

Martin Audio for Metropolitan Museum of Art



One of the world's most celebrated cultural institutions, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, has transformed the sonic experience of its historic Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium with a sophisticated Martin Audio upgrade. This modular installation overcomes the venue's long-standing acoustic challenges while providing a high-fidelity portable system for performances across the museum's iconic gallery spaces.

Opened in 1954 as a purely acoustic hall - designed primarily to showcase instruments from the Met's own collection with no amplification intended - the 700-capacity Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium has remained largely unchanged in appearance. The original Korina woodwork endures, as does the Steinway piano gifted by the company upon the venue's opening. Writing in *The Met's* own *Bulletin* upon its opening, Robert B. Newman describes, "The virtues of the Rogers Auditorium are inescapable and many. Its intimacy is warming. Its seats are built on the wise assumption that nature has not done the upholsterer's work for him. Its sight lines are perfect and its acoustics so good that no amplifiers are needed, and a person talking in conversational tones on the stage can be heard with ease in the balcony."

Yet, as the auditorium's programming evolved, so too did its audio demands. The legacy sound system previously installed - early-generation powered column speakers positioned only on the left and right sides of the room - delivered severely uneven coverage, with significant gaps across both the floor and balcony. It was barely adequate for lectures and simply unsuitable for contemporary musical

performances.

Sebastian Hurtado joined The Met as Senior Technical Manager AVMS Production, in 2024. As a seasoned audio engineer who has worked across multiple countries and throughout the US, the sound in the auditorium became an immediate focus. "I think I identified the need for an upgrade within three days of arriving," he recalls. Once a business case had been authorised and budgetary approval came, Sebastian wasted no time. His brief was clear: replace the legacy system with a single, unified solution capable of handling everything from intimate lectures to full live bands - all while preserving the visual and architectural integrity of the historic space. After consulting with several top-tier manufacturers, Sebastian and his team selected Martin Audio, citing both the product fit and the quality of communication with the Martin Audio team throughout the process. "We sent an initial concept, and they mapped it out and made recommendations. It made us feel confident it was being done correctly."

The final installed system is anchored by three Martin Audio TORUS Series T1230 and one T1215 constant curvature array elements, configured as a centre cluster and rigged from a truss at the front of the stage. "We didn't want to change the essence of the space, and with no positions possible to hang a Left-Right line array, we realised a centre cluster was the way to go," describes Sebastian. "It covers the lower and upper centre of the house incredibly well. Even without subwoofers, the low end from the TORUS 12s is substantial for video playback and presentations."

Four Martin Audio FlexPoint FP12 12" premium point-source speakers are positioned on the sides to fill outer coverage gaps, while four FP6 6" models - precisely time-delayed - address the notoriously difficult under-balcony zone. "The FP6s have provided one of the biggest improvements. They sound fantastic and are delayed so well that it almost seems like they're not doing anything, which is perfect," he notes. For larger performances, a ground-stacked system comprising three per side TORUS T820 8" tops and two per side SXC115 15" cardioid subwoofers, is designed to handle any production required in the space. Ten Martin Audio LE100 stage monitors round out the rig: "We've had guest engineers ask what they were because they want some; they sound great with minimal processing."

Sebastian describes a massive shift in audio quality. "The response has been noticeable by everyone. The even coverage is the most significant improvement; there's not a dead spot in the entire room. And we have the full frequency range represented with incredible clarity and fullness. Whether it's a lecture that keeps the audience engaged, or a full band with brass and strings, everything is represented properly."

For Sebastian, a key aspect of the system design was modularity and the ability to deploy elements of the system in other areas. "We wanted to kill two birds with one stone and have a modular system we could take into the galleries." The ground-stacked system therefore doubles as a portable rig for events and performances throughout the museum, allowing The Met to bring consistent, high-quality audio to

spaces as acoustically challenging as the all-glass, hard-surfaced Engelhard Court. "The challenge in many of our rooms, especially with speaking, is intelligibility. But with the Martin Audio system, we're able to overcome it," he says. "Its flexibility means we can deploy optimum systems for each event - that may be three tops and two subs per side, or a more distributed system." The Martin Audio cardioid subs have proved particularly successful. "They work remarkably well," he confirms. "You can stand right behind them and not feel a thing. In a big echo chamber like this museum, having subs fire in only one direction really helps."

The entire system was purchased through dealer ADI, who also handled amplifier programming and final tuning. Physical installation - including routing cables through the building's complex, century-old infrastructure - was carried out by Sebastian and his in-house team. A helpful discovery during the process: the mounting locations for the FP12s sat behind fabric-covered plywood panels concealing former pipe organ openings, which served as convenient cable pathways.

"I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with such a prestigious and world-renowned institution. We worked through a number of design options with Sebastian as we considered all possible use case scenarios and the best way for the museum to get the most bang for their buck," comments Martha Callaghan, Northeastern Regional Sales Manager, North America, Martin Audio USA. "It's incredibly gratifying to see this work come to fruition. It's a gorgeous venue, with important work to do, and the combo of TORUS and FlexPoint makes sure that work is coherent and delivered with pristine articulation and clarity. I am looking forward to our ongoing collaboration with The Met and their team."

Perhaps most tellingly, the upgrade has changed the way the institution programmes its spaces. "It has prompted programmers to start doing more events in the auditorium," concludes Sebastian. "Before, they preferred the galleries because the auditorium infrastructure wasn't great. Now, our spec is much more rider-friendly, and we don't have to rent outside gear."

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