





UCLA'S NOTION

Atrium at the Herb Alpert School of Music

With a boost from the Herb Alpert Foundation, UCLA envisions a new kind of music school—a multi-centered, holistic institution that sends forth versatile graduates, ready for the realities of the 21st-century music business.

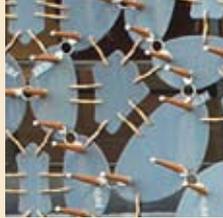
BY *Josef Woodard*

When the news went public, back in 2007, that the Herb Alpert Foundation was offering a gift of \$30 million to the UCLA music department, many working at the juncture of music education and cultural enterprise experienced something akin to reverse sticker shock. During a period of dwindling patronage for the arts, along came the largest single arts donation in the University of California system's history, possibly setting the stage for a burst of progressive ideas and visions of what a music school could—and maybe even should—be doing in the 21st century.

Of course, while the amount of the gift staggers, of equal importance is the ambition and set of concepts behind the endowment. Today, with the newly dubbed Herb Alpert School of Music (HASOM) having recently completed its third full year officially in operation, it seems a ripe time to check in with the progress of the endeavor.

Tim Rice, who has taught at UCLA since 1987 and been the president of the HASOM since its inception, says, "I think that one of the things that interested Herb Alpert was that he could see that the instant we formed a school of music, we would be like no other school of music, probably, in the country. There are two dimensions to that. One is simply, because of the particular study of music at UCLA, we end up with extremely strong programs not only in Western classical music, but in jazz and world music, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in popular music.

"So we end up with a school that looks more like the universe of music than typical music schools, which look more like solar systems with classical music in the center and everything else revolving around that. It's just a kind of de-centering that I think is productive. At the same time, that doesn't diminish the importance of Western classical music. Maybe it feels a little like when Galileo said, 'You know, I don't think Earth is at the center



of the universe.' But that didn't diminish the importance of life on Earth," he laughs.

Looking back on the initial stimulus for the epic-scale endowment, Herb Alpert Foundation president Rona Sebastian speaks about the importance of pursuing a new—or broader—view of the music-school paradigm, in keeping with Alpert's life, work and vision. As a jazz and pop musician, Alpert found great success as an artist, and later as head of A&M records. For many years, he has turned his sights on cultural philanthropic work—and he tends to think big.

Sebastian continues, "We looked at the fact that most conservatory training was very narrow in scope and really didn't do enough to prepare graduates for careers in music and the arts. That was one factor that attracted us to UCLA. We saw great potential for a broadened type of curriculum.

"Secondly, we wanted to choose a partner for this gift that would really be a partner, in terms of being able to brainstorm about what kind of cutting-edge program we wanted to develop, one that was really focused on students and their evolving needs in the 21st century. We felt that UCLA was the right partner, because it already had a strong tradition and excellence in Western classical music, but also . . . in world music, popular music and in jazz."

Originally, the grand plan was realized through UCLA's Christopher Waterman, dean of the school of art and architecture, the academic umbrella under which the music department sat. Sebastian says that Waterman's "thinking really paralleled where we wanted to go, which was looking at a very kind of holistic, more integrated school . . . Also, we were very aware of the fact that they were sitting in an incredibly rich environment. UCLA is a world-class research institution, so the resources, not only in the arts but in all the other fields, being right there, was very enticing."

Alpert's vital role in music education in Los Angeles goes back many years, particularly in connection with his twenty-year legacy of support for CalArts, with its experimental music orientation. CalArts also administers the annual Alpert Award in the Arts—a \$75,000 grant for five mid-career recipients each year, with the honorees then mentoring CalArts students. That award, explains Sebastian, "came about on the heels of the NEA cutting its funding for individual artists. The reaction was that we had to find something to help support artists." (This year's Alpert Award in music, as it happens, went to a CMA member, the flutist Nicole Mitchell.)

But asked whether the much more ambitious UCLA gift and program is a sort of expanded version of the CalArts model, Rice emphatically rejects the idea. "I don't think so at all. For example, CalArts is a performance-oriented school. It doesn't have that large segment of the school devoted to scholarship. I think it's also a school devoted primarily to experimental forms of music and to world music. Again, we embrace everything. The only thing the two might share is that devotion to, and respect for world music.

But we're not trying to turn the Herb Alpert School of Music into a CalArts."

Sebastian explains that the Alpert Foundation has "been involved in CalArts in this really deep, deep way for twenty years. When we did that endowment gift, it was very different in that we were looking at a program that is very innovative and cutting-edge, which really stresses taking lots of risks. [At UCLA] we were really helping to form and develop and nurture a fledgling program, in a way, the CalArts gift was more like 'this program is great. Let's take it to another level of sustainability.'"

Rice points out several areas where the "big gift" has impacted operations at UCLA and helped in the broader plan to forge a new general academic structure through the Herb Alpert School. Increased funding for scholarships has helped attract top students, particularly at the graduate level, and Rice says "that has a big effect on faculty morale."

Equipment and technology at the school have been upgraded, as well. "Particularly in public universities," Rice says, "there are typically no budget items for technology. And in music, that's terribly important. In the last three years, we've been able to create an up-to-date piano laboratory, an up-to-date computer laboratory and update our classrooms with first-rate audio-visual equipment, for playback, screens and all that kind of stuff. That has been a major improvement."

In terms of expanding into pragmatic areas of study relevant to the modern musician, HASOM has sent out tentacles into other regions of the university, with a "Music and Law" class, work with music therapy with the UCLA hospital, and courses in marketing and "branding yourself as a musician." A new contemporary music ensemble has been founded at UCLA, as well, under the direction of acclaimed pianist Gloria Cheng, a contemporary music champion.

"In the area of curriculum," he adds, "we have a few initiatives going down the road. One is a core curriculum that all our first-year students take, where they're really thinking about music from a global perspective. We think that that is a really important place to knit together the various majors of the school into a sense of 'schoolness,' but also give them a wonderful experience of the breadth of music that they will encounter out in the real world."

"We've been able to significantly strengthen our jazz program. Before we became a school, it was kind of running on a shoestring—it simply wasn't up to a fully professional level, in terms of what we were providing our students curricularly. We've been able to devote some money to that program and bring it up to the same level as our classical music program, which has been great."

When it comes to jazz studies at UCLA, no name represents greatness more than that of the jazz guitarist Kenny Burrell, who will be the subject of an 80th-birthday tribute at UCLA's Royce Hall next year. Burrell's association with the university goes back to the late '70s, when he developed a class called "Ellingtonia,"



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the first such Duke Ellington course in the country, and possibly the world. This was a time before jazz studies had become nearly as entrenched in higher education as it is today, making Burrell something of a trailblazer.

Burrell’s work at UCLA developed deeper roots when he became a full-time director of the jazz program in 1996. Several years later, he was the recipient of Alpert’s financial and moral support. From his office in Schoenberg Hall, Burrell recalls his first brush with Alpert altruism. “I remember we did the big celebration of Ellington’s 100th anniversary and Herb came to that,” says Burrell. “Shortly after that, his office contacted me and said they’d like to help. I certainly accepted it, because we could use it.”

Alpert, says Burrell “was very reliable and a wonderful source for us. I’m not surprised, because he’s a beautiful guy, a jazz musician, and has had a huge success. It just makes me feel good, not only about the big gift he gave us, but the small gifts that people don’t read about all the time.”

Burrell is particularly in support of the major re-thinking of the Alpert School efforts, which he was involved in designing. “The bottom line with all of this integration education is that it is preparing musicians to go out into the music world and be prepared to do many things,” Burrell comments. “They’re not all going to get jobs in symphony orchestras. They’re not all going to get jobs in studios and big bands or combos. So the idea is to prepare them to do all of it and be able to handle it. I think that’s a great idea, and I’m glad to have been part of the curriculum committee for this kind of thing, because that certainly is something that I have experienced.”

He says that UCLA faculty and former students “sit in the LA Phil or they sit in the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, and yet you can see them doing a jazz gig somewhere, or working on some commercial in a studio. In today’s world, that kind of versatility and adaptability is important, to be a successful musician. Not everybody is going to become a headliner, but the music business itself is becoming more diverse and more integrated.”

“When you hear a TV program or a movie or a concert, you hear all kinds of elements being played and coming at you, from classical music to rock to jazz. The musicians who are sitting in those orchestras and those bands are able to do all of that. I have a couple of friends who work on that show *Dancing with the Stars*. Think about all the different kinds of music that comes out of that orchestra. I know the leader and I know a couple of the guys in there. They’re very capable of sitting with any symphony or with any jazz group. That’s the future of the music.”

Having the adaptability to cross genres makes sense in terms of both real-world applications and cultural awareness, according to Burrell. “It all boils down to what my guy Ellington said, ‘there are only two kinds of music: good, and the other kind.’ We’re getting there. The purpose [at HASOM] is to prepare the musicians to be better all-around musicians.”

The latest development strengthening the jazz department is a merger with another long-standing program, the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz—a solid educational entity with a roaming home base. Burrell, Alpert and piano great Herbie Hancock have forged a partnering plan, in which six to eight UCLA musicians will be selected for a two-year program, in which students can choose to earn Master of Music degree in jazz.

This merger came about naturally, given that Alpert has also been involved in the life and funding of the Monk Institute since its start. As Sebastian comments, “it was one of those things where you think ‘if we could bring these two programs together, wouldn’t that be amazing?’ It’s the idea of something far greater than the sum of the parts, for both sides.

Because of the funding we do across many, many organizations, the opportunities for synergy that maybe the organizations themselves aren’t aware of. They’re busy with their own work. We’re really pleased, and there is great excitement in both organizations about that merger.”

Meanwhile, in the classical sector of the school, Neal Stulberg, music professor and director of orchestral studies since 2005, points out that “the atmosphere here is characterized by openness and an unusually close interaction between faculty and students. When we see students who are curious about different genres and cultures, we encourage them in this direction. While we’re acutely conscious of the need to turn out expert practitioners, we want our students to think as broadly as possible about music, and how they might fashion a life in music.”

Stulberg leads the UCLA Philharmonia and is in charge of the UCLA Symphony, conducted by graduate students. As an “in the field” example of the new broader and more interactive disciplinary reach of the Alpert school era, the UCLA Philharmonia performed at L.A.’s Disney Hall in April, with a diverse program that included music of Mexican Arturo Márquez, the China’s Ge Gan-ru, Egyptian émigré and longtime UCLA professor A.J. Racy, and jazz flutist-composer-educator James Newton, now a UCLA professor.

Undoubtedly, the centrality of UCLA to the film industry, and the entertainment environment generally, has an effect on the nature of the school. Stulberg notes that “because Los Angeles is one of the world’s arts and entertainment capitals, it attracts enormously creative people—which of course benefits all of our arts departments at UCLA. The senior composer on our faculty, for example, is Paul Chihara, one of our most prominent American composers who has had a major career in both Hollywood and concert music. His master’s program in Composition for Visual Media is the first of its kind, and is attracting extremely talented composers from around the world.

“Our students have exposure to not only Los Angeles’ excellent community of classical musicians, but important studio musicians, film and television composers and arrangers, and experienced music professionals. “



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Left to right: Lani Hall Alpert; UCLA ethnomusicology student Forrest Mitchell; Herb Alpert; Herbie Hancock; Kenny Burrell; and UCLA ethnomusicology student Owen Clapp.





Bassoonist John Steinmetz, who teaches part-time at UCLA, views the slow evolution of the HASOM as a positive sign of change of attitude, philosophy and practicality in academia. “As I see it,” he says, “most music schools prepare students for the jobs of a hundred years ago. I think Alpert chose UCLA and CalArts partly because their programs are connected to current musical life. At UCLA there is an ongoing and still controversial revamping of the undergraduate theory/history curriculum to include musics outside the Western tradition. Personally I like this idea very much, because I think it’s important now to understand Western music as one set of approaches among the many ways of doing music on our planet.”

More broadly, Steinmetz notes that “musical life is changing so fast now, it’s hard to imagine how any institution can keep up. This is an important question for music schools, and I don’t know whether they’re asking it.”

Looking at the state of the school, a few years down the line, Sebastian reports that the Alpert Foundation is encouraged by the progress so far, and is happy to see the program continue “along the path that it’s on now, to the degree that it really is developing the full musician. In other words, the different elements that are going into that curriculum and the priorities that are being communicated to the students are going to help produce artists that are able to be successful in a very competitive world, that are going to be sensitive to the needs of their community, that are going to be able to look at their art form as something that integrates with lots of other disciplines.

“We see it following that model. The graduates of this school will really be able to succeed with the demands that are out there in this new century.”

HASOM appears to be very much in synch with that concept, and working towards deeper levels of the “integration education” model it embodies.

“Well,” says Rice, with a touch of wryness, “money helps. I think what money has helped us do is begin to realize the ambitions that we’ve had for this program. It really is making a difference. My sense is that Herb Alpert got excited about the potential for music study here at UCLA, seeing how varied it was. The money from this gift is really helping put into practice those ideas we presented to him, lo, those four years ago.”

Raised in southern California, Josef Woodard has been a freelance journalist/critic since 1980. He has covered music (of various genres), film and the fine arts for many publications, including the Los Angeles Times, Rolling Stone, Entertainment Weekly, Musician, Option, Opera Now, Artweek, Down Beat, Jazz Times, and Jazziz. He won an ASCAP Deems Taylor award for jazz writing in 1998.