

Powell Hall

St. Louis Symphony

718 North Grand Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 533-2500

<http://www.stlsymphony.org>

Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)

Overall Rating: 5 stars

- Accessibility by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Usher Staff: 5 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: not applicable
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 5 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 stars (untested by this author)

This evaluation was last updated on July 1, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Mrs. Cynthia Schon, Facilities Manager for Powell Hall.

Attending a performance at Powell Hall is an absolutely amazing experience. The building's acoustics complement the high degree of musical talent within the St. Louis Symphony, and seasonal concerts exhibit a diverse array of works by a variety of composers, ranging from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to George Gershwin to film composer John Williams. Blind and visually impaired visitors will find the Powell Hall staff extremely accommodating, the facility relatively easy to navigate, and the musical performance immensely impressive. The readily available usher staff enables a blind or visually impaired visitor to navigate the facility confidently and with minimal difficulty. Additional accommodations such as Braille signage and downloadable program notes provide visitors with easily accessible information about the facility's performances, services, and amenities. However, the auditory splendor of the orchestral performances, without a doubt, remains the Symphony's most enticing quality for both sighted and non-sighted patrons.

The first advantage to visiting Powell Hall is its close proximity to public transportation. Cabs, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers are able to drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance. For those utilizing Metro services, the number 70 bus has

a stop immediately outside Powell Hall, as well as at the connecting Grand Avenue Metro Link Station, located one and a half miles south.

Upon arriving at the hall, there are ushers at several major points inside and outside of the building which make it very easy to solicit assistance to find one's way into, around, and out of the facility. Often, the ushers are waiting on the sidewalk as patrons disembark from their vehicles, and they are prompt to check on patrons during intermission and after the performance if requested. The ticket window is also conveniently located straight inside the main entrance. Although sighted assistance is necessary to locate one's designated seat, the logical and straightforward layout of the facility can enable a blind or visually impaired individual to navigate the facility independently if given clear directions. Braille signage on restrooms and in the elevator further increase the potential for independent travel. However, the hallways can become especially crowded after the performance as everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exits. As a result, it is advisable for blind or visually impaired individuals to solicit sighted assistance when exiting the theater. Due to the moderate lighting in the auditorium, all low-vision individuals should always bring their canes to Powell Hall, minimizing any potential problems in navigating large congested crowds.

If a sight-impaired individual is interested in attending a performance at Powell Hall but cannot afford the regularly priced tickets, many available discount options make attending a symphony at Powell Hall very affordable for everyone. Individual student tickets are available for \$10.00 (Premium Orchestral Series) and \$25.00 (Live at Powell Hall Series) with proof of a valid student ID. Thanks to the generosity of the St. Louis Symphony, a limited number of complimentary ticket vouchers are available annually through the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These are also on a first come, first serve basis. Interested individuals may reserve up to two complimentary tickets by calling the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000.

Occasionally during certain performances, the Symphony utilizes footage on a large movie screen in order to enhance the musical performance. For example, highlights from the 2014-2015 Live at Powell Hall series will include *The Godfather*, *Gladiator*, *Pixar in Concert*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. All will feature a screening of the above-mentioned movie with the St. Louis Symphony providing the live film score. Descriptive audio will not be offered for these performances, and low-vision individuals may wish to bring binoculars or a monocular, depending on the location of their seat. The auditory presentation, however, surpasses anything heard in a modern cinema. Hearing the film score performed live really gives the listener a deeper appreciation for the talent and coordination that is involved in recording music for a motion picture. Blind patrons will enjoy this auditory sensation just as much as any sighted patron.

As one will quickly discover, there are no bad seats in the house from an auditory perspective, though the top-most balcony seats could easily be considered prime auditory seats. However, guide dog users will wish to take extra precaution in selecting a seat when purchasing tickets. Most rows of seats are not spacious enough to accommodate service animals, but if the individual were to request an aisle seat or a seat in a wheel chair section, the individual will find that such arrangements work best for one's four-legged companion.

Before visiting, be sure to check out the St. Louis Symphony's accessible and well-organized website. Here, patrons will find a calendar of events for the current season, sound clips of signature pieces, and other online amenities that will render the visitor well informed and well-prepared for their trip to Powell Hall. Concert programs, for example, may easily be obtained in advance in a blind-friendly format through the Symphony's website. Within a week of the performance, the Symphony posts downloadable pdf documents of the basic program information (minus extra media such as advertisements). These documents are very accessible through screen enlarging software and through OCR software, such as Kurzweil or Open Book. For visitors with low vision, the Symphony maintains a small supply of large print programs (also omitting additional information such as ads), and inquiries of their ability may be made to any usher. As the house lights only produce moderate lighting, if a low-vision individual believes that he or she may require better lighting by which to read their program, that individual would be well-advised to bring a small flashlight, providing of course that that person does not use said flashlight during the performance, as this can be very distracting to other sighted patrons in attendance.

Before the performance or during intermission, visitors may wish to purchase refreshments at one of two bars: one located on the ground floor, just off of the main lobby and another located on the lower terrace. Both bars offer large-print menus upon request, and visitors will find the staff extremely accommodating, willing to assist a patron by whatever means are necessary in order to make the individual's experience positive and enjoyable.

Originally conceived as a movie house, Powell Hall is adorned with an elegant architecture, design, and history. Group tours of ten or more people are available free of charge upon request, allowing both sighted and non-sighted visitors to take in the building's rich history, grand décor, and typical back stage activity. The facility's flexibility on group sizes allows tour guides to adjust their presentation to suit the needs and interests of a particular individual or small group.

The hall's friendly and accommodating service, coupled with the impeccable performance by the professional orchestra, will be sure to make a visit to Powell Hall a truly memorable experience.

For specific details regarding performance times and ticket prices, please call the Powell Hall box office at (314) 534-1700.

For further inquiries, please contact:

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