



Colburn's Latest Composition

School Expands With New Building, Students and Programs

by Rod Riggs

Award an "E" for excellence to the Colburn School. That would be on the basis of its graduates, faculty and facilities.

A case can also be made for an "E" for the institution's role of "extension" into the community. Or for "enigmatic," for Richard D. Colburn, its major benefactor, or "extraordinary," for Herbert Zipper, a music educator and major influence.

For nine years, the Colburn School has stood quietly on Grand Avenue at Second Street. Now, it is drawing Downtown's attention with a 12-story addition.

The building is the overture to a program that will add as many as 1,000 students to the school and nearly double enrollment in its elite Conservatory of Music. The first day of classes at the Conservatory is Aug. 22.

The students in turn will generate more on-campus concerts and recitals for Downtown Los Angeles residents, workers and visitors, and also extend performances into more area schools.

Colburn's growth is the result of "defining and clarifying our future evolution," said Deborah L. Berman, dean of the school. "The Conservatory program was the driving force for the expansion. We had to have the facility to do it."

Two programs share the facility.

The School of Performing Arts (SPA) offers instruction in music, dance and drama to some 1,400 students.

"This is not an all-day or community school," Berman said. "Students come here and take lessons. Some do it only for personal reasons. The talented students emerge and may become candidates for the Conservatory."

The youngest students - ages two and up - "don't even know they are in a class," she said. "It's organized playtime filled with music and dance and drama. They are not taught skills, but are exposed to melody, harmony, rhythm, composition and mood. It's all in there. They are like little sponges and they have fun."

An adult population, at the upper levels of instruction, ranges up to 80 years of age and even includes a member of the Colburn board, Berman said.

The dance program, for professional performers, focuses on ballet. It is led by former Joffrey Ballet teachers Glenn Edgerton, who is artistic director, and Leslie Carothers-Aromma, co-director.

"It is a crown jewel," said Berman. "The focus is on ballet but they do many things, from hip-hop to folkloric."

The drama program, small at present, focuses on young children and on improvised performance. Its director is Debbie Devine, co-director of the 24th Street Theater.

Expanding Conservatory

Sharing the campus with the SPA is the Conservatory of Music, an accredited program that offers a bachelor's degree in music performance, an artist's diploma and a professional studies certificate.

The Conservatory aims to produce performing artists, Berman said. Students are selected by audition and the process is very strict, regardless of age, she added.

"Colburn made it possible for a limited number of Conservatory students to have free tuition and free room and board," she said. There were about 80 students last year; approximately 100 are expected this fall.

Robert Lipsett, professor of violin, said the Conservatory program is one of many factors unique to the school. Others are "a world-class faculty, the location in the middle of the arts quarter and the money - thanks to Colburn."

The degree program, started with 15 students four years ago, "will never be huge," Lipsett acknowledged. "It is very difficult to get in and there are auditions at every level."

Even so, Conservatory students appear frequently throughout the city as well as in Pasadena, Santa Monica and Orange County.

Colburn's first Conservatory graduating class in 2006 had five members, four of whom make up the Calder Quartet.

Violinists Benjamin Jacobson and Andrew Bulbrook, violist Jonathan Moerschel and cellist Eric Byers met when they all were students at USC.

"We all were enrolled in different studies," Bulbrook said. "We all graduated in something but because we are serious about it, playing became our priority."

The quartet was in residence at Colburn for two years.

"We were very lucky, working with a superb faculty including Robert Lipsett and

cellist Ronald Leonard," Bulbrook said.

One of the groundbreaking aspects is the free tuition for Conservancy students, which means no waiting tables or hefty loans. "You're relieved of financial burdens, so it's really up to you and your dedication," said Bulbrook. "For all of us, it's the kind of thing we had wanted to do: focus on performance."

For the past year, the Calder Quartet was in residence at the Julliard School in New York City. The members received artist's diplomas.

"New York is a great thing for the student, but Colburn is reinventing the model of the modern conservatory. At Colburn, people get better," Bulbrook said.

At the Walt Disney Concert Hall across the street, Chad Smith, vice president of artistic planning for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, finds Colburn's growth part of "a golden age for L.A. We're lucky to be part of it."

The evolution of cooperative programs between the professional orchestra and the school is natural, he said. For example, Phil Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen and his teacher, Jarma Panula, will hold master classes in conducting and work with the Conservatory orchestra and smaller ensembles.

Smith describes Colburn students as "fine musicians, very directed and very talented."

An expanded Colburn "fills out the area," he said. "By 2009, we will have a full Downtown arts area, including the new performing arts high school at one end and Colburn at the other and will be able to provide opportunities for musicians of all ages to perform, including the L.A. Phil and the Opera."

Berman also dreams of the Colburn School becoming a community gathering place.

"We bring many students into Zipper Hall for performances," she said. "There are Friday night concerts, conservatory classes and a new chamber series including guest artists. And the new building has a cafe that will be open to the public, where people can meet."

Slow Growth

In musical terms, Colburn grew *poco a poco* - little by little - since its beginning at USC in 1955. Its struggles attracted the attention of Richard D. Colburn, an avid amateur violin and viola player, who supported its accreditation as a school of music in 1980. The school adopted his name in 1986.

The enigmatic Colburn, a very private individual, provided the major portion of the \$26 million cost of the school's original building Downtown and also of the \$120 million cost of the expansion.

He also was a patron of the L.A. Phil, the L.A. Opera, the Los Angeles Chamber

Orchestra and other musical organizations around the world. He assembled a collection of about 70 instruments, which he loaned to young musicians.

"He loved to play chamber music," Berman said, and "wanted young musicians to have better instruction and facilities than he did."

Colburn's decision to use his wealth for music education is credited to Herbert Zipper, whose extraordinary life ranged from conducting the pre-war Vienna symphony to Nazi concentration camps to Paris to the baton of the Manila Symphony to internment by the Japanese. After the war, he moved to Chicago to lead the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts. Colburn and Zipper met in Chicago.

In the 1970s, Zipper joined the faculty of USC's school of performing arts, then housed in a World War II-era barracks in a university parking lot. When the school was threatened with extinction, Colburn provided the funds to keep it going.

Nine years ago, the school moved from the USC campus to Bunker Hill. Herbert Zipper died in 1997 at age 92. Colburn died in 2004, also at 92.