

Los Angeles Times

Culture Monster

All the Arts, All the Time



L.A. County High School for the Arts has celebrity lineup to celebrate its 25th anniversary

April 6, 2010 | 6:00 am



These may be tough times for maintaining excellence in public education, given the condition of the California state government that's primarily responsible for funding it, but that's not stopping the [Los Angeles County High School for the Arts](#) from celebrating its past and present in a rare high-profile event.

The specialized public high school, housed in borrowed quarters at Cal State Los Angeles, will take over some prime downtown arts real estate on April 17 -- the Ahmanson Theatre -- to celebrate its 25th anniversary in elite company, and to boost the private fundraising it counts on even in the best of times.

The headliner is Barry Manilow -- who got his own schooling in Brooklyn but was one of the earliest supporters of L.A.'s answer to the kind of arts high school chronicled in the film and television series "Fame." At the school, students audition for spots, and those who succeed are accepted into a regimen that includes a daily menu of academic courses, followed by studio work in visual art, music, dance or theater.

Also on the Ahmanson bill are Natalie Cole, Bob Newhart and Monica Mancini (the singing daughter of composer Henry Mancini), with the arts high school's jazz ensemble and chorus providing backup. Among the non-performing stars expected to be on hand making presentations are Marilyn Horne, Frank Gehry and John Williams. Video greetings will be extended by Plácido Domingo, Quincy Jones, Janet Jackson and Michael Feinstein, among others.

Singer Josh Groban, a 1999 graduate of the arts high school, will be among the presenters; other well-known alumni include actress Jenna Elfman, longtime Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater member Matthew Rushing, visual artist Kehinde Wiley and "High School Musical" cast member Corbin Bleu.



The evening's honorees, for contributions to the school and to the arts, are Manilow, who has been a supporter from nearly the beginning, having appeared at the first graduation ceremony in 1987; Dr. Ed Kantor, a Beverly

Hills ear, nose and throat specialist known for treating performers; Ginny Mancini, widow of the late film composer; and philanthropist Flora Thornton, naming donor to USC's Thornton School of Music.

"Artistic young people need that extra push," said Ginny Mancini, whose friendship with philanthropist Caroline Ahmanson drew her into the arts high school's orbit in 1994, when the school shared in the proceeds of a 70th birthday tribute concert for Henry Mancini at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion shortly before his death. Ahmanson, who died in 2005, was instrumental in securing state funding for the arts high school and the use of facilities at Cal State L.A.

Tickets are \$100 to \$2,500, and available through the Ahmanson box office, (213) 628-2772. John Jackson, executive director of the private nonprofit foundation that raises money to augment the school's public funding, said the hope is to net \$400,000 for its programs in what figures to be a difficult year for state funding of education.

The state's budget woes also have contributed to delays in groundbreaking for a new, \$24-million facility for the high school on the Cal State campus, Jackson said. The foundation has secured donations of \$1.25 million to equip a 300-seat theater that's part of the project, and \$500,000 for a 500-seat outdoor amphitheater, both to be built when construction on the 40,000-square-foot high school building goes forward.

Since last fall, the county arts high school has had new, high-profile company in the "Fame" game -- the Los Angeles Unified School District's fledgling, 1,100-student downtown arts campus, known as [Central Los Angeles High School No. 9](#). The new arts academy, which cost \$232 million to build, draws 70% of its students from in and around downtown L.A., unlike the established one, which auditions students from all over Los Angeles County. With just 160 spots open for the county arts school's next freshman class, and 850 students who auditioned for them, Jackson said, "there's incredible need out there" for additional arts training programs. "We're all colleagues, we all reach out to one another and call one another. Some people use the word 'competing.' It's just not a word I intend to use."

-- Mike Boehm

Related

[A good year for Los Angeles arts students](#)