

Venture capital



The green light has been given to the €100m Cyprus Cultural Centre. **Tassos Angelis**, general manager of the Cyprus Cultural Foundation, reveals more about the project.



When I want to highlight the scope and significance of the Cyprus Cultural Centre (CCC), a project coordinated and overseen by the Cyprus Cultural Foundation (CCF), I often compare it with the ancient theatre of Salamis. I say that because of the magnitude of this project. Without wishing to conceal my pride, we Cypriots believe the finished product will be nothing short of the greatest cultural infrastructure created in our country since the theatre of Salamis.

Despite its small population, Salamis – one of the few city-kingdoms of Cyprus – provided a huge cultural complex during the Hellenic and later Roman periods, one that boasted a theatre with 20,000 seats, an amphitheatre, a gymnasium, an agora and much more.

This undoubtedly demonstrates a level of civilisation that we can only dream of reaching today. It is precisely this point that gives rise to a number of tough questions. Why is it that what our ancestors managed to create over 2,000 years ago, appears to us today, in the age of technology and opulence, to be an elusive dream? Why is it that this part of the world, which in the past offered the greatest civilisations to humanity, is today suffering from cultural anaemia and poverty? In what way, then, is it possible for civilisation to return to its cradle?

We in Cyprus, having searched for the lost threads in the depths of history, have managed to find the strength and the means, though belatedly, to unite the past with the present and the future of our civilisation. This ambitious project has been undertaken by the CCF.

Our organisation was created in 2005 by the Council of Ministers and was tasked with the creation of a Cypriot cultural centre in Nicosia, the capital of the Republic of Cyprus. The arts complex will be located close to the presidential palace and the legislature; an area that has long been designated a major cultural zone. The site is adjacent to the proposed new House of Representatives, the new State Art Gallery, the site of the new Cyprus State Theatre and other government buildings. The district also lies at the heart of the new city, creating a focal point for the capital.

In 2006 we launched an international architectural competition for the design of the CCC – one that attracted 60 applicants from 16 countries. Following a unanimous vote, the jury gave British firm Hopkins Architects the job of turning the project into reality.

The building will stand as one of the most significant new works of architecture in Cyprus; a national venue for the performing arts that will have a transformational impact upon cultural provision in Nicosia, in Cyprus and within the wider multinational context of the European Union and beyond. The building combines architectural excellence with functionality; one that has a sense of presence and occasion; and that is, above all, a human resource, a forum for the people of Cyprus.

Our main goals at the CCF are to establish a centre for the performance of symphonic and chamber music particularly – and, as appropriate, dance, opera and musical theatre scaled to the needs of a

Above and opposite: CGI renderings of the Cyprus Cultural Centre, due for completion in 2012.

Inset: Tassos Angelis, general director of the CCF.



growing (and increasingly discerning) regional audience and the growing market for cultural tourism. It will showcase local, regional and international performances – allowing the best of local work to be seen and heard alongside productions and performances of the highest international standards. The venue will also play a strong role in the country's civic and educational life.

In addition to its main performance space of 1,400 seats, the complex will also feature a smaller 500-capacity hall, an outdoor theatre suitable for large-scale concerts and popular entertainment, exhibition spaces and state-of-the-art conferencing facilities.

Without doubt, this project signals something of a cultural renaissance for us and, once completed, Cyprus will earn a place on the international cultural map. The highest quality and best forms of worldwide art and culture will become accessible to the Cypriot public while the human and social values expressed through art and culture will help bridge the gap between the two main communities of our nation after decades of conflict and separation. The millions of people visiting our island every year will also be able to participate in the magic of art offered at the CCC while Cyprus will become a link between the southeast Mediterranean and Europe.

As a member of the European Union and with the help of the CCC, Cyprus – located at the crossroads of three continents – may be considered a cultural bridge of communication, cooperation and development between Europe and its neighbouring countries. The geographical position of Cyprus has been and continues to be a source of misfortune for our people and our neighbours; one that continues to attract invaders and conquerors set on expanding their military and economic interests.

We live in an area that is constantly plagued by wars, conflicts and disagreements, with dire consequences: instability, insecurity and socio-economic underdevelopment. It is not surprising, therefore, that culture is not considered a priority for governments and populations but is marginalised; instead of being a vital and valuable part of life in every society, it is seen as a form of luxury.

We believe that the time has come for European Cyprus to be seen not as a springboard for trials and tribulations but as a springboard for art and culture. With this in mind, the CCC and our new venue will be at your disposal. ■