

FAQ
WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE (WMOH)
2020 SEAT UPGRADE PROJECT

1). Why do the seats need to be replaced?

The seats are original to the historic 1932 building and are due for replacement and modernization. While maintenance on these seats over the years has included reupholstering and some renovation to the Orchestra section chairs, the seats have been an ongoing and major source of patron complaints. The project will also create additional accessible seating areas. Improving comfort and accessibility for patrons is a priority for San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Opera, and the San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center.

2). What is the timeframe for the seat installation, and which seats will be upgraded?

This is the third and final phase of the seat upgrade project, which began in summer of 2013, when the Box seats were first replaced. The Balcony and Balcony Circle seats were subsequently upgraded in 2015. This final phase of the project has been fast-tracked to take advantage of the COVID-19 venue closure. This phase will begin in September and end in January 2021, and will include all remaining seats in the Orchestra, Grand Tier, and Dress Circle seating sections of the War Memorial Opera House.

3). What are the improvements that will come with the seat upgrade?

The new seats will provide better comfort by offering more leg room, raising the height of the seat cushion, narrowing arm rests so that seats feel wider, and using sculpted dense foam to provide support. The new seats will also improve sightlines to the stage through modest adjustments to the seat layout, including staggering the seats along the center aisle. The new seats have been designed to preserve the historic look and feel of the War Memorial Opera House. The new seats include a discreetly

placed cupholder for patron use during performances, excluding the front rows of seating sections.

Accessibility for patrons will be improved with additional seating options. Patrons with disabilities and patrons using wheelchairs can choose from new accessible seating areas in the left and right Orchestra sections, in addition to the existing center rear Orchestra accessible seating.

The project includes the addition of several bariatric seats in both the Orchestra and Dress Circle seating sections. Bariatric seating is wider than standard chairs and designed to provide comfort for those with larger frames.

4). Will the seating affect the acoustics in the auditorium?

Threshold Acoustics has been engaged to consult on the acoustic impact of the seating upgrades. They took baseline measurements of the existing condition and, without affecting reverberation times, the seating upgrade will improve the audience experience and deliver a more present acoustic. As a result of the acoustic study, the new seats will be a plush seat cushion with a wooden seat back. On Orchestra level only, the carpet between the rows will be replaced with a resilient material.

5). How will the seats look or feel different from previous seats?

The new seats are being designed for ergonomic comfort and to offer support to a wider range of body types. The historic nature and beauty of the Opera House will also be reflected in the overall seat design choices including wood tone, design details, and aesthetics.

6). Are you simply replacing seats, or is more extensive renovation required?

In addition to installing upgraded seats, the project includes improved aisle lighting, floor repair, partial carpet replacement, and greater dispersion of wheelchair seating locations by the addition of new accessible seating areas. Accessibility upgrades will be made in the restrooms and along the accessible path of travel on Café, Orchestra, and Dress Circle levels.

7). Will the seating capacity change?

There will be some limited seat loss in the Orchestra section, resulting in an approximate 4% reduction in the number of seats in the house. The seat loss is related to efforts to improve sightlines through staggered placement in the center Orchestra sections and the addition of the wheelchair accessible platforms in the side sections.

There will be some limited seat loss in the Grand Tier and Dress Circle related to efforts to improve sightlines and provide greater comfort in Grand Tier and Dress Circle sections.

8). Will the layout of the house (section names and locations) change?

With the exception of the addition of the new side Orchestra accessible seating areas, the overall layout will remain the same, including the location of all aisles. No locations or sections are changing names. The five rows that comprise Grand Tier and Balcony Circle have been relabeled Row AA, BB, CC, DD, and EE to clarify the distinction with the adjacent Dress Circle and Balcony sections, respectively, which will continue to be labeled Row A, B, C, D, etc.

9). Will seat numbers change?

The basic seat numbering scheme will remain the same, with odd-numbered seats on House Left and even-numbered seats on House Right. There may be selected rows that will be renumbered due to the loss of seats.

10). How will the new seat layout affect subscribers and patrons who have reserved seats for the Spring 2021 Season?

The majority of subscribers will not be affected; however, as the new seating layout is designed to improve sightlines for patrons seated in the Orchestra, Grand Tier, and Dress Circle sections, we anticipate that a small number of subscribers in those sections will be affected. Patron Services from the Opera will work closely with those affected to discuss alternative seat locations equivalent to their previous assignments.

11). When will I know if my seats will be reassigned?

Patron Services will begin contacting affected patrons during the month of September to discuss alternative seat locations equivalent to their previous assignments.

12). Will accessible seating areas change?

Yes, there will be greater dispersion of accessible seating options from the addition of new accessible seat platforms which will accommodate patrons who use wheelchairs and their companions in the Orchestra side sections. The rear center Orchestra section wheelchair seats will remain as they are presently configured.

13). How is this being funded, and will ticket prices go up?

The seating upgrades are being funded by a facility fee that has been charged on a per ticket basis since November 2013 for San Francisco Ballet and January 2014 for San Francisco Opera. The facility fee ranges from \$1 to \$3 based on the seating section for which the ticket is purchased. The improvement of the patron experience in the Opera House is a priority for both SF Ballet and Opera, and future facility fee funds will be used for similar patron-focused facility upgrades.

Ticket prices are always subject to change, but any increases will not be a direct result of this upgrade.

14). How were the seats chosen, and who chose them?

A Request for Qualifications (“RFQ”) was issued jointly by San Francisco Ballet and San Francisco Opera, resident licensees of the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House. It was issued in cooperation with the War Memorial Board of Trustees of the City and County of San Francisco, who are responsible for the construction, management, and operation of the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House. The RFQ was then used to identify qualified seating suppliers to provide design and pre-construction services for custom seats.

Ducharme Seating, a company with expertise in historical theaters who is committed to manufacturing products with minimal environmental impact, was chosen as the seating supplier. Custom sample seats were developed with and reviewed by SF Ballet, SF Opera, and the War Memorial.

15). Will the seats have cupholders?

Yes! Almost all of the new seats (with the exception of the front rows of seating sections) will feature cupholders to allow patrons to sip on their beverage of choice while enjoying performances.

16). What will happen to the old seats?

The existing seats will be removed and disposed of per the San Francisco Environment Code's Construction and Demolition Debris Recovery Requirements, as the materials from which they were originally constructed have outlived their useful life. Seats will not be available for patrons to obtain for health and safety reasons.

17). Who is involved and managing this project?

The project is being managed by the War Memorial Performing Arts Center in collaboration with SF Ballet and SF Opera, with the support of theater consultant The Shalleck Collaborative and a team from the City's Department of Public Works.

18). As this is a city building, why isn't the city responsible for this project?

The City is managing the project, as well as funding design and architecture services, permitting, and construction costs related to ADA upgrades in lobbies and restrooms.

19). Has San Francisco Opera cancelled its entire 2020–21 Season?

Fall 2020 live mainstage performances have been cancelled, and affected patrons have been notified. At this time, all Spring 2021 live mainstage performances are planned to take place as scheduled. San Francisco Opera is monitoring the situation, including the

latest public health recommendations and orders. We will continue to share any updates to our season as they become available.

20). Can I see the seats in person?

To ensure the safety of our patrons and staff during this time, we are unfortunately not able to offer our patrons the opportunity to view and/or sit in the seats in person. We invite you to view visual assets depicting the new seats and their features by visiting sfopera.com/seatupgrade.

21). If Spring 2021 performances take place as planned, what safety precautions are you going to put in place?

Your safety and health are our top priority. We are working closely with the War Memorial Performing Arts Center as well as a group of top medical experts from UCSF to formulate plans and preparations for a safe return to the Opera House in line with government regulations and emerging thinking across entertainment venues. As we get closer to re-opening the Opera House, we will be in touch to share specific steps we are taking to ensure your health and safety.