

High school musical...and so much more | Zev Yaroslavsky



Student Josh Groban in "Fiddler on the Roof" in 1999



And on stage in 2010

Since coming to town as the new principal of the [Los Angeles County High School for the Arts](#), George Simpson hears one question constantly.

“People ask me all the time, ‘Is your school like ‘Fame’?’” says Simpson, who joined LACHSA in 2008. “It’s exactly like ‘Fame,’ only 10 times more intense... We have kids spontaneously bursting into song in the hallways.”

Now picture that intensity spread across a quarter-century.

As Los Angeles County’s “arts high” turns 25 this year, you get the feeling that this is one silver anniversary that’s going platinum.

Since September, 1985, when it opened on the Cal State L.A. campus, LACHSA has been launching the careers of young artists in music, theater, dance and the visual arts while garnering support from some of the biggest names



Actress Jenna Elfman, right, performs at "Arts High" with a fellow student

around.

Placido Domingo’s grandson was a LACHSA student. Other alums include singer Josh Groban, Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas, actress Jenna Elfman, Corbin Bleu of “High School Musical” fame and Anthony Anderson (“Law & Order.”) One of Frank Gehry’s sons went there and another currently is on the faculty. (Just to keep it all in the family, graduations are sometimes held at the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall.) The headliner for the first graduation in 1987? Barry Manilow.

And when you start talking about past galas to benefit the school, you're getting into the celebrity stratosphere—with honorees including Henry Mancini and French fashion great Hubert de Givenchy, and performers ranging from Julie Andrews to Luciano Pavarotti.

The [25th anniversary celebration](#) being put on by the Arts High Foundation on April 17 is no exception, with appearances slated by artists including Natalie Cole, opera legend Marilyn Horne, Bob Newhart and Manilow, along with video tributes from luminaries such as Domingo, Quincy Jones, Janet Jackson and Cher. Tickets for the fundraiser—whose honorees include Manilow and Ginny Mancini—range from \$2,500 for VIP seating to \$50 for LACHSA students and staff.

But the mission is, as the saying goes, priceless. The high school's foundation says it needs to “stand strong in the gulf of a broken arts education system—a rupture that has allowed arts education in other communities to be virtually eliminated, and one that has even threatened LACHSA by key areas of its programs being reduced by up to 20%.”



Law & Order's Anthony Anderson

Despite perennial funding challenges, the school now has on the drawing board a new building—to provide academic classrooms, a new “black box” theater and an outside amphitheater—that would be the first space on the Cal State campus dedicated exclusively to LACHSA.

At the same time, the 600-student school, which also offers programs in film and television, is experiencing a surge in applications. This year, a record 760 applicants auditioned for 175 slots. In all, 3,300 hundred students have come through during the past 25 years.

Early champions include the late Caroline Ahmanson and Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, who helped LACHSA navigate initial difficulties over where to locate the campus. LACHSA's foundation has long played a key role in providing a tuition-free, conservatory-style arts education to some of the most talented public school students around.

Click through the gallery below and see if you can discover the next Matthew Rushing (Class of '91, now an Alvin Ailey dancer/choreographer) or Kehinde Wiley (Class of '95, whose paintings have been displayed at the National Portrait Gallery.)

And then post your own [LACHSA pictures](#) on our website.