

Rod Stewart to open The SSE Hydro, a major new entertainment venue for Scotland

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The SSE Hydro, Scotland's largest purpose-built public event arena, will open to the public with a concert by Rod Stewart on 30 September. Its free spanning roof of 120 metres, large enough to encompass Glasgow's Queen Street railway station, encloses a highly flexible amphitheatre for an audience of up to 13,000. Externally, the arena is wrapped in lightweight translucent panels taking the excitement of the concert to the city – the whole building can be illuminated to glow as a beacon of colour on the waterfront.

The new building joins the landmark Clyde Auditorium on the northern bank of the River Clyde within Glasgow's former docks, and has been designed from the inside-out to ensure excellent views of the stage and high quality acoustics. The flexible arena has capacity for 12,000 seated or 13,000 with standing in the performance bowl, and includes 11 hospitality boxes, two large VIP suites and a club seating level. As well as accommodating a wide variety of concerts and stage sets, the SSE Hydro will also be configured as a sporting venue to host netball and gymnastics during Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games.

The seating bowl is shaped like an amphitheatre, enclosed by a lattice steel roof and wrapped in translucent ETFE cushions. The 1,400 tonne steel diagrid roof, one of Europe's largest free-spanning roof structures, is held aloft by a circular array of angled concrete fins, which support a tilted seating bowl, designed to draw the audience close to the stage and provide the best possible viewing angles from every seat.

The whole building can function as a huge screen for projections, and every aspect of the state-of-the-art lighting system can be programmed, allowing performers great creative freedom to shape the venue, inside and out. Inside the seating bowl, the stage lighting rig was similarly developed with performers in mind and evolved through discussions with production crews – weighing 260 tonnes, its size and circular form allow maximum flexibility.

The circulation spaces run around the perimeter of the performance bowl. Here, the façade is more transparent to draw in natural light, animating the building with the movement of people and exposing the dramatic structure that supports the tiers of seating within. The spaces are protected from solar gain by a frit pattern, applied to the ETFE cushions.

Foster + Partners designed every detail, from developing the complex geometry of the roof structure to the interior signage. The practice worked with graphic designer, Per Arnoldi to devise a bold primary colour palette for the circulation spaces, and the cushioned seats were developed specifically for the project with the manufacturer.

Designed to reduce energy demands, the building combines natural and mechanical ventilation – fresh air is drawn into the building above the entrances, and vented at a high level. The SSE Hydro is integrated with the district-wide public transport and the surrounding landscaping provides a valuable new civic amenity – the building is set back from the river to frame a new public space between the arena and conference centre. In addition, a low concrete bank curves around the base of the

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arena, concealing catering and support spaces and providing an attractive green, landscaped plinth.

Spencer de Grey, Head of Design, Foster + Partners:

“With its vast steel roof and capacity for 13,000, this is the largest performance arena that the practice has designed – operationally, it allows performers a great deal of freedom in staging events, and visually, its form helps to capture the excitement of a concert. We were delighted to have the opportunity to work with SECC once again, almost 18 years since we were first commissioned to design the Clyde Auditorium. The SSE Hydro has been a great team effort and it is fantastic to see the arena come to life for its first concert.”

Notes to editors: The SSE Hydro website: www.thehydro.com

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