CASE STUDY

Cinema Orion

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Genelec brings a new era of sound to historic Cinema Orion in Helsinki



GENELEC®



THE BACKGROUND



Cinema Orion, designed by architect **Martti Välikangas**, is a rare surviving example of Finnish art deco and one of Finland's oldest motion-picture theatres. Its golden ornaments, ceiling lamp and pillars draw on ancient Egyptian influences. The lobby has a perspective inspired by the Vatican's Scala Regia. Now this landmark has an audio system to match its interior, built around Genelec's smart active loudspeakers and subwoofers.

For around 40 years, Orion was home to the Finnish National Film Archive's cinema. When the Archive moved to Oodi Central Library in 2019, the non-profit cultural organisation **Elävän kuvan keskus (Elke)** took over the venue. Elke works to promote film culture in all its richness and diversity, both nationally and locally at Orion. Its programme includes film classics, cult films, curated series, new arthouse and European titles, and Finnish films with English subtitles. It also hosts festivals, film events and talks with filmmakers.

"The aim of the project was to elevate the cinema experience to the next level," says **Minna Nurmi**, Cinema Manager at Orion. "We had a pretty outdated sound system inherited from the film archive era, and we have a big audience of cinephiles and film lovers. We wanted to create a premium cinema experience for the cinema lovers and those who care deeply about cinema."



A GENELEC DEMO THAT SETTLED THE QUESTION

The choice of loudspeakers was made in the room itself. During a demo session, the Orion team listened to Genelec's S360 main monitors playing from the front alone, with no surround channels active. "The sound suddenly became so vivid and so full-bodied," Nurmi recalls. "It was full of nuances, and the clarity was extreme. We were really amazed."

Three S360s were specified for the front channels. They are joined by twelve 8340 Smart Active Loudspeakers for the surround channels in the main hall, and four 8330 loudspeakers on the balcony. Two 7380 subwoofers complete the system. Together they deliver clear, full-bodied sound throughout the auditorium.

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>
> Minna Nurmi
> Cinema Manager at Orion



BRINGING MODERN SOUND TO A HISTORIC SPACE

The 1920s auditorium is very different from a modern black-box cinema. Once the new system was running, the team found that many elements of the building resonated with the sound. Each one had to be tracked down and isolated, spot by spot, to remove the resonances.

The 44-seat balcony required a different approach. With the help of Genelec and renovation contractor **CinemaFix**, the balcony now has a full 7.1 surround experience of its own.

The entire system is calibrated with Genelec's GLM software, which measures each loudspeaker's in-room response, and corrects for the influence of the room. "Everything was calibrated specifically to this space using Genelec GLM," says Nurmi. "It's perfectly handmade for this space now." The result is a system that handles both high-impact blockbusters and quiet, delicate soundtracks with equal ease.



Minna Nurmi, Cinema Manager at Orion.



FROM STUDIO TO STALLS

Orion's audiovisual setup covers both the digital and analogue worlds. Most films are screened in 4K on a Sony projector. Orion also runs two 35mm projectors, used almost monthly, and a 16mm projector. "We tested the Genelec system with 35mm film too, and it sounds amazing from film as well," says Nurmi.

For Orion, choosing Genelec was about more than sound quality. "It was amazing to think that we can hear in the cinema hall something that the sound designer and director actually intended," Nurmi explains. "Genelec was not chosen only because of its legendary quality. After discussions we noticed we had many shared values: ecology, durability, products that last long in heavy use, and cultural and educational democracy."

This link between studio and cinema matters to her. "It's amazing to think that sound professionals use the same Genelecs in their studios when designing the sound for a film, and now we can bring that experience to the audience in its finest form. That's cultural preservation. It lets people experience a film as it's supposed to be experienced."

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OPEN TO EVERYONE

Access is central to Orion's mission. With reasonable ticket prices, students, seniors, children and low-income audiences can all enjoy high-quality sound. The cinema also supports new talent, regularly showing student work and indie films. "They deserve the best possible conditions to show their films," says Nurmi.

The new system also opens up new possibilities. Orion plans to expand its audiovisual events, including cine-concerts, and hopes to welcome filmmakers who want to work on different versions of their films in the space.

Audiences have already noticed. Guests at a screening of Primavera, a film about the life of Vivaldi, were struck by how it sounded. They even commented that they were able to enjoy the visuals more as a result of the improved audio quality.

"We really believe and hope that people will rediscover Cinema Orion all over again with this new sound system," concludes Nurmi, "and rediscover their favourite films as well."

THE DETAILS

Loudspeakers

3 x S360
12 x 8340A
4 x 8330A
2 x 7380A
GLM Software



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