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architecture +
urban design

memorial hall performing arts centre

location senior school domain road melbourne australia

status completed april 2005

client melbourne grammar school

photography john gollings

Founded in 1858, Melbourne Grammar School is one of the oldest denominational schools in Victoria. The South Yarra site is well known, with its fine collection of nineteenth century bluestone buildings set in generous and picturesque landscaped grounds. The campus is subject to a complex range of planning and heritage controls, including some 25 buildings and landscape elements listed on the Heritage Victoria Register.

The 'Old Melburnians War Memorial Hall' was opened on November 11 1928 to honour the members of the School community who gave their lives and service in the Boer and First World Wars. It was designed by Hugh Peck to compliment the earlier Tudor style main quadrangle buildings. The Hall has a flexible flat floor format, rear balcony and proscenium stage with very limited wings and back stage facilities. The Memorial Hall is the gathering place for a great many student activities – concerts, plays, assemblies, examinations and the like and it might well be regarded as the 'heart' of the School. Music and the Performing Arts hold a central part in the cultural life of the Melbourne Grammar community, and whilst the Hall has served the School well it falls well short of modern performance requirements.

The Memorial Hall has been extensively refurbished and extended to provide facilities for Music and the Performing Arts, as well as general School use. New accommodation includes a significantly expanded basement for storage, back-of-house under stage areas, a Music Studio and rehearsal space as well as improved stage size and drama performance facilities. Given severe site and heritage constraints, most of the new space has been provided underground, except for a modest addition to extend the stage and wings. The development of the western extension has allowed the opportunity to relocate the Bromby Street driveway to align axially with

the Witherby Tower and South Quadrangle and so improve the vista and entrance from the south.

A new terrace has been created adjoining the Hall cloisters thereby improving the western setting of the building. Beneath the terrace lies the Music Studio and rehearsal space. This is accessed via external stairs down to a recessed courtyard, which also provides access to daylight and views into and from the underground Studio. All underground spaces link back to the main Hall and back-of house facilities providing a fully integrated music and drama complex. The new Music Studio is a spectacular space with a soaring 8-metre ceiling designed specifically to accommodate a full symphony orchestra.

The refurbished main Hall will seat the whole School of 780 students and staff in a range of flexible formats. The flat floor Hall has been retained together with an improved balcony. A new fore-stage elevator provides for an expanded stage, an orchestra pit and loading access to the basement stores below the Hall. Seating can be arranged in a number of ways via a demountable tiering system along with flat floor stackable seating. The Memorial Hall complex has been transformed into a worthy new home for the Performing Arts, Music and the life of the School community in general.

"Our new Orchestral Rehearsal Studio in the Memorial Hall project has been a resounding success, both architecturally and acoustically. The Director of Music is thrilled with the new facility and from all within the School we have heard nothing but praise and positive responses to the new spaces." James Burton, Property Manager MGS 2005

