“My attitude is never to be satisfied, never enough, never.”

Duke Ellington

Project Narrative

Won in an international design competition in 2013, the LBA-CGS JV and GCS Design Build Team was challenged to transform this aging historic National Landmark through a comprehensive modernization into the nation’s premier facility that will finally match The Duke Ellington School of the Art’s national reputation. The design finds the balance between restoring and respecting the historic fabric, while creating major new academic and performance venues, and expanding the existing complex by 110,000 sf. The “Arts Machine” design seeks to express and expose what goes on inside, promoting interdepartmental awareness and collaboration, while offering many diverse venues to invite the DC Community in to experience the fruits of its pre-professional training programs. The academic and arts environment revolves around a foursided sky-lit atrium, with the new iconic 800-seat Duke Ellington Theatre’s “egg” suspended in the middle as the institution’s metaphoric heart. The historic fabric of the existing original structures were meticulously restored and, in many cases, replicated new where missing. The original high school classroom spaces were efficiently utilized to accommodate the more conventional Academic curriculum spaces. New construction - expressed in contemporary design and materials to differentiate from original structure - is woven in and around the restored historic buildings with the all-new middle section and rear addition able to accommodate the large and tall studios, performance and rehearsal spaces that are required for an Arts School of this caliber. Exterior amenities such as the outdoor Entrance Plaza placed at the top of the restored historic front lawn, the Media Center Terrace sheltered under the grand two-story portico and the Education Terrace on the Ellington Theatre Roof with its spectacular views across the city all contribute to its expression of revitalization.
Modernization of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts

Project Information

National Landmark Structure: Built in 1928 for Western High School
Duke Ellington School of the Arts founded in 1974 by Peggy Cooper Cafritz and Mike Malone

International Design Competition: awarded to LBA-CGS JV August 2013

Start of Construction: June 2013
Project Completion: August 2017
Original School Area: 171,000 sf
Modernized School Area: 271,000 sf (Existing Renovations 74,000, New Construction 197,000)
Parking: 100 space underground garage
Student Population: 620

Curriculum: Standard DCPS High School Academics plus pre-professional training in eight majors:
- Dance
- Literary Media and Communications
- Museum Studies
- Instrumental Music
- Vocal Music
- Theater
- Technical Design and Production
- Visual Arts

Major Public Performance/ Event Spaces:
- 800 seat state-of-the-art Ellington Theatre with:
  - Full Stage Rf, 40 line sets and Girders, Orchestral Pit and W/L
  - Control and Follow-Spot Rooms, Stage Trap, Meyer Constellation Sound System, Lighting Catwalks, high performance acoustics, design
- 272 seats on telescoping system in the Performance Hall with:
  - Control Room, Theatrical Rigging, Lighting Catwalks, Meyer Constellation Sound System capable (future)
- 100 movable seats in the Black Box with Control Room and Wire
- Rope Grid
  - 1,000 square to Ground Floor Atrium Space
  - 100 opera/ Kyle Entree Gallery
  - 50 capacity rooftop Edutainment Terrace
- 50 specialty Media Center Terrace

Academic Spaces:
- 26 Classrooms for Math, World Languages, Social Studies, English and Science

Major Arts Spaces:
- Professional-level Recital Studio and Control Room
- 100 seat Wind Band and Orchestra Rehearsal Studios
- Jazz and Percussion Labs
- Swing Ensemble Rehearsal Studio
- 120 seat Choir Rehearsal Room
- Show Choir Studio
- 6 Piano, Opera and Music Theory Lab Classrooms
- 22 Sound Isolation Practice Rooms
- 8 Sound Isolation Lesson Studios
- Vocal Technique Studios
- Opera Workshop Studio
- 4 Dance Studios and Classrooms
- 8 Tech Design & Production Workshops, Studios and Classrooms
- 11 Museum-based Library Media & Communications Labs and Classrooms
- 3 Video, Film and Editing Labs
- 1 D-D Art Studios
- 1 D-3 Art Studios
- Costume Shop with Costume/Conveyor Storage System
- Scene Shop
- Instrument Repair Shop
- 2 Green Rooms
- 2 Music Libraries
- VP Suite

Other Spaces:
- Fitness/Aerobics Center
- Media Center
- 500 seat Cafeteria with Full Service Kitchen & Servery
- Art Collection Storage with special fire protection & security
- Health Center

DC Public Schools
Artemis Wilson, Chancellor of DC Public Schools

Duke Ellington School of the Arts
Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Co-Founder
Mike Malone, Co-Founder (In Memoriam)
Charles Barber President (Ellington School of the Arts Project)
Sandie Sugg, Interim Head of School
Donald Lee Newman, Director of Operations

Design Builder
LBA - GCS, LLC

Architects
LBA - GCS, LLC

civil engineer: Frank Architects
Christopher Gruen, FAIA, Principal-in-Charge/Director of Design
Christopher Ambridge, FAIA, Sr Design Architect; Derek Bannor, Asst Project Architect

Lance Bailey & Associates
Anne Barney, AIA, Project Manager; Louis Fry Jr, AIA, Project Architect

PV CELLS (FUTURE)

STAIR SHOWN DASHED
TOOTH-IN WALL TO EXISTING FOR CLARITY

THEATRE AND ATRIUM UNDER CONSTRUCTION