

# Dorothy's Vision:

## Celebrating Los Angeles Music Center at 50

One of the nation's premier cultural institutions, Los Angeles Music Center celebrated its 50th anniversary in December. The event brought together for the first time all four of the center's resident companies—Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Opera, and Los Angeles Master Chorale—along with the dance series Gloria Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center.

The performance paid tribute to Dorothy Buffum Chandler, a driving force behind the development of the center, and the namesake for Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, home of the LA Philharmonic and LA Opera (and, for many years, the Academy Awards). A series of celebrity hosts guided audi-

ences through multiple segments saluting the many performers who have appeared at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson Theatre, and Walt Disney Concert Hall.

The evening included a new, specially commissioned, dance piece by Justin Peck, performed by the LA Dance Project; the first-ever simulcast, from Disney Concert Hall to the Chandler, of the LA Philharmonic, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, playing "Helix," composed by Esa-Pekka Salonen; the LA Opera and LA Master Chorale in the banquet scene from John Adams' opera *Nixon in China*; Susan Graham performing three arias; monologues or scenes from David



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Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, and Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God*; Davis Gaines and Dale Kristien singing numbers from *Phantom of the Opera*; Edward James Olmos recreating his role in *Zoot Suit*; and a duet from Matthew Bourne's ballet *Swan Lake*. Also featured was a tribute to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion's 25 years as home to the Oscars. The finale was a musical number performed by more than 200 artists who have appeared live throughout its history.

Dallas-based Corporate Magic collaborated with Los Angeles Music Center on the creation of the event. Stephen Dahlem, senior creative director with Corporate Magic, says the production's design, which also featured scenery by Greg Crane, made use of multiple projection surfaces, showing content that chronicled the Music Center's history and also supported the individual performances.

"Corporate Magic wanted to use the architecture of the building in the show's design, including the Mondrian-like windows, chandeliers, and the reflective surfaces in the Chandler lobby," says Crane. These translated into different scenic elements. For example, four flown pieces, each containing a stringed instrument player, were seen in the stunning opening sequence. "We had to extend them to accommodate the performers, but they are very much based on the building's chandeliers," says Crane. Another element, consisting of arrays of rectangular boxes that flew in, was based on the front windows of the Music Center. "They were especially tricky to design because we wanted to project video on them," Crane notes. "Basically, they

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consisted of gold frames with reflective surfaces filling them out. We wanted each surface to reflect a little differently, so some were filled with lamé, some with beaded fabric, and some with a reflective fabric with strings of crystals and beads." The set was built by Las Vegas-based Dynamic Scenery, with automation supplied by SGPS. A star drop placed farther upstage was supplied by San Diego-based Ray's Rentals.

The final flying piece of scenery was a sunburst that mimicked the Los Angeles Music Center logo. "It was glittering and spectacular," Crane says, adding that because of its iconic status, "it needed to stand out, for sure." Also, Crane designed the on-stage orchestra platforms on various levels that were "painted with different levels of metallic golds to match the rest of the design." These levels had lighting units built into their bottom coves.

The scenic design allowed for three layers of projection, Crane says, "Downstage was a full stage drop, then the Mondrian panels, broken in to multiple sections that raised and lowered, and the upstage projection screen."

Dahlem notes that the rear-projection screen was 30' x 60' in size. "At mid-stage," he adds, "we had an LED screen that flew in and out; it was approximately 40' wide by 15' tall and consisted of PIXLED F11, an 11mm screen that was provided by XL Video. Front projection was handled by the theatre's house projectors, which were Barco FLM HD18s. Rear projection was handled by two stacks of Barco HDX-W18 projectors. Dataton's WATCHOUT was the media server."

Steve Dumbacher, the production's technical director, says, "Much of the content was drawn from the Music Center's archives, and those of the resident companies. It was quite a task to coordinate with the different curators. In the end, we found some amazing stuff."

He continues, "We started in April with the Music Center's archivist, making sure we hit each of the organizations' high points. It was quite a task







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and we had to make some really hard choices. The show could have lasted another three hours! We also wanted to make it not about the history of the center but what the future holds. That was the point of the opening number, with the chandeliers.”

It was an ambitious project by any means, but, Dahlem says, “One of the biggest challenges there was an opera there three nights before. We had to strike it, load in our show, perform, get out, and reload the opera.”

Dumbacher adds, “We were mashed

up in there, trying to create the show around the opera’s line usage and lighting plot. Lighting had a huge challenge because they had to make use of the opera’s rep plot, with some supplements. The lighting designer, Matt Ford, did a great job with that.”

Ford says, “They had a hang that accommodated four operas. The edict was we couldn’t touch that, which made it very challenging. Also, the set had to fit in around the pieces already on the fly rails. We are so used to walking into a space that’s completely

empty and putting things exactly where we want them, that this became a difficult task.”

The opera rig was a combination of Philips Vari\*Lite VL3500 Wash units and Martin Professional MACs, but, says Ford, “We didn’t use that much of the existing moving light rig. We brought in quite a few VL3500 Spots, some VL1000 Arcs, and VL5Bs.” PRG supplied the lighting gear.

He notes, “One reason we used the VL3500 was that it was important to have a unit with shutters, to clip off



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pieces of scenery, for example. Except for that, I could have used a less expensive unit, but it was very important in terms of lighting control."

The designer notes that, given the preponderance of projected imagery, Ford made use of many side and high-side positions. This was not a compromise, he says, because such positions were useful for opera and dance performances. "We used the automated gear to accommodate whoever else happened to be up there. It was pretty much sidelighting and backlighting

with some moving lights buried in the box booms to light the portals that flew in and out." He also made good use of the house's four Lycian followspots.

Lighting was controlled on a PRG V676 console, programmed by Harrison Lipman. "He does the Grammys," says Ford, "and he processes notes very quickly. Nowadays, it's all about managing time and making sure everything flows together smoothly from act to act. That's so much of what makes a show

look elegant and seamless. Harrison managed the existing rig and kept in step with everything in terms of the time we were given."

Amazingly, Dumbacher notes, given the time pressure, "There was never a full, beginning-to-end rehearsal. Everyone at Corporate Magic knows each other so well, it was a very smooth operation." And, one imagines, a night Los Angeles will long remember. 📶



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