



# Hope springs Eternal

The new performing arts center at Indian Springs High School is not only a flexible educational resource, but acts as a beacon for the wider community

**Above:** The width of the proscenium opening can be adjusted to suit different performance types

Although the city of San Bernardino is one of California's poorest and most violent, the Indian Springs High School Performing Arts Center is a symbol of the community's determination to break the cycles of violence and poverty by instilling a love of the performing arts and improving the overall quality of life and learning.

"The design concept was to create a superbly functioning, state-of-the-art, flexible performing arts center which would be an icon for the school and the community," says John Fisher, president of John Sergio Fisher & Associates, which designed the venue.

The 19,452ft<sup>2</sup> (1,807m<sup>2</sup>) center has a 514-seat multifunctional venue with full support spaces and will also house a black box theater in the future. The front lobby, which doubles

as an art gallery for use by the students and the community, is lit during the day by a tall north-facing curtain wall.

## Three types of end users

"Flexible technical resources will enable the community, school and district to use and enjoy the facility for many different functions," says Fisher. "Thick concrete masonry unit [CMU]-bearing walls support the steel trusses and beams and also provide excellent sound attenuation to and from the theater, as well as thermal lag.

The proscenium theater has a fly tower with gridiron and rigging for 25 line sets, including two for an orchestra shell. The proscenium opening can be adjusted in width from 40ft (12.2m) for plays to 60ft (18.3m) for orchestral, dance and musical performances. There is an orchestra pit lift that can rise to one level to



provide space for 29 additional seats, and can rise still higher to create a thrust stage.

The front-of-house stage lighting positions are contained on a tension grid for position flexibility, and on a catwalk. Tracked draperies at the rear of the tension grid, catwalk and side galleries provide adjustable acoustics ranging from a one-second reverberation time for drama and sound-reinforced musicals, to 1.7 seconds for orchestral works. The convex side-wall reflectors are designed to prevent overlapping sound waves and provide early reflection and sound intimacy.

### **Architectural features**

The curved north-facing, all-glass lobby has a commanding mountain view. The audience chamber ceiling is a convex curve that swoops up to the fly loft and disperses sound waves.

Throughout the building, the structure, HVAC and fire-protection systems have been left exposed so that the building itself is a tool for learning, particularly for students interested in the entertainment industry, the design professions or the construction trades.

### **Technological tools**

The project has other flexible theater system attributes (including acoustics) that make this a performing arts center not only for students setting their sights on a career in the entertainment industry, but also for those considering other fields. The lobby, cross aisle and stage are at the same level, eliminating the need for a wheelchair lift or ramp. There is a hidden lift for musicians to access the orchestra pit. The sightlines have been designed so anyone in any seat can see the edge of the stage.

**Above:** The facility's glass-fronted lobby also doubles as an art gallery



## DESIGN



Above: The line sets, with performance draperies and orchestra shell ceiling units flown above

Top right: The multifunctional hall seats 514 people

The theater will be in constant use by the students and administration, as a major venue for the community and visiting troupes.

### Flexible design

There are company switches to enable the community to bring in its own lighting and sound systems for musical and theatrical performances. The orchestra shell's hard surfaces provide early reflections to the audience, enhancing the feeling of intimacy in musical productions. The orchestra pit lift provides a stage extension that the district can use for large,

## MEETING OF MINDS

The programming and design were defined through a creative problem-solving group. John Fisher, as the architect principal, acted as a neutral facilitator, eliciting qualitative and quantitative requirements and ideas from the stakeholders. These included the director of facilities, principal, faculty, students, maintenance and operations staff and the community.

Fisher took large notes on newsprint, hung them on the walls, and repeated the process around the room until a consensus was reached that fitted with the budget. Many plan and section and 3D options were generated, and a final selection made from them, unanimously, by the stakeholders.



on-stage administration meetings and of course, the school can use the theater for convocations, graduations and all types of performing arts events, including films. “The uses for all three entities are unlimited, supported by the state-of-the-art technology,” comments Fisher.

### Environmental features

The CMU walls are designed to provide low energy consumption performance with most of the low-emissivity glazing facing north and sun control louvers on the sparse glazing to the south and west (not installed before the photoshoot). All of the lighting, including the theatrical lights, is LED, and the CMU is produced locally. Although the district chose not to participate in any sustainable program, the building meets the criteria for a LEED Silver rating.

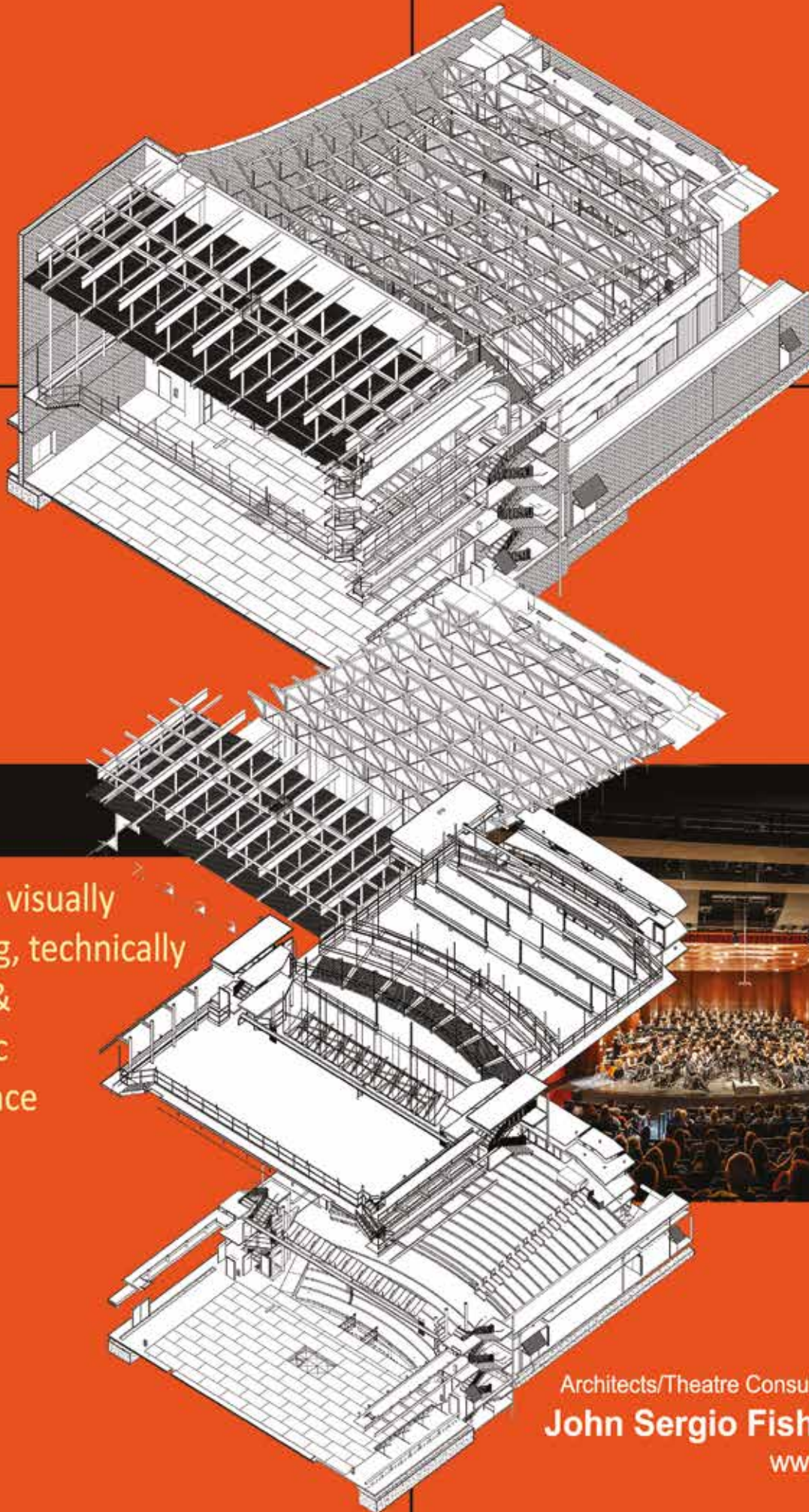
“The building is an imposing icon for the arts and the school, which can be seen from a mile away on the street that serves the entry to the campus,” says Fisher. Visually, it dominates the existing one-story buildings of a converted middle school, but uses some of the same color and material palette – CMU, glazing and corrugated metal. On the campus's south exit corner, it sits at the end of the main parking lot, across from the administration building and is secured by fencing and gates, except at the main lobby entrance for the public.

According to the district, the Performing Arts Center is setting the standard for its educational programs rather than fitting into an existing program. The building can accommodate full orchestra, choral performances, productions of any type, displays of student and community art, and the instruction of theatrical productions.

“The Performing Arts Center is not a reflection of the community's current state, but rather an aspiration of what it can become,” says Tom Pace, director of facilities planning and development at John Sergio Fisher & Associates. “The building is a reminder to the community that it can choose to reach for the stars. Every time the community thinks it has reached its capacity to meet a challenge, it can look up at the Performing Arts Center and be reminded that this capacity may well be limitless.” ■

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