



DIE GLOCKE BREMEN'S CONCERT HALL

ARCHITECT 1927/28

Walter Görig, Bremen (1885–1974)

Other Buildings by Görig (selected)

Friesenhaus im Spitzenkiel, Bremen
Church (Protestant) in Oslebshausen, Bremen
Cathedral Architect at Bremen Cathedral
from 1930 onwards
Central State Bank, Am Wall, Bremen
Deutsche Hypotheken- und Schiffahrtbank,
am Domshof, Bremen

RENOVATION 1995–97

Architectural consortium:
Dipl.-Ing. Gerhard Müller-Menckens
(1917–2007)
Dipl.-Ing. Klaus Rosenbusch

Other Buildings by Müller-Menckens (selected)

Sparerndank housing estate, Bremen
Norddeutsche Kreditanstalt und Kunsthalle,
Bremerhaven
Pachhaus Theatre, Bremen
Technical College, Emden
Teerhof Development, Bremen

Structural Engineers

Ingenieurbüro Zill und Klochinski, Bremen

Building Services Engineers

Ingenieurbüro Wiegand H. von Gilsa, Bremen

Electrical Engineers, Lighting, Lifts

Ingenieurbüro Miersch, Wittichenau

Acoustics Consultant

Heinrich W. Lüdeke

Back cover:

The main hall was conceived as a single sound box. This allows concert-goers to feel close to the music and, most important, produces tones that are as crisp as they are warm.

Operating Company

Glocke Veranstaltungs-GmbH

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28195 Bremen

Tel. +49 (0)421 – 33 66 5

Fax +49 (0)421 – 33 66 780

PROJECT DATA

Construction Work

Conversion of the Chapter House into a
concert hall 1869
Destroyed by fire 1915
New building Die Glocke opened 1928
Renovation 1995-97

Main Hall

Seating capacity: 1,397 (fixed seating)

Small Hall

Seating capacity: 432 (movable seating)

VISITOR INFORMATION

Ticket Agency in Die Glocke

Domsheide 6-8
28195 Bremen
Tel. +49 (0)421 – 33 66 99
www.glocke.de
ticketverkauf@glocke.de

Opening Hours

Monday to Friday from 10am to 6pm
Saturday from 10am to 3pm
The box office usually opens one hour before
the performance.

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