The main auditorium is surrounded by a rendered concrete grid, supported by timber pilaster arches.

### Set the stage

**O'Donnell & Tuomey’s joyful new building for the Lyric Theatre in Belfast is the stuff of theatrical legends, writes Oliver Wainwright**

**Photographs: Dennis Gilbert**

**Thrusting off the railway tracks, the Lyric Theatre was founded on the principle of then 114 years ago. The story of the Lyric Theatre is less a matter of lineage, but the history of its location and its community.**

The original theatre was built in 1979 as the first purpose-built theatre in Northern Ireland. It was designed by architects O’Donnell & Tuomey and was a response to the need for a new theatre in Belfast.

The new building is designed by the same architects and is located next to the original theatre. The design incorporates the latest in theatrical technology, including a flexible seating arrangement and a state-of-the-art stage.

**It should feel like a home – an extension of the houses along the street**

The building is a response to the need for a new theatre in Belfast, and it is designed to be a welcoming and inclusive space for both audience and performers.

**House for Theatre** – a place on the corner of a domestic street and the city's main thoroughfare.

The theatre is designed to be a flexible space that can adapt to the needs of its users. It includes a variety of performance spaces, as well as rehearsal and backstage facilities.

The building reflects the materials of its context, sited at the end of a street of red brick houses.

**Set the stage**

O'Donnell & Tuomey’s joyful new building for the Lyric Theatre in Belfast is the stuff of theatrical legends.
BUILDINGS: O’DONNELL & TUOMELY

The peak of the theatre’s fly tower rises above the terraces on the bank of the River Lagan.

visual order around and between them. “They are like modern trees,” says Thomas. “There is something organic about the way the spaces are contained as developing into the sky through their curved, radiant forms — folded expanses of blank wall punctuated with glass, intermixed with the structural elements.”

From now on, the tiered music room, once a 19th-century coach house, is now used as a reception area. The main entrance, off Kilgrampread Street, is an iconic space that preserves the original Glenarm window.
the floor— the kind of metrically precise detailing that makes it beautiful. The floor is an elegant and refined feature of the design that enhances the overall aesthetic of the building.

As we move up to the second level, the level of finish and attention to detail is even more pronounced. The materials—such as the timber walls and ceiling—continue to play a significant role in creating a sense of warmth and comfort. The use of natural light and the careful arrangement of spaces allow for a seamless integration of indoor and outdoor environments.

The third level introduces a series of open-plan spaces that are designed to encourage interaction and collaboration. The layout is fluid, with minimal partitions to promote a sense of openness. The materials used here are consistent with those on the lower levels, maintaining a cohesive design language throughout the building.

The fourth level is dedicated to additional office spaces, with a focus on maximizing natural light and providing, quiet, private areas for concentration. The careful consideration of space and light continues to be a key design principle, ensuring that the building is both functional and inviting.

In summary, the O’Donnell + Tuomey building is a testament to the power of design in shaping spaces that are not only functional but also inspiring. Through the careful consideration of materials, light, and space, the building has been transformed into a dynamic environment for learning and innovation.