



## The Stadtcasino Basel Re-Opens!

The Stadtcasino Basel is a world-class concert hall that proudly stands at Barfüsserplatz, next to the Barfüsserkirche with the Historical Museum Basel. It belongs to the Casino-Gesellschaft, a nonprofit cultural organization, and is home to the Sinfonieorchester Basel (SOB). Other orchestras, such as the Kammerorchester Basel and Basel Sinfonietta, also hold many of their concerts here, and the Basel Festival Orchestra has been playing the New Year's Eve concert here since 1996. The Musiksaal (main concert hall), which seats up to 1,400 people, is used for large-scale symphony concerts and festivals and has welcomed many foreign guest orchestras, such as the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and London Symphony Orchestra. In addition to classical music, its internationally renowned excellent acoustics—sixth-best of its kind in the world—make it a popular venue for concerts and shows of all kinds. A smaller concert hall that seats around 450 guests, the Hans Huber Saal, named after the Swiss composer, is used for chamber music concerts, small soloist concerts, as well as lectures, conferences, and apéros. In 2016, the Stadtcasino had to be closed for renovations, forcing the SOB as well as the other orchestras and events promoters to temporarily find new venues for their events. The August 2020 completion date of the four-year project is still on target, so barring any Covid-related restrictions, the beloved Stadtcasino Basel will be reopening soon.

### A Look Back

The first origins of the Casino-Gesellschaft date back to 1808, when several eminent citizens met regularly to debate and gamble. With a growing membership, they decided they needed their own building, and in 1820 commissioned the young Swiss architect Melchior Berri (who also designed the beautiful blue “Basler Dybli” postboxes with the white dove that can still be found around Basel's old-town) with the project. They did not want a splendidous building, nor did they want something only functional—the requirements of the building design were described as “a noble, simple style.” The original, much smaller building was erected between Barfüsserplatz and Steinenberg and opened for operation in 1826. The first major expansion occurred in 1876, with the construction of the Musiksaal designed by Johann Jakob Stehlin, followed in 1904/1905 by the addition of the Hans Huber Saal designed by Fritz Stehlin.



In 1938, after over a century of use, the original “Berri Building” could no longer meet the requirements and was demolished and replaced in 1939 with the Stadtcasino building that is still on site today, designed by a team of architects (Kehlstadt, Brodtbeck, Bräuning, Leu, and Dürig). The com-

missioned art on the façade of the building—Apollo and the Muses—was painted by Alfred Heinrich Pellegrini in 1941. Since then, the only renovations were the walling up of the windows in the Musiksaal in 1964 and the installation of a new organ in 1971.

Towards the end of the 20th century, it was decided that the Stadtcasino Basel was no longer able to meet future demands in various respects. The Casino-Gesellschaft held a competition for a new building from 2000 to 2007, which was won by the Iraqi star architect Zaha Hadid. However, although the project received broad political and cultural support, and a large part of the financing was covered by private donations, it was rejected by the people in a referendum on June 17, 2007. A later analysis of the voting outcome revealed that many opponents recognized the architectural quality of the proposed design but rejected it because the main building block was much larger than the existing building and would have dominated the Barfüsserplatz. Instead, more subtle structural alterations and extensions to the existing building according to plans by the Basel architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron were approved, and construction and renovations have been underway since 2016.

### The Reconstruction

The reconstruction plan, which was originally scheduled to be completed by 2019, was quickly extended to 2020 due to unforeseen challenges with the existing structures. In addition, the renovations included extensive rescue excavations below the music hall and extending to the adjacent Barfüsserkirche. These excavations, which lasted around 12 months, unearthed the remains of the southern and western wings of the cloister and part of the cross garden of the church, gravestone fragments, a Spanish gold coin, an approximately 600-year old baptismal font weighing 900 kg, as well as more than 260 skeletons—from infants to older people. More than 4,000 people were able to visit the exposed monastery buildings in over 70 guided tours offered during the excavation phase, and 25 press articles as well as 6 television and radio reports were published on the archeological finds. Specialists from the fields of archeology, anthropology, art history, and history have also published a German-language book that explains the findings from the excavation under the Stadtcasino entitled “1000 Jahre Basler Geschichte” (1000 Years of Basel History); for more information on this, visit the website [www.archaeologie.bs.ch](http://www.archaeologie.bs.ch).

The new Stadtcasino was designed to be stylish and unobtrusive. Herzog & de Meuron envisioned the Musiksaal as separate from the 1939 addition, with an extension towards Barfüsserkirche in the same style as the rear facade of the existing Stehlin building. This created the room for a spacious and welcoming foyer. The two concert halls were renovated with great care in consultation with the historic preservation department. For example, the Musiksaal renovations were based on its historical origin, which included changes to the overall color scheme, oak parquet flooring, seating based on the historical model, lighting, and natural lighting. A new organ was installed behind the stage, and a contemporary, automatically adjustable stage has been installed.

### The Grand Re-Opening

The re-opening of the Stadtcasino Basel will mark a new era that will offer audiences and artists an exciting overall experience, with acoustically incomparable performances in a wide variety of cultural styles in a stylish, spacious, and pleasant setting in every respect. In addition to the Sinfonieorchester Basel settling back into their newly renovated home, many other music ensembles, international orchestras, jazz concerts, and shows of various kinds will also find their way to the state-of-the-art stage.

The official opening ceremony will take place on August 22 in the presence of invited guests only. The public open house is scheduled to take place on August 23 from 9:00–16:00, but details on the specific schedule and program, particularly in light of the existing coronavirus restrictions, are still being worked out. Check their website closer to the date to learn about all the concerts that will take place to celebrate the opening week of the Stadtcasino.

[www.stadtcasino-basel.ch](http://www.stadtcasino-basel.ch)