



ON-CAMPUS

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VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY'S NEW JOHN AND JOAN MULLEN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS: **Uniting an Artistic Community Under One Roof**

BY WHITNEY B. WINKELS

Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania, has always had a dynamic artistic community. Until recently, however, all their performance spaces were spread out across the 260-acre campus. “For many years, even before I became president, I have been vocal about my desire to create a permanent home for the arts at Villanova,” says the Rev. Peter M. Donohue, Villanova University President, who served as chair of the University’s Department of Theatre from 1992 to 2006. “The Center for the Performing Arts will be that place. It will be a place of discovery, where knowledge is disseminated and applied, and it will be a destination that reflects the quality of our students, faculty and staff, the caliber of our productions, and the talent of our performers and artists.”

After years of fundraising, Villanova University and Rev. Donohue were able to bring this vision to life, creating a cultural hub to unite the artistic community. In the end, the new John and Joan Mullen Center for the Performing Arts will meet the needs for five unique spaces for performance, rehearsal, education, and dance—finally bringing them all together under one roof.

The new John and Joan Mullen Center for the Performing Arts opened its doors in 2020 in a prominent location on Lancaster Avenue. Not only does the building serve as an important entrance to campus on a busy intersection, but it also houses multiple performance spaces with very specific needs:

Topper Theatre a proscenium theatre seating four hundred audience members, this space offers tailored acoustics, including a Wenger Maestro® Full-Stage Acoustical Shell with Diva® Clouds and custom tormentor doors

Court Theatre an open format, variable capacity, two-hundred-seat theatre with Wenger Portable Audience seating

Smith Performance Lab an intimate and flexible space for classroom and performances with a Custom StageTek® Riser System that seats up to one hundred audience members

Dwyer Family Foundation Choral Room a space for up to fifty people, designed with functionality and acoustics in mind, including StageTek® Seated Risers, Roughneck™ Music Stands, Nota® Music Posture Chairs and a Preface® Conductor’s Stand

Dance Studio a flexible 2,500 square foot rehearsal and teaching space with a sprung maple dance floor, wall-to-wall mirrors, continuous dance barre, and audio/visual playback with track and curtains

Making these spaces a reality was a large task, requiring collaboration, innovation, and customized solutions. Plus, each performance space came with unique challenges and timelines as well as different needs and talent.

Joint-partners Robert A. M. Stern Architects (RAMSA) and Voith and Mactavish Architects were brought on to design the center. L.F. Driscoll served as construction manager; Theatre Projects Consultants (TPC) served as theatrical consultants. Wenger Corporation also played a key role in the collective vision,

providing innovative solutions everywhere—from the acoustical shell, manual control systems, and rigging—to custom seated risers, audience seating, and rehearsal equipment.

“It takes a lot of coordination to bring performing arts spaces to life,” says Ryan Cole, Project Manager at Wenger Corporation. “The ideas and products are just the first step. We have to circle back with our partners and engineering teams constantly. We even think about things like how the cabling and wiring runs up the walls or where to put the outlets and how power was going to be run for the step lights, everything along those lines.”

Fortunately, the Wenger team could streamline the process for the University, providing answers in real-time to address every aspect of the project, all the way from the performance and rehearsal spaces to the classroom settings. Additionally—while coordinating the production, construction and installation schedules—Wenger was able to offer guidance and instruction using their new products at the same time.

“The specifications that Theatre Projects Consultants put together were to a high standard, which we can meet. But it also produces a higher quality product and theatre space for the end users to work in,” Cole said. “I think that’s one of the challenges that we like to meet as a company, being able to hit those quality levels that TPC requires which, in the end, produces a great, fully functional theatre and a highly functional theatre for those end users.”

When the facility opened, Rev. Donohue offered remarks: “Today, a dream is becoming a reality. This is an exciting new chapter for Villanova. I look forward to what the future holds for our arts community and am humbled by the countless people who made today possible.”

“We are grateful for the alumni, parents and friends whose generosity has helped us reach this exciting milestone,” says Michael J. O’Neill, Senior Vice President for University Advancement. “The Performing Arts Center is a highly anticipated facility and an impressive example of how

philanthropic investment is transforming our campus today and for the future.”

“The Center for the Performing Arts is the last piece of Villanova’s ambitious plan for redevelopment on the south side of Lancaster Avenue,” said RAMSA Partner Kevin M. Smith. “We were proud to be a part of this far-sighted reimagining of the University’s physical campus and even prouder to support Father Donohue’s vision for raising the profile of the arts in Villanova’s academic and campus life.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Whitney B. Winkels is the Senior Marketing Communications Manager for Wenger Corporation. She joined Wenger Corporation in 2016 as the Performing Arts Marketing Manager and helped lead marketing and communications efforts for the Wenger Corporation’s Wenger and J.R. Clancy brands. As the Senior Marketing Communications Manager, she oversees Wenger’s Music Education, Performing Arts and Athletics marketing initiatives.

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