Behind the Scenes

A Legacy for the Future

Winter Festival Launches Campaign for Arts & Lectures

By Brett Leigh Dicks, News-Press Correspondent

When UCSB Arts & Lectures launches its Winter Festival on Monday, the long-running local cultural series also will commence the first major fundraising campaign in the history of the program.

Campaign for Arts & Lectures is a one-off initiative that aims to raise $20 million over next five years. The funds generated by the campaign not only will contribute to the annual operating costs of Arts & Lectures, but also will be used to establish a permanent endowment to help secure the future of the series for years to come.

"About four years ago Celesta Billeci, the Miller-McCune Executive Director of UCSB Arts & Lectures, came to the board and asked some of us to help her think through the best way to ensure the sustainability of the Arts & Lectures program over a very long time," says Dan Burnham, co-chair of the Board for Arts & Lectures.

"All the major arts programs in Santa Barbara, and ones throughout the country, require philanthropy. It is logical for people to assume that because Arts & Lectures is university-based that the funding largely comes from the university and ticket sales, but that isn't the case. So an endowment will provide base support for the program as well as a source annual income."

Only about half of Arts & Lectures annual budget comes from ticket sales and funding from the students and campus, with the other half having to be raised each year. The goal of $20 million for this initiative is twofold: Half will be applied to the annual operational costs over the next five years while the other half will form a permanent endowment for the series.

"Most university arts presenting programs across the country, and all of them the size of our program, have endowments, but this program has no endowment," says Ms. Billeci. "That means we have no safety net and there's nothing to secure the future of the series. We're not an organization in trouble, but with the current economic climate we have seen how quickly things can change."

Founded in 1959, UCSB Arts & Lectures has evolved into one of the largest and most influential and respected university-based arts programs on the West Coast.

From critically acclaimed concerts and dance performances, to talks by ground-breaking authors and influential politicians, to an innovative film series, Arts & Lectures presents more than 100 events annually. This year's series alone has so far seen almost 100,000 attendees at its regular series shows and a further 20,000 attend its School and Community Outreach programs.

Throughout its 53 years, the series has staged countless cultural coups including presenting a young emerging cellist by the name of Yo-Yo Ma, bringing the Vienna Philharmonic to The Granada Theatre and even coaching Patti Smith out of New York City.

The importance of the series is not lost on those that have taken to its stage, among its past alumni are lending their considerable creative profiles to the campaign. The likes of performance artist Laurie Anderson, violinist Sarah Chang, composer Philip Glass and author Amy Tan have agreed to be part of Arts & Lectures's Honorary Campaign Committee.

With an ethos to educate, entertain and inspire, that mission is not restricted to ticketed events within the series. Arts & Lectures also oversees an outreach program featuring master classes, open rehearsals, lecture demonstrations and classroom discussions with visiting artists and speakers at UCSB, as well as at local elementary and high schools.

A key element for the success of the series to date has been the incredible diversity within its programming. Its presentations encompass not only a broad spectrum of artistic disciplines, but draws from all facets of each respective genre.

One need only look at Arts & Lectures' music program for a dynamic insight into that diversity. In the realm of classical music, Arts & Lectures' scheduling has ranged from emerging soloists like Jeremy Denk to icons like the Vienna Philharmonic, while its contemporary counterpart has included punk rock icons the caliber of Lou Reed and soulful singer-songwriters like Aimee Mann.

One of the challenges of presenting such a varied program, which encompasses dance, film and lectures, with some many events, is of course coordinating a schedule. At times working years in advance, not only are organizers balancing artist schedules, but they are also matching those to the availability of suitable venues.

In addition to various UCSB venues such as Campbell Hall, Arts & Lectures also uses a range of Santa Barbara locations including the Arlington, Lobero and Granada theaters, the Music Academy of the West's Hahn Hall and the Fleischmann Auditorium at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

"One of the great things about our program is that it's global," says Ms. Billeci. "We go to a lot of different venues throughout the city. "Not only are we working with the dates that the artists and venues are available, we also take a lot of care to make sure we don't bring a dance company in on top of say State Street Ballet. We have the schedules for the other local presenters like the Santa Barbara Symphony and CAMA and confirm those to make sure we're not booking on top of each other."

The upcoming Winter Festival will be a showcase of the breadth Arts & Lectures. Making use of a range of local venues, the festival will present an event every night between Monday and March 10, featuring performers and speakers from all walks of life.

The festival opens with a talk by influential string theorist, bestselling author and NOVA host Brian Greene on Monday at UCSB's Campbell Hall and culminates with a performance by Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with legendary Wynton Marsalis on March 10 at The Granada Theatre.

"We strive to present a diverse program," says Ms. Billeci. "You can be of any genre. You can a garage band from Austin, Texas, like we did with Black Joe Lewis and the Honeybears, or you could be (one of) the world's greatest classical artists, Yo-Yo Ma, but you have to be of the highest level. That's the one criteria that unites everyone that comes through Arts & Lectures and it's non-negotiable."

You might have to good to take to the Arts & Lectures stage, but you don't have to be widely known. In fact, bringing lesser-known talents to town is something the series prides itself on and something its audience embraces.

"Some of the things we love presenting are some of the artists you haven't heard of, it's a way our community can discover new artists," Ms. Billeci adds. "We did that with Lang Lang. When we brought Lang Lang eight years ago, nobody knew who he was, and now he's a rock star in the classical music world."

"The community here is so open to trying new things. There's a trust between the community and our program — we trust they will come and they trust that we won't disappoint them."

Preservation Hall Jazz Band Artistic Director Ben Jaffe coaches UCSB Jazz Ensemble student in an afternoon workshop.

Trombone Shorty coaches Carlos Montes of McKinley School.

Yo-Yo Ma coaches UCSB violist Jacob Adams in a master class.

New York City Ballet MOVES master class with Darci Kistler for UCSB students