

# IMPROMPTU

A woman with short, styled hair, wearing a black, off-the-shoulder, long-sleeved gown with a sequined bodice and a full skirt. She is standing in front of a dark, textured wall. The magazine title 'IMPROMPTU' is overlaid in large, bright green letters at the top.

## **SUPERSTAR SOPRANO**

RENÉE FLEMING  
RETURNS TO  
ASPEN!

## **Plus**

TANGO: FROM THE  
DANCE HALL TO THE  
CONCERT HALL

PEEKING BEHIND  
THE OPERA CURTAIN

A NEW CAMPUS,  
A NEW ERA



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# ◀ A NEW CAMPUS, A NEW ERA

Hundreds of exceptionally talented young musicians come through Aspen each summer to study at the Aspen Music Festival and School. With the stunning new Matthew and Carolyn Bucksbaum Campus, they now have access to world-class facilities in one of the world's most beautiful settings.

*By Jessica Cabe and Laura E. Smith*

After thirteen years of intensive planning, negotiating, designing, digging, and, finally, building, the Aspen Music Festival and School has a fourteen-building, thirty-eight-acre teaching Campus to rival that of any music institution in the world. And what's more, it accomplishes this while showcasing its spectacular natural surroundings

and sharing the facilities with a pre-K-8 school in what is a unique, eco-friendly institutional partnership. It's a combination of accomplishment that leaves even the Festival leadership responsible for the project amazed.

"I knew it would be spectacular," says AMFS President and CEO Alan Fletcher, "but then once the buildings

went up and I went out there to experience it, it was even more than I had imagined."

The second and final phase of the Matthew and Carolyn Bucksbaum Campus's construction was completed in May. Bringing online these gracefully designed, acoustically honed spaces will usher in a new era for the Festival's

musicians, supporting their pursuit of an even deeper level of artistry and opening new possibilities for their level of musical development in Aspen—and beyond.

That's not hyperbole. See, this wasn't just a remodel. And it wasn't done for any single, simple reason, like providing more space or looking on the surface like the rest of the Festival's world-class buildings. When you get down to it, it was done for the purest, most important reason of all: to provide the best spaces possible for blossoming musicians and to support their artistic transformation.

"One of the things we say about ourselves so frequently is that we are introducing young people to their careers," says Fletcher. "Thus, it only makes sense that the experience of rehearsal and performance should be at the level that they're going to experience when they become concertmasters of the Montreal Symphony or Chicago Symphony or become a soloist playing in

halls all over the world."

Before the redevelopment of the Bucksbaum Campus, conditions for the artist-faculty and young musicians of the AMFS were less than ideal for practice and rehearsal. Though they would perform in the breathtaking Benedict Music Tent, students used practice rooms designed in the 1960s that were cold, damp, and not exactly soundproof. Teachers would consider themselves lucky to lead lessons in carpeted trailers.

And then there's rehearsal by multiple orchestras.

"The Aspen Conducting Academy, which was then, and is, one of the best conducting programs in the world, was in a building that was not meant for it," says Fletcher. "The sound was terrible. You couldn't hear across the orchestra."

That building also wasn't big enough even for the small conducting orchestra. It was not unusual to see percus-

sionists overflowing into the parking lot, playing their parts from outside the building, because they physically would not fit inside the room.

As if finding adequate rehearsal space for one small orchestra weren't difficult enough, the AMFS's summer has five full orchestras rehearsing and performing on a weekly basis.

"We used to routinely have to build a platform over the seats in Harris Hall and put an orchestra to rehearse in there," says Fletcher. "It took hours to set up that platform and have a rehearsal, and then tear it all down. That was just a routine thing because we didn't have space. Now, we can rehearse three orchestras simultaneously on the Campus."

And rehearse them well. In the old spaces musicians couldn't hear each other and struggled to stay in tune in the heat or cold. The new spaces are climate-controlled with custom-made, silent, slow-moving air systems and have acoustic treatments to create-

ALEX IRVIN

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extraordinary sound carry and blend. Fletcher notes this will be a significant change for players striving for the highest levels. "Rehearsal, whether for chamber music or for an orchestra, is, only at the very beginning, about assembling the piece," he says. "Then the real work, the real artistry, is in balance. If the players can't hear each other, then how can they know?"

While the students' and artist-faculty's needs were the top priority in the planning and design of the new Campus, the one-hundred-plus year-round and summer staff members are in for a completely new work experience, too.

"On the old Campus, the staff worked in two completely separate 120-year-old buildings," says Fletcher. "There were genuinely different cultures of the buildings. And in the summer, we were squeezed all over the place. Summer staff were in closets, not even on the Campus, wherever we could fit them. To have a really beautifully coordinated and designed office space makes a very serious improvement to what we will be able to accomplish here."

The Bucksbaum Campus redevelopment story has a happy ending, but it

was a long road to get to there.

It was in 2003 that the AMFS and its now-partner Aspen Country Day School had its first charrette on the stage of Harris Concert Hall to explore the project. The Festival needed orchestral rehearsal halls and studios, the school needed classrooms. It looked like it could work if, and only if, a room divider could be found to split 800-foot classrooms into 400-foot teaching studios. And the key was they had to be soundproof enough for lessons to take place simultaneously on both sides.

"It started with the wall," says Daniel Song, the AMFS's vice president and general manager. "Funny, because the wall divides things, but it was the wall that actually brought us together."

Architect Harry Teague, who also designed the Benedict Music Tent and Harris Concert Hall, found a company called Skyfold that made acoustic, retractable room dividers. Nothing in



Left: A view over Castle Creek of the buildings in mid-build this past winter. Right: The 1890s Newman Bungalow, the home of the foreman of the Newman Silver Mine that occupied this site at that time, was picked up and moved about 150 feet to allow for better site design.

its product line was adequate, but the company said it would custom make a new product for this purpose. Many months and three tests later, Skyfold had done it and the organizations had their wall. The Campus could be built.

"If that Skyfold didn't work, we would have no Campus," notes Song. Skyfold now sells these same room dividers to other organizations across the country.

Another challenge was the extremely complex business negotiations between the two organizations, which resulted in a 500-page agreement, signed in 2012. The talks lasted long enough to exist through multiple Board chairs and presidents, on both sides. At one point, talks were pulled from a slump by an AMFS Board member, Sam Brown, whose professional experience included an appointment by President Clinton to Vienna to mediate discussions among 52 nations on Soviet disarmament. Approvals from City of Aspen and Pitkin County officials also took years, and a total of 46 separate meetings with various councils and commissions.

The final key to the process was a \$25 million lead gift given by Carolyn and Matthew Bucksbaum in 2007 for the project funding. The Bucksbaums, from Iowa, had visited the Festival on a road trip for their first wedding anniversary in 1951. This gift, the largest ever given in Aspen, anchored the \$75 mil-

lion project, whose costs are split between the two partners.

Teague's deep relationship with the Campus pre-dated even his work on the Tent and Hall: As a graduate student, he worked on the buildings on the old Campus with another Aspen architect, Fritz Benedict. To re-imagine the space, and the buildings, Teague spent hours on the Campus at different times of day, sketching the profiles of the surrounding mountains. These eventually came to be incorporated directly into the design of the rehearsal halls through materials and angles that represent "sky, earth, and water." The ultimate 105,000-square-foot plan doubled the square footage of the Campus.

Building was completed in two phases—phase one was completed in 2013, and phase two was completed this year—and each phase could have taken two years on its own. Instead, each was completed in nine months.

"It's the only way it would work," said Jenny Elliot, senior vice president for strategy and administration and the overall manager of the project. "Or else we would have had to cancel a season. This was our only option."

Approaching contractors with this schedule often went about as well as you'd imagine.

"Some said no; some, their brains

exploded," Elliot says with a laugh. "But Shaw was like, 'Well, of course you need it done in nine months.' They'd done it twice before."

Shaw Construction also built Harris Concert Hall, which they were able to complete in one year because the Hall wasn't in use prior to its construction, and the Benedict Music Tent, which was finished in nine months.

So how in the world did the Bucksbaum Campus get finished in two bouts of nine months when it should have taken four full years?

"You pay for it," says Elliot. "Those are your choices. You can sacrifice schedule, quality, or money, and we sacrificed money."

More people, more hours, and better preplanning all had a hand in the quick and most efficient completion of the project. Crews worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day, through snow and freezing temperatures. Some workers even were there on Christmas.

Even an arduous construction schedule like this one offered its moments of fun, though, and the historic nature of the site provided some quirky challenges—as well as some artifacts from the site's former iterations as a silver mine and, briefly, as a hotel and resort.

"They found old mining stuff; they found wagon wheels," says Elliot. "There was a spur of the old Midland Railroad that came all the way down

A large romantic orchestra can rehearse in the 7,400-square-foot Hurst Hall. The building has extra light for acoustic "bloom" to mimic the sound blend and carry of a large auditorium.



KATIE STOOKESBERRY

HARRY TEAGUE (LEFT); LAURA E. SMITH (RIGHT)