

A Webb Management Services case study

THE GALA VENUE SEATING SYSTEM AT THE
TOBIN CENTER
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



Progress Report:
FIRST 20 MONTHS SINCE 2014 OPENING

Authored by:
DUNCAN WEBB, WEBB MANAGEMENT SERVICES INC.
NEW YORK, NY

The Tobin Center



The Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, which opened in 2014 in San Antonio Texas, was an underused historic municipal 4000-fixed seat auditorium, which has been completely renovated and expanded, located in a prime River Walk location. This area was underdeveloped and the revitalization of the Tobin Center contributed to giving it a new life.

Designed by LMN Architects of Seattle, in partnership with San Antonio architectural firm Marmon Mok, the Tobin Center's design combines the 1926 Spanish Mission-style façade of the former Municipal Auditorium with a striking new structure, covered with a metallic LED lit "veil".

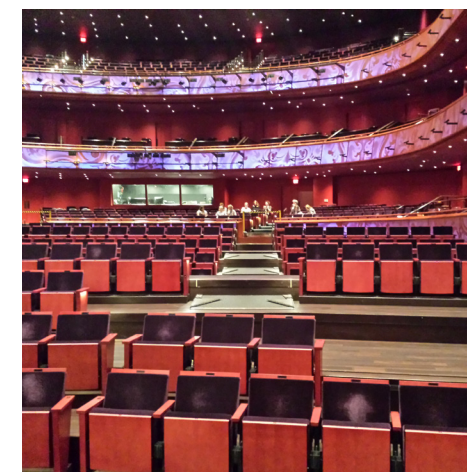
The H-E-B Performance Hall, with seating on four levels, was designed by Fisher Dachs Associates to accommodate acoustic and amplified performances of both local and touring performing arts and entertainment. It features a traditional proscenium arch and orchestra pit lifts, offering comfortable seating for 1738 with optimal sightlines and excellent acoustics.

Given the increased demand for added capacity and flexibility to accommodate non-traditional performances, and considering the overflow of events from the convention Center, the main hall was developed as a multipurpose space.

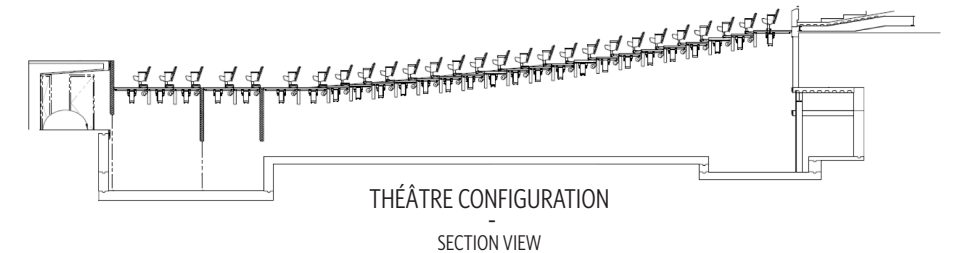
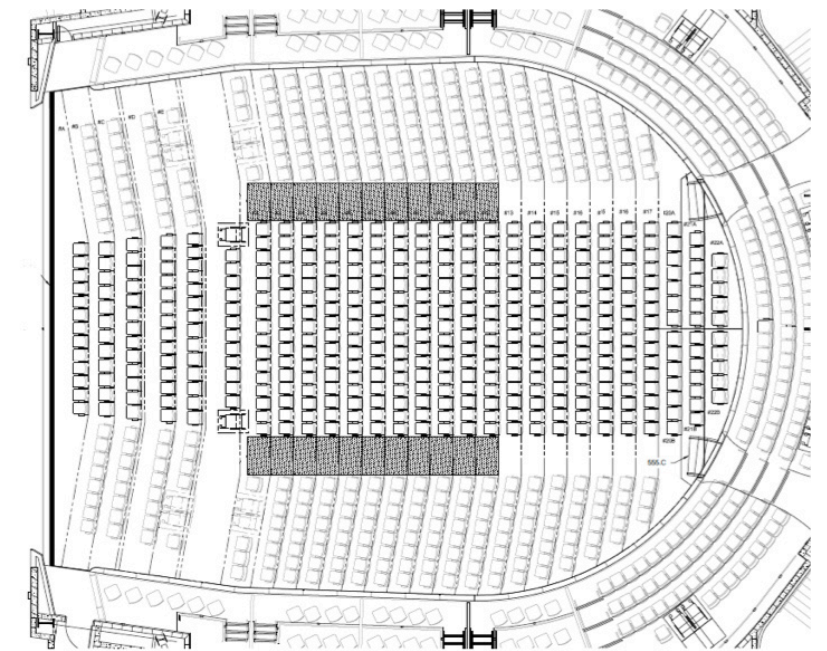
This progress report on the Tobin Center, conducted over the first 20 months of operation, revealed that the multipurpose H-E-B Hall achieved a high level of activity and attendance. The hall successfully supported a broad range of programs and activities, improved the Center's ongoing financial performance, and helped further its mission as a community-serving asset and amenity.

In its standard auditorium configuration, H-E-B Hall can support the full range of traditional concerts and theatrical performances. Most of the Center's 10 resident companies (including symphony, opera, ballet, chamber orchestra, theatre, choral, and youth music/theatre organizations) use the hall in its traditional setup, but are now exploring the space's versatility to support an even broader range of performances, educational programming and special events.

The main Hall hosted 212 events during its 2014-2015 inaugural Season - four events a week on average. To make a debut with such a high level of use, it had to rely on very quick and easy space transformations. **To that end, the project invested in the Gala Venue Seating System so that this busy building could remain primarily dedicated to standard-form performing arts but also accommodate non-traditional uses and users.**



Theatre and Concert Hall



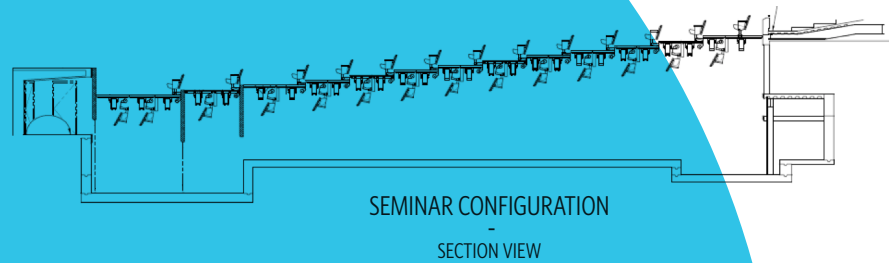
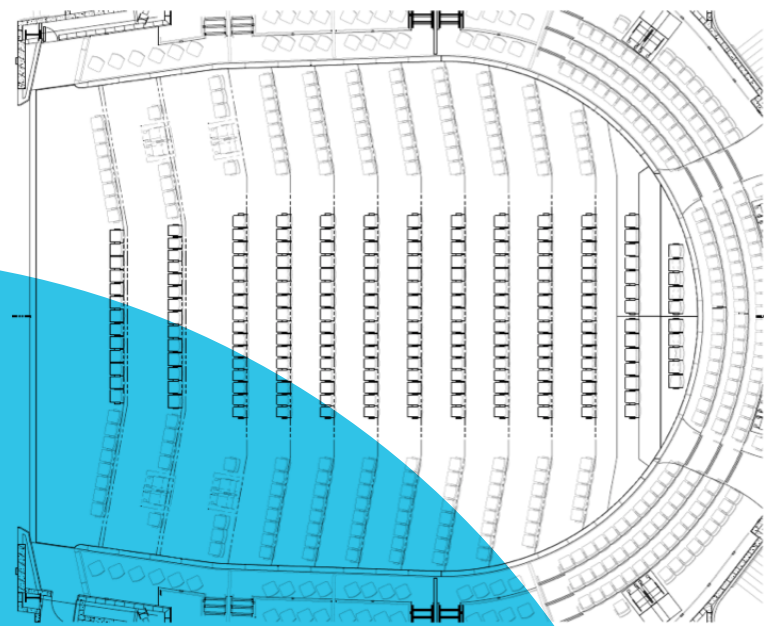
The automated flexible *Gala Venue Seating System*

The H-E-B Hall is equipped with a [Gala Venue System](#) fully automated mechanical floor and seating system to create a mixed-use building, adaptable for non-cultural activities, such as educational programs, meetings and other events. The hall had to retain its role as home for ten different resident companies while considering a limited available footprint. The integrated system allows for a series of additional configurations based on sets of rows at different heights, with or without seats.

The Gala Venue Technology enables the main performance hall to showcase optimally various types of events and accommodate frequently fluctuating audience sizes by changing from a raked seating layout to a flat floor space, with virtually endless configurations in between. A single operator typically does the computerized transformation within 10 to 30 minutes.

Each configuration looks and feels as seamless and robust as a permanent fixed venue with adequate sightlines – the audience is usually unaware of the mechanical seating system, as none of the structural stability, high-quality auditorium seats or floor finishings have been compromised. The *Gala Venue Seating System* was installed at a cost of \$9 million (including seats and floor finish), plus pit construction and structural adjustment costs. The complete system costs accounted for approximately 8% of the total construction costs of the project.

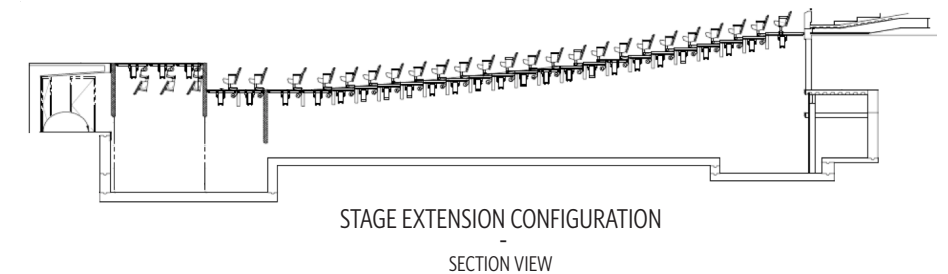
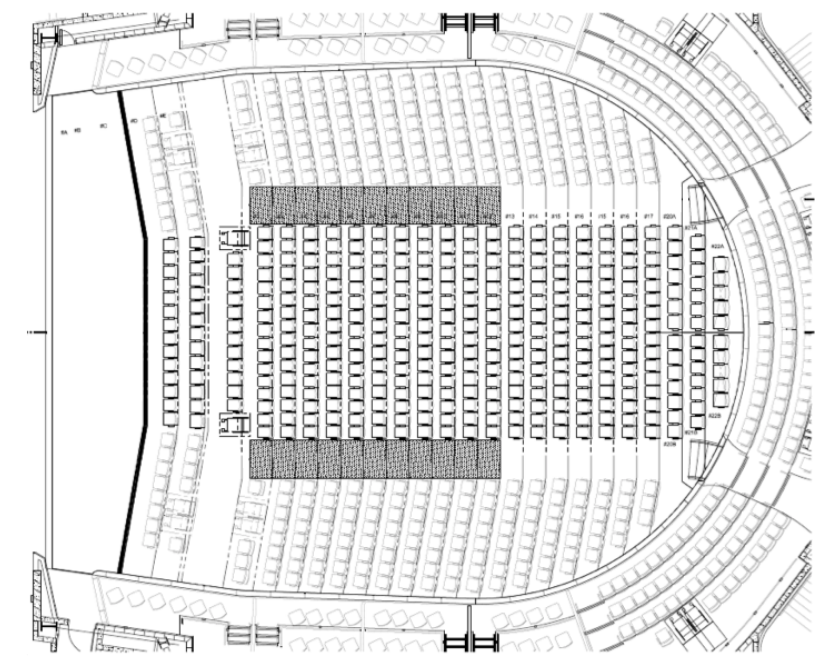
To date, there have been no additional costs related to the Tobin Center's *Gala Venue Seating System*. Upkeep has also been minimal, requiring just a thorough annual maintenance check performed by two technicians from Gala.



Evaluation of the *Gala Venue Seating System's* performance

Data collected on the first 20 months of H-E-B Hall activity, configurations and revenues show that:

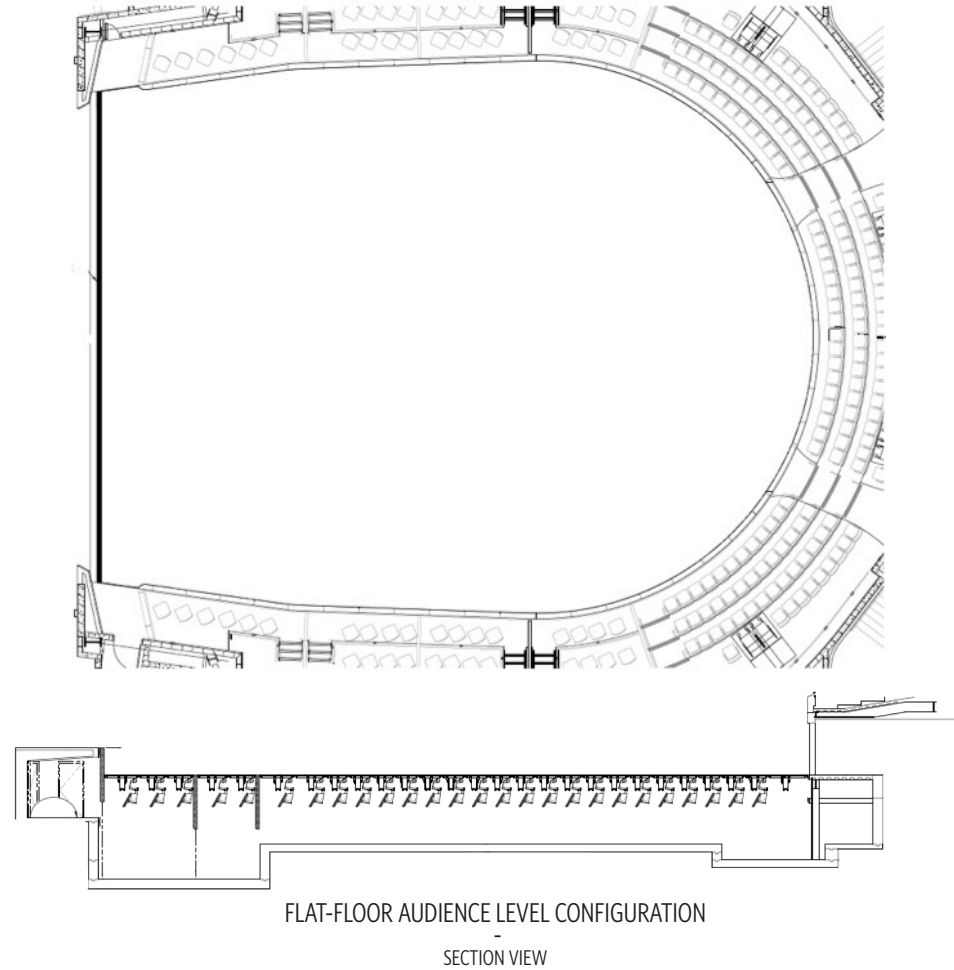
- The state-of-the art H-E-B Hall was extremely busy and mainly used in its traditional setup, with optimal sightlines and acoustics to suit all 10 different resident companies, as well as world-class visiting performing arts companies;
- With four additional configurations made possible by the *Gala Venue Seating System*, the Hall hosted a wider range of programs, including awards ceremonies, charity balls, fashion shows, flat-floor concerts and corporate luncheons;
- The built-in flexibility of the *Gala Venue Seating System* had a significant beneficial impact on all activities, financial performances, regional economy and mission delivery.



Flat-floor concert hall configuration

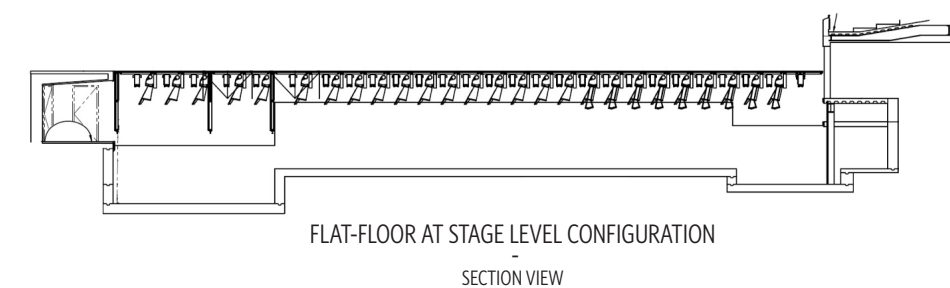
The flat-floor concert hall made possible by the *Gala Venue Seating System* has a total capacity of 2100 seats. Between the opening of the main hall in September 2014 and March 2016, this configuration was used for 11 events.

DATE	EVENT
9/25/14	Mixfest 2014
9/28/14	Citizen Cope
10/5/14	LeCrae
10/12/14	Erasure
10/23/14	Charity Ball Association
11/5/14	Kalin & Myles
3/18/15	Pink Floyd Experience
7/16/15	Megan Trainor
10/5/15	Billy Idol
10/17/15	Mixfest 2015
2/21/16	Patio Andaluz



Flat-floor social stage height configuration

In the flat-floor social stage height configuration, all orchestra-level seats are removed and the floor is at stage level for large-capacity banquets and other special events. In addition to its regular performance schedule, this configuration which can accommodate 800 for a seated meal enabled the Tobin Center to add 8 more charity events to its calendar, supporting fundraising for San Antonio non-profit organizations.

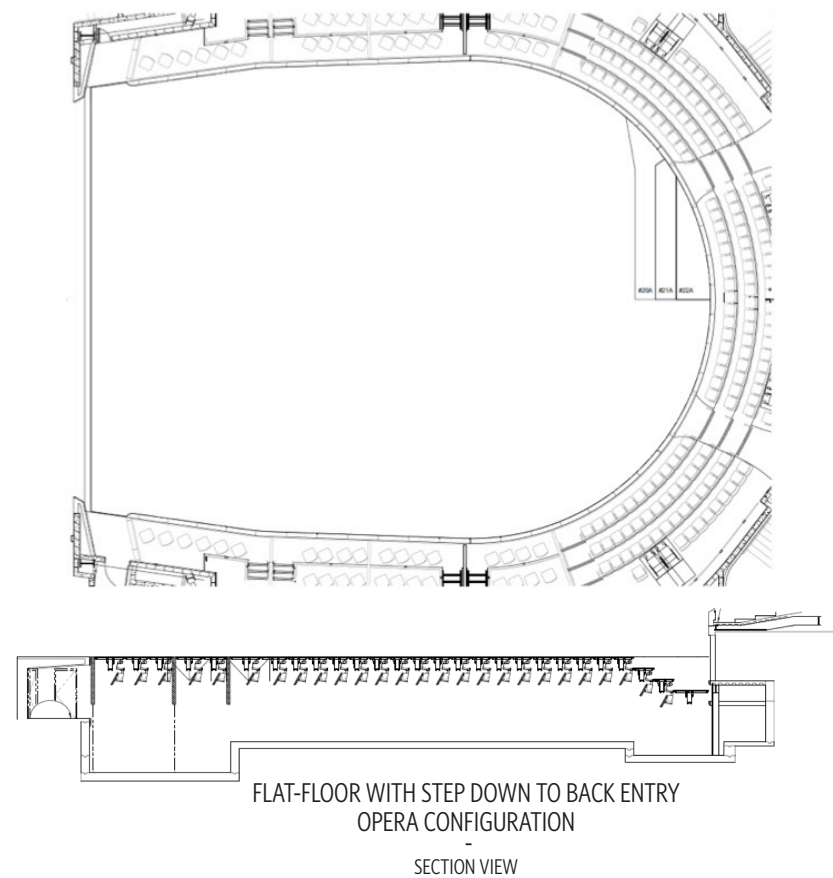


DATE	EVENT
10/23/14	Charity Ball Association
12/8/14	Family Violence Prevention Services - Nutcracker Sweets
4/23/15	Battle of Flowers Luncheon
9/10/15	San Antonio Children's Museum
12/14/15	Family Violence Prevention Services - Nutcracker Sweets
2/1/16	Thomas Rueter Dinner
4/19/16	Town Club Fiesta Event
4/21/16	Battle of Flowers Luncheon



Large social configuration with stage

The large social with stage setup suits a range of community, civic and special events, including meals and performances on the orchestra-level flat floor for a capacity of 450. This configuration has been used 27 times over the 20 month period reviewed.



DATE	EVENT
9/15/14	Castro 40 th Birthday Celebration
11/12/14	Fiesta Poster Unveiling Event
11/18/14	Nside Magazine Gala for Hill Country Daily Bread
11/19/14	San Antonio Economic Development Foundation
11/20/14	McNay Art Museum Patron Party
11/24/14	Family Services - Festival of Lights
1/8/15	BBVA Management Meeting
2/4/15	Bexar County Family Justice Center Gala

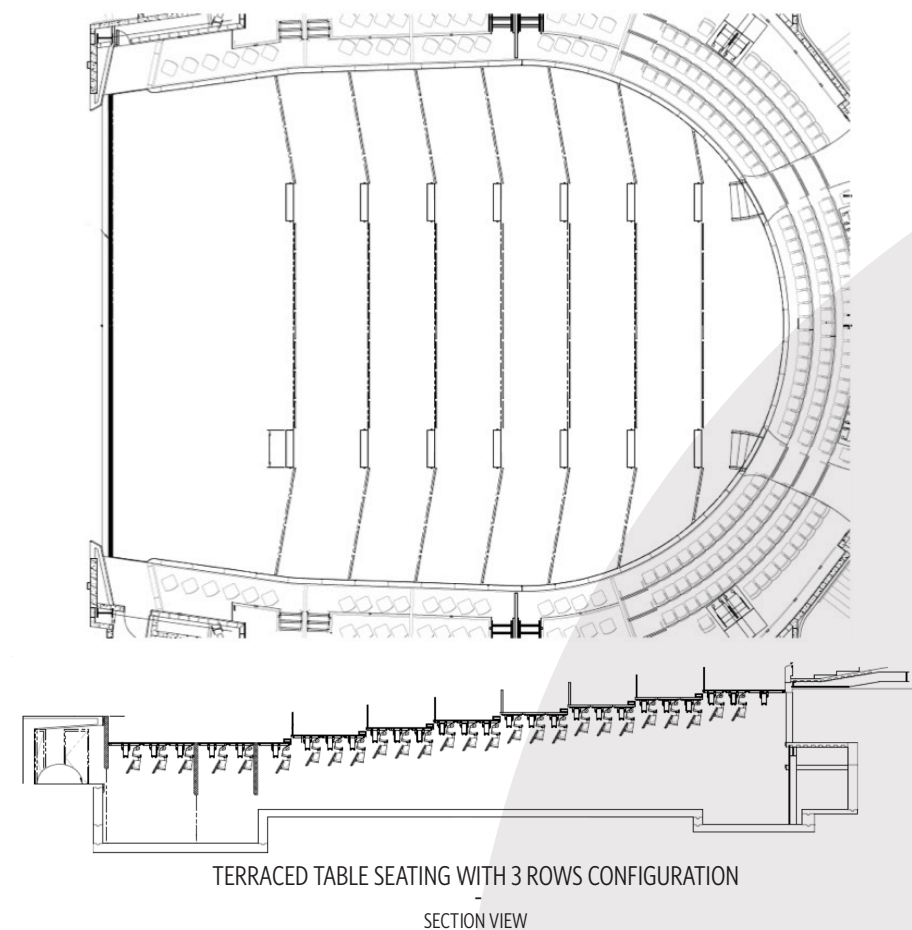
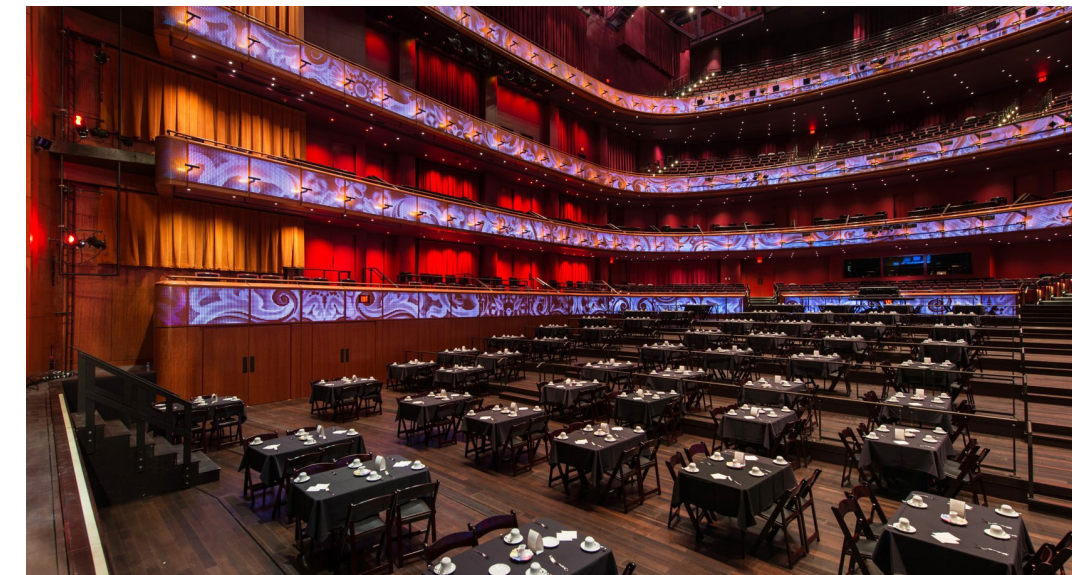
DATE	EVENT
3/1/15	Van Courtland Social Club - 100 th Anniversary
3/31/15	City Year SA - Ripples of Hope Gala
4/1/15	Baptist Health System Leadership Meeting
4/14/15	UTW Fashion Show
5/28/15	SABJ Medical Heroes Dinner
7/25/15	SACVB Texas Band Masters Reception
8/22/15	Freeman Wedding & Reception
9/3/15	TexITE Dinner
9/15/15	Downtown BEST Awards Dinner

DATE	EVENT
10/4/15	St. PJ's Princess and Me Event
10/13/15	UTSA Donor Dinner
10/15/15	Fiesta Commission Poster Unveiling Event
10/19/15	Raysearch Laboratories
11/6/15	Healthy Futures Luncheon (El Tropicano)
1/19/16	Bexar County Family Justice Center
2/17/16	Vermeer Awards
3/1/16	Encore "Mattress Firm"
3/16/16	Vision Source with ZZ Top
4/12/16	CREW San Antonio Luncheon

Cabaret configurations

The *Gala Venue Seating System* allows for various cabaret and seminar configurations, with terraced rows, tables and chairs, providing a capacity of up to 1300. This setup has only been used twice so far, but it is expected that a more targeted marketing effort will result in additional rental business.

DATE	EVENT
9/26/14	Musical Bridges Around the World
8/29/15	Renaissance with the Stars (SA Area Found.)



Gala Venue Seating System impacts on ...total activity



Four alternative configurations have been used in the first 20 months of operation of the Tobin Center. **Table 1** shows the number of events associated with each of these up to now, for a total of 47 events. This represents 12% of the total number of events within the H-E-B Performance Hall.

With an average of 28 Gala-enabled events per year, there is room for further growth in rental capability. This is less about the expansion of traditional cultural programs, and will more likely be related to non-traditional events such as cabaret shows, conventions, corporate banquets, city events or teaching seminars, programmed during weekdays and on a single day.

Table 1

TOBIN'S USE OF GALA VENUE SEATING SYSTEM	CAPACITY	2014-2016	ANNUAL AVERAGE
Active Months		20	12
Events made possible by Gala System			
Flat-floor concert	2100	10	6
Large social configuration with stage	450	27	16
Flat-floor social stage height	800	8	5
Cabaret configuration	1300	2	1
Total		47	28
Main Hall	1750		
Number of events		403	241
System-enabled events as percentage of total		12%	12%

... financial performance

Table 2 below shows that net revenues* for events, made possible by the Gala System have grown significantly over the first 20 months. They are now higher than net revenues for events in the traditional raked seating layout, respectively amounting to \$14,762 and \$12,055 per event. This positive and continuing trend should continue as venue managers gain

experience promoting and pricing events for non-traditional users.

The higher contribution of Gala-enabled events, now estimated at just above \$400,000 annually, relieves pressure on annual fundraising activity, making the facility more sustainable and financially independent.

Table 2

OPERATING BUDGET IMPACTS OF THE GALA VENUE SEATING SYSTEM	2014	2015	2016
New main hall configurations made possible by Gala System			
Net Revenues/Event	\$4865	\$7023	\$14,762
Main Hall tiered Orchestra			
Net Revenues/Event	\$5791	\$10,818	\$12,055

* net revenues: gross rental income, ticket sales and/or food and beverage income less direct costs



Gala Venue Seating System impacts on ... regional economy

During its first 20 months of activities, the new Center has already had significant economic impacts on San Antonio and Bexar County. The *Gala Venue Seating System* drives a portion of these impacts by supporting new events that attract new audiences from outside Bexar County.

Out of these new events made possible by the *Gala Venue Seating System*, an estimated average of 15 events a year with an average audience of 1200 would not happen elsewhere in the county.

It is estimated that 25% of that audience is new (20% coming from outside Bexar County plus another 5% re-captured from venues outside the County). Using the per-capita expenditure numbers published by Americans for the Arts (in its 2012 edition of "The Arts and Economic Prosperity"), the spending by these recaptured regional residents and visiting audiences, accounts for approximately \$150,000 a year.



... mission delivery

In addition to an increase in the activities and improved financial performance, the *Gala Venue Seating System* has enabled the Tobin Center to pursue a strong community-oriented mission by:

- Accommodating a broader range of arts, cultural and community programs, both now and looking to the future, when the size, shape and functionality of performance spaces may well be different;
- Facilitating quicker and cheaper (less labour intensive) changeovers and thus higher levels of subsidized access for charity organizations and educational events;
- Creating an efficient and attractive meeting and special event venue that drives earned income and keeps non-profit rental rates low;

- Supporting a broader range of educational programs: 50,000 students attended performances on school field trips during the first season alone;
- Increasing daytime and evening use of the building to drive activity and economic development in downtown San Antonio;
- Promoting stronger partnerships with artistic organizations, educators, civic groups and the local business community;
- Creating events that yield higher revenues vs traditional tiered auditorium configurations.

Conclusions



The *Gala Venue Seating System*, which represented 8% of the total construction costs of the project, has delivered **significant benefits** to the Tobin Center and the City of San Antonio, including:

- Increased activity and attendance in the H-E-B Hall;
- Broadened range of programs and activities that can be well served by the venue;
- Improved ongoing financial performance of the Center; and
- Advancement of the mission of the Center as a community-serving asset and amenity.