

FOLGER THEATRE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

PROJECT CASE STUDY



FIXED AND PORTABLE AUDIENCE SEATING

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Audience Services Coordinator



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CHALLENGE

Provide fixed and portable seating for historic theatre.

WENGER SOLUTION

Coordinating features and aesthetic details to best suit application. Supplying variety of sample chairs for selection and planning. Delivering and installing seating to meet tight renovation schedule.

BENEFITS

- Refined aesthetics complement historic setting
- Quiet operation minimizes distractions
- Flexible seats enable accessibility and ADA-compliance
- Ergonomic designs enhance support, comfort
- High-quality materials and construction ensure longevity
- Expert installation ensures satisfaction

HIGHLIGHTS

“It was very important to us that our new chairs reflected the room’s inherent aesthetics and acknowledged its history,” explains Beth Emelson, Assistant Artistic Producer with the Folger Shakespeare Library and Folger Theatre in Washington, D.C.

“Our theatre has a very high aesthetic and architectural quality – complete with gargoyles!” Emelson remarks. “It’s not a generic space.” Opened in 1932 on Capitol Hill, the Folger is a world-renowned research center on Shakespeare that offers plays, concerts and activities for families, school groups, tourists and scholars.

After 20 years of heavy use, the previous seats were starting to fail. The upholstery was tearing; loose springs and nuts rattled noisily. Meanwhile, many of the Folger’s local peer theatres were upgrading their facilities or building new ones.

At the Folger, new seats were the centerpiece of general renovations that carefully respected and preserved the facility’s historic status. Theatre Projects recommended Wenger fixed and portable models, along with determining their placement to best suit the space, architecture and accessibility needs.

The facility’s design is based on Elizabethan innyard theatres, with a main seating area flanked by two side galleries and a balcony above; the overall seating capacity is 270. Fixed seats were installed on the main floor, with portable chairs used in the galleries and balcony.

“I supervised the installation and the Wenger crew was great, working diligently and respectfully,” recalls Charles Flye, Technical Director/ Production Manager. “They were talented, honest and able to improvise solutions when necessary.”

He notes that the fixed seats bolted solidly to the floor, with a large mounting plate and anchor studs. While a number of the old seats had loosened over time, Flye does not expect that problem to occur with the Wenger models.

To better accommodate accessibility needs, a number of the new fixed seats are movable: wheels pop up with a simple mechanism and the seats roll away to make room for a wheelchair or scooter.

All the Wenger seating is earning rave reviews from Folger staff and audiences alike. “Audiences have reacted very positively to the new chairs – people are really enjoying them,” says Tim Guillot, Audience Services Coordinator. “The fixed seats and portable chairs are both very comfortable.”

Emelson adds that the seats operate quietly and their finish nicely matches the theatre’s interior. “They feel sleek and modern, but with an homage to the room’s classical characteristics,” she explains.

The Folger’s architecture features pillars and columns, so there are a number of obstructed-view seats. “Now we can remove these seats if we’re not sold to capacity,” notes Guillot. “When audiences see a number of empty seats, I think it colors their impression – albeit slightly.”

The side galleries have two rows of chairs; during the planning process the Folger staff tried Portable Audience Chairs of different heights in order to create optimal sight lines over the wide balcony railings.

For the first row, 32” chairs were selected; the second row features models two inches higher. “People in the second row don’t realize their chairs are taller, enabling them to see more easily,” says Emelson. “It’s like night and day.”

Aesthetically, the Portable Audience Chairs mimic the fixed seats’ wood tone in the arms and seat bottoms, along with the upholstery. Emelson believes the two chair models look like they belong together.

Overall, she praises her ‘terrific’ experience working with Wenger each step of the way. “Everyone on their team was responsive and understanding of our tight timeline,” Emelson concludes. “We trusted Wenger and they delivered!”



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PRODUCT LIST

Fixed Audience Seating and Portable Audience Chairs.