



Thomas Wallin, Sound Recording Technology student, adjusts sound levels on the mixing console in Studio A.

This building is alive with

the sound of music. Just an outside glance at Del Mar College's newly renovated and expanded Fine Arts Music Building conjures up a sense of flow. A sweeping, concave wall cradles a grass-covered amphitheater, its high windows angled downward like a satellite dish to funnel sound to an audience. Rows of fixed aluminum louvers span the windows and, by design, resemble a giant musical staff.

"The first day I had class, I played my flute out here," said student Isaac Balboa, 26, pointing to the area surrounding the amphitheater. "People over there heard me. It's almost magical."

The \$8.2-million redesign project, begun in fall 2012, was undertaken to modernize the music building and accommodate growing student numbers. It achieved those goals in a big way, combining fresh architectural elements, new space and up-to-date technology.

David Richter, whose firm Richter Architects designed the renovations, led a tour of the new facility Jan. 14 for College officials and members of the Board of Regents.

"We wanted to create architectural energy with this broad curve across the face of the building," he said. "It has flow and movement that is natural to music."

Growth spurt

The building on Del Mar College's East Campus grew by 18,910 square feet. The original music building, built in 1957, had been 29,527 square feet.

"The old building had areas that were too small and inadequate in acoustical properties for us to continue

to use," said Dr. Cynthia Bridges, chairperson of the College's Music Department. "The need for space and technology outgrew the existing space."

A large rehearsal room, library for sheet music, two recording studios and two classrooms with upgraded equipment are some of the revamped building's new features. Construction required both demolition and preservation of existing structures. The Stone Writing Center, which sat near the original music building, was torn down. Wolfe Recital Hall, opened in 1961, was renovated and remains a treasured part of the new building.

Approximately 140 music education students are enrolled at the College for the spring 2014 semester, Dr. Bridges said, and enhancing the learning experience for them was a driving force behind the project.

Great acoustics

Mission accomplished, according to Balboa, a music education major.

"Overall it has improved times a thousand," he said of the building. "The acoustics are great compared to where we used to rehearse. There's new storage space and everything is nice and organized. Unorganized music is a disaster."

Balboa, in his third year of studies at Del Mar College, hopes to become a school band director. He's pursuing his dream right here in his hometown, juggling college classes with a full-time job at Whataburger, a fast-food restaurant.

In the new rehearsal room, natural light streams in through narrow windows on the back wall, complementing fluorescent light from fixtures hanging from the high ceiling. Large, fabric-covered panels that line the walls absorb sound and help achieve the acoustics so valued by musicians, Richter said during the tour.

"We wanted to create architectural energy...
It has flow and movement that is natural to music."

"Memories are part of architecture."

Recorded sound

Musicians favor the stage-like quality of hardwood floors when they're being recorded, Richter said. That's why, in two new recording studios, the floors are surfaced with maple. The wood is bright, rich and polished smooth as a mirror.

Behind a pane of glass in each studio are control rooms where students learn to record music with professional-grade equipment.

"It's a fully functional space to learn about the engineering of sound," Richter said in the control room of Studio A, the larger of the two.

The centerpiece of the room is a Solid State Logic mixing console, manufactured in Oxford, England. It's a hybrid of an analogue console and digital audio workstation – desirable in the recording industry, said Dr. Paul Bissell, music professor and director of Del Mar College's Sound Recording Technology (SRT) program.

Prior to the new studios, recording was a complicated process, Dr. Bissell said. Students in a confined recording room had to communicate by cellphone with musicians in the recital hall who they couldn't see. Now they communicate through a pane of glass via headphones and speakers.

"Compared to where we were a year ago this is so much better," Dr. Bissell said. "Now we have space enough to give sound a three-dimensional quality, and we have the technology to get the sound right."

'Professional experience'

Mando Gonzalez, 26, is in his element at the mixing console and its array of faders, knobs and meters. An SRT major, he said the equipment is "top of the line."

"This is built for a professional experience. It's not like you're in a garage trying to record someone. It's like what you would expect to see in California. I think the (SRT) program here and the equipment is the best in South Texas."

Scaled down but equally impressive, Studio B is

designed for recording ensembles and quartets, Richter said. A sign above its doorway lights up to read "Recording."

The ability to record sound and apply it to the learning process is important to students like Gonzalez and Balboa. Recently, Balboa was struck by the quality of a recorded wind ensemble rehearsal.

"You can hear the full sound rather than just your own sound around your ears," he said. "The full sound is different from what I think I sound like. Hearing it recorded helps you improve. That's what music is all about."



Steven Hansen, adjunct Sound Recording Technology (SRT) instructor and musician, plays a song in Studio A while Dr. Paul Bissell and SRT students record him in the control room.

Live performances

When it comes to live performances, no modern venue would be complete without a green room, where artists prepare to go on stage. With that in mind, architects designed a new green room backstage at Wolfe Recital Hall that includes dressing rooms and plenty of storage space for musical instruments.

"It's the heart of the back of house," Richter said to the tour group.

Wolfe Recital Hall is a venerated space at Del Mar College. Generations of aspiring South Texas artists have taken the stage to give rite-of-passage performances for fellow students, parents and the community. Celebrity guests have performed there as well.

"My son did recitals on this stage," Richter said.
"Memories are part of architecture."



Old meets new

Despite its age, the hall blends perfectly into the new Fine Arts Music Building. Some of its original features were left alone, such as the pristine, stained-wood wall panels. Others were refurbished; the hardwood stage was refinished and the foyer was renovated to better mitigate sound.

A recent addition to Wolfe Recital Hall is a Steinway D Concert Grand Piano, the largest of Steinway's grand piano family. The \$85,000 purchase was made possible by a generous contribution from Wayne and Deneece Squires through the Del Mar College Foundation, along with a trade-in of an older Steinway the department had.

From classroom to performance hall, the new Fine Arts Music Building is fully equipped to nurture the next generation of Del Mar College's music education students and prepare them for the future.

"We're looking forward to seeing how this facility helps students learn smoothly and effectively," Dr. Bridges said. "We want to continue improving the quality of arts in the community."

Music @ DMC: www.delmar.edu/music 361.698.1211



Del Mar College's
Board of Regents approved
design plans for the new Fine Arts
Music Building in 2011. Funds for
the project were derived from a
\$25 million student revenue bond.

Richter Architects was the project architect, with WKMC Architects serving as coordinating architect and Journeyman Construction, Inc., serving as contractor.

Del Mar College's Department of Music offers these degree and certificate programs:

Associate in Arts:

Applied Music
Music Education – Instrumental
Music Education – Vocal
Music Theory and Composition
Associate in Applied Science:
Sound Recording Technology
Certificate:

Sound Recording Business-Level 1

National fine arts accreditation at Del Mar College

Music program: Accredited since 1948 by the National Association of Schools of Music.

Art program: Accredited since
1991 by the National Association of
Schools of Art and Design.

Drama program: Accredited since
2005 by the National Association
of Schools of Theatre.

Del Mar College, in Corpus Christi, Texas, was founded in 1935.
More than 50,000 students have graduated from the College, and more than 22,000 credit and noncredit students in the Texas Coastal Bend are served each year. The College is ranked in the top two percent of community colleges in the United States granting associate's degrees to Hispanic students. In-district tuition costs \$1,169 per semester for a full course-load.