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performing arts
focus

Performance At A Premium

University Of Maryland Designs For Consistency

Located on 17 acres of the University of Maryland's campus in College Park, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center recently celebrated its official grand opening and dedication on September 29. Following four years of construction with a \$130 million price tag, the 318,000-square-foot complex is now the largest single building ever funded by the State of Maryland.

Named for University of Maryland alumna and Virginia artist Clarice Smith, the new facility features six primary performance halls: a 1,100-seat concert hall; the Ina and Jack Kay Theatre, a 650-seat proscenium theater; the 250-seat Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall; a 200-seat dance theater; a 200-seat studio theater; and a 100-seat theater lab. Unlike most performing arts centers on university campuses, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center also serves as home to the departments of theater and dance and the School of Music, offering what the facility describes as "unique opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration as well as student interaction with guest artists." The center additionally boasts a 23,000-square-foot performing arts library as well as numerous classrooms, lecture halls and customized rehearsal spaces.

Theatre Projects Consultants, working closely with acoustician Kirkegaard & Associates, served as the theater consultant on the project and was contracted to provide design services for the production sound, video and communications systems. Theatre Projects



XThe Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland features six primary performance spaces, including this 1,100-seat concert hall.

turned to Paul Garrity, now a principal at Auerbach & Associates in Manhattan who had previously sub-consulted for both firms in the past, to design the extensive systems with TPC coordinating the integration of these systems into the complex fabric of the building.

"One thing we kept in mind throughout the design process was that this was a university facility and would be used by a lot of students, including student engineers," Garrity said. "Therefore, we made the decision to

install similar components in each of the venues so that as engineers went from one room to the next, there wouldn't be a complete culture shock in terms of gear."

In keeping with that philosophy, two manufacturers' names repeatedly showed up on the master equipment list: Crown and EAW. In total, more than 50 Crown Com-Tech amplifiers would be called upon to drive a large number of predominantly EAW loudspeaker enclosures throughout the complex.



XUsed in tandem with 3-way EAW loudspeakers, Com-Tech's AS300 amplifier in the Kay Theatre utilizes Crown's USP2 modules to provide crossover points and EQ settings for the cabinets.

After the specification went out to bid, contracting duties were awarded to SPL Integrated Services. "Having worked with SPL on a number of previous projects, like Baltimore's Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, we were quite pleased that they had won the bid," recalled Dan Mei, senior consultant at Auerbach. "This project was fairly daunting in terms of both size and complexity, but SPL's reputation and record on other high-profile installations sufficiently demonstrated that they could handle it. From a logistics standpoint, it also didn't hurt that their office is based in nearby Columbia, MD."

In October of 1999, amidst the flurry of construction efforts, SPL began to install the audio cable infrastructure, which proved to be an even more arduous and time-consuming task than normal. "All of the performance spaces can be tied together through nearly 60 patch bays in the central recording room so, needless to say, there was a massive

amount of cabling that had to go in," said Don Alberg, SPL senior design engineer and project manager for the Clarice Smith installation. "All in all, we ended up running somewhere between 350,000 and 400,000 feet of wire, which, in itself, took almost four months to pull."

The central recording room is essentially the core of the system. From here, numerous tie lines run out to each of the performance spaces allowing operators to patch practically any signal from any venue to just about anywhere in the facility. For example, in overflow seating situations, audio (and video) signals from the concert hall could be easily routed into additional rooms with a bit of quick patching.

"All of the venues have extensive speaker patching capabilities," Alberg added. "There are Whirlwind plates all over the place with line, mic, video and speaker outputs, which make the rooms extremely configurable. Operators can simply plug something into a wall plate, run upstairs to the central recording room, make a patch, and it's ready to go."

As far as staple gear is concerned, a combination of Crown CT-210, CT-410, CT-810 and CT-1610 amplifiers are spread out between the six halls as well as employed on a number of portable systems that can be rolled around between the various classrooms and rehearsal spaces as needed.

The center's Com-Tech amplifiers that are used in tandem with 3-way EAW loudspeakers, like the KF650s and KF300s in the concert hall cluster and AS300s in the Kay Theatre, utilize Crown's USP2 modules to provide crossover points and EQ settings for the cabinets. "USP2s helped streamline the system as well as reduce some of the overall costs by eliminating the need for some additional outboard processors," Mei noted.

Like Crown amplifiers, EAW loudspeakers are equally ubiquitous at the facility. Chosen in large part for their sound quality, Garrity cited the manufacturer's wide range of product offerings as another key deciding factor—a fact substantiated by the presence of AS, FL, JF, KF, SB, SM and UB Series models around the building.

"EAW is also one of the companies that really bends over backwards to try to work with consultants on specifications," Garrity said. "They're great at providing whatever information or product data is needed in a timely way. And if it turns out that you require a custom product for a special application—although that wasn't the case on this particular project—they're always willing to help."

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