



Opus 8

Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Palau de la Música Catalana, Barcelona

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Art Nouveau in Barcelona? But of course: Gaudí! Nothing wrong with that, but it is definitely not enough. There is an artist of equal standing whose name should be included in the answer, though he has been ignored for decades, even by experts: Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850–1923). So it is high time that some attention was paid to this man who fought not only for the architecture of Modernisme but with equal passion for political self-determination and the cultural renaissance of Catalonia – and it is particularly time to look at one of the most astonishing works produced by the European architecture in the early 20th century, the Palau de la Música Catalana, the Catalanian Palace of Music in Barcelona.

It is the perfect example of a work produced by an architectural movement also aiming for intellectual and artistic self-assertion of Catalonia. And so Catalanian Modernisme is not just a Spanish variant on Art Nouveau of the kind that flourished between Paris and Tallinn, Glasgow and Moscow, but an entirely individual creation with a regional flavour, drawing on the past. And so Gothic and Islamic influence can also be seen in this architecture of exceptionally jubilant colour and forms – as in the Palau, commissioned from Domènech i Montaner by the ambitious Orfeo Català choir in 1908 and built on the periphery of the Old Town. It is an amazing building deriving its overwhelming power not least from the contrast between structural restraint and decorative exuberance. The Palau is built of iron and red brick, brightly glazed ceramics and colourful glass, ornamented all over and flooded with light, but the main experience is the large hall, a magical work of spatial art in which musicians and audience are as one.

Recently Catalanian architect Oscar Tusquets has completed his renovation and extension of the Palau. His work is congenial. He has been successful in effecting the difficult symbiosis between the present age and the historical building. The new components confidently present themselves as such. This is his way of showing respect. At the same time, however, even though it is in reality clearly Tusquets' work, it also appears to merge seamlessly into and onto the old building.

It is well known that Manfred Sack is not just an architecture critic but also an expert on music. This makes him particularly well qualified to analyse the Palau de la Música. Hisao Suzuki is one of Spain's most sought-after architectural photographers.

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