



Duke Ellington School of the Arts

CONTEXT: Duke Ellington School of the Arts was established in 1974 and remains the sole DC public high school to offer a dual curriculum encompassing both professional arts training and academic enrichment in preparation for college and careers in the arts. It was born to “house the creative soul of the District” and to mirror the rich cultural diversity of our country. In a new facility, the school was looking to reflect their values and facilitate a nurturing and inspiring passion for arts and learning in talented students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to develop their artistic skills. The LBA-**CGS** Architects Joint-Venture Design Team won an International Design Competition for the commission in 2013. As the Design Architect, **CGS** Architects was challenged to transform the aging, ca. 1898 National Landmark structure through a comprehensive modernization and expansion program to create a world-class facility that aligns with the School’s reputation as one of the Nation’s premier High School of the Arts programs.

SOLUTION: **CGS** Architects’ approach to the challenge was rooted in developing a solid understanding of the original building fabric in order to respect and dignify the architecture while evoking an interpretation that is understandable to its stewards, occupants and visitors. Based on thorough research, the historic fabric of the existing original structure—which over the years had undergone



Location:
Washington, DC

Scope of Work:
Full Modernization Design, Historic Renovation, Architecture, Review and Approvals

Cost:
\$165 Million

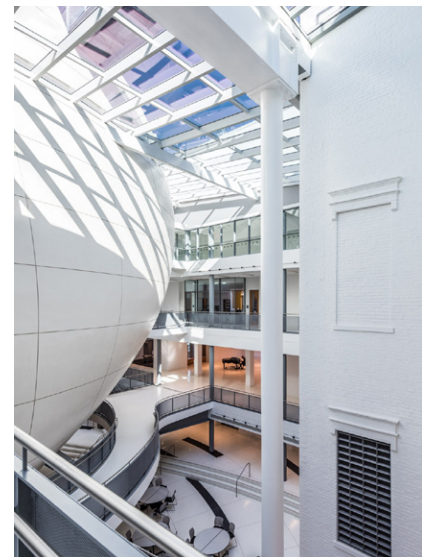
Size:
265,000 SF

Construction Completion Date:
2017

Delivery Method:
Design-Build



significant demolition and unsympathetic interventions—was meticulously transformed. Original spaces were efficiently utilized to accommodate modern academic spaces. New construction—expressed in contemporary design and materials to differentiate from original structure—radiates from the core of the restored historic buildings with new mid-section and rear additions housing large studios, performance venues, and rehearsal spaces. The “Arts Machine” design expresses the functions within, promoting interdepartmental awareness and collaboration while inviting the surrounding neighborhood to experience the products of its diverse pre-professional programs. The academic and performance environment revolves around a four story sky-lit Atrium featuring a new, iconic, 800-seat theater at its core, representing the institution’s metaphoric ‘heart’. Once isolated floor plates and dark, labyrinthine corridors are rationalized to circulate around the Atrium, exposed to natural light and dynamically positioned to be open to views across this central space. At the Atrium floor is located the institution’s central and defining space providing flexible furnishings and serving many school and outside functions. Two additional major rehearsal and performance venues—the Performance Hall and Black Box Theater— are accessed directly through a stand-alone lobby. Excavated space below the Atrium allows required parking to be concealed from view without compromising the overall project massing and footprint, thus preserving the limited outdoor space primarily embodied by the restored historic front lawn. Exterior amenities, including the outdoor Entrance Plaza, the Media Center Terrace sheltered under the grand two-story portico, and the Education Terrace on the Ellington Theater Roof with its spectacular views across the city, all contribute to Ellington’s expression of renewal and revitalization. The product at Duke Ellington is a historical rebirth that does not mimic but codifies, does not copy but magnifies the spirit of this special program. In the end, the building is telling a story, and we have let that story go on.



Key Strengths

- + Unique Design Concept
- + Modernization of/Addition to Existing/Historic Building Fabric
- + Highly Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement Process
- + Successful DC Regulatory Approvals Process (ANC/HPO/CFA/Mayor’s Agent/DCRA)
- + Design-to-Budget