

## PSU's Lincoln Hall: Ready for its close-up

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Randy L Rasmussen/*The Oregonian* Bryan Johanson, music chair, likes the acoustics in Room 75 after an extensive remodel. "There's not a bad seat," he says.

Before a \$30.7 million makeover, Portland State University's Lincoln Hall was noisy, hot, cold, dark, cramped, techno-quaint and worn out. Today, it's quieter, more temperate, lighter, techno-smart and ready to rock in an earthquake.

The back-to-the-walls remodel of the 1912 former high school that sits on the corner of Southwest Market Street and Broadway means students and city-goers can once again enjoy one of Portland's best small, downtown concert halls. The building also houses classrooms, rehearsal rooms and storage for the university's roughly 350 music majors and 400 majors in theater and film expected this fall, along with offices for the School of Fine & Performing Arts.

Dozens of civic arts groups use the building, too, from renowned string quartets such as the Takacs Quartet, to White Bird's dance groups to Classic Greek Theatre of Oregon.

An open house today welcomes the public back to one of the oldest buildings on the urban campus.

Lincoln Hall has been a school in one form or another for almost 100 years. Until 1952, it was Lincoln High School and then became Portland State University's first building on the Park Blocks. The music and theater arts departments moved into the grand old building in the early 1970s. Enrollment in both programs continues to grow.

Visitors will notice the changes as soon as they walk in the main entrance off the South Park Blocks. While

the grand stairway remains, the interior entrances to Lincoln Performance Hall have moved. So has the box office. Bathrooms have been added. The hallways are narrower, and light pours from skylights three floors overhead.

Inside the performance hall, not much has changed except for new seats, additional space for wheelchair patrons and a three-fold expansion of the orchestra pit. The hall continues to seat 465.

The larger orchestra pit is significant for the school's nationally award-winning opera program. "In the past, we have been restricted to a reduced orchestration and even then have been forced to put the harpsichord, percussion, basses or someone up in the wings on either side of the stage because there just wasn't room in the pit," says Christine Meadows, Director of Opera. "Of course, this can cause all kinds of ensemble and tuning problems, not to mention being distracting. I don't expect the enlarged pit to change our repertoire choices too much, but it does open things way up."

More dramatic changes occurred downstairs, in Room 75, a former lecture hall turned performance space. Continental seating (no more central aisle) increased the capacity from 204 to 220 seats. New acoustic clouds hang from higher ceilings. New walls, a new stage floor and new seats in three shades of green ring the room, which will be used for classes, rehearsals and performances.

"There's not a bad seat," says Bryan Johanson, the university's music chair. He likes the onstage sound so well, he chose the space to make a guitar recording earlier this month.

"We can hear each other really well," he says. "It's a perfect 220-seat hall."

Another change is the addition of a new, 48-seat recital hall on the third floor. Full of light and acoustically lively, it will host student recitals, receptions and small chamber concerts. A Steinway concert grand and a new harpsichord by Portland builder Byron Will sit ready to play. Singers will love the resonance.

"I think this is the room that is going to wow everybody," Johanson says of the former moldy and leaky teaching studio.

The impetus to remodel Lincoln Hall came out of desperation. The nearly 100-year-old building was "one of the worst buildings on campus," says Barbara Sestak, dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts. In 2007, the Oregon Legislature approved \$29.1 million to pay for deferred maintenance, including seismic upgrades. An additional \$1.5 million in Oregon stimulus money brought the total to \$30.7 million.

The makeover didn't add much space to the music or theater departments, but significantly reconfigured it, Sestak says.

Natural light returned to street-level classrooms when previously boarded-up windows were uncovered. Massive, 60-foot steel beams and concrete "sheer walls" brace the building in case of an earthquake. New efficient but historic-looking windows replace all 324 of the old ones. Old heating/air conditioning equipment came out and a new unit sprouted on the roof, creating practice rooms and theater storage space and room for 25 computer/music stations. Walls were demolished or moved to increase classroom sizes, including an acting studio and acting classroom.

In all, 580 people worked 162,000 hours on the building, says Ron Blaj, project manager. With a little more work, the building may qualify for a LEED Platinum certificate, the highest energy efficiency rating in a national program that encourages sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, selection of materials and indoor environmental quality.

If Sestak can raise an additional \$4 million, Lincoln Hall will receive a new three-story glass tower, creating a dramatic entrance on Broadway. So far, she has raised \$301,000, she says.

*The public can tour Lincoln Hall after a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m. today, Sept. 23. Additional tours with performances and short lectures take place at an open house beginning at 10 a.m. Oct. 9.*