

Marymount College arts students liven up downtown San Pedro

By Donna Littlejohn Staff Writer

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Visit San Pedro's downtown Sixth Street on a Tuesday or a Thursday night and you'll find yourself walking to a new beat. It's the music of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Charlie Parker and others played by the Marymount College Jazz Ensemble. A few doors away, Marymount drama students are putting the final touches on the props for their spring production of "You Can't Take it With You."

Since January, music and drama students from the Catholic college in Rancho Palos Verdes have been meeting for some classes in the Grand Annex, an intimate concert venue, and Warner Grand Theater in the 400 block of West Sixth Street. It's a partnership that's a benefit all the way around.

Marymount students have use of performance space that fits in well with their artistic endeavors. And downtown San Pedro gets an infusion of talented and energetic young musicians and artists - a perfect fit for the town's new Arts, Culture and Entertainment District status within the city of Los Angeles.

"We need our buildings to be filled up with young people," said Liz Schindler Johnson of the Grand Vision Foundation, a nonprofit support group for the Warner Grand. Other downtown leaders, such as property owner Gary Larson, are reaching out to art schools in an effort to strike up similar arrangements to make use of empty space in the historic shopping district, which is attracting more artists, galleries and studios. Larson is offering space in one of his properties, the Arcade Building, for an arts or design school.

Much of the credit for the success of the the Marymount deal goes to downtown business owner Marylyn Ginsburg Kaus, long active in San Pedro revitalization efforts, and her husband, Charles John Klaus, who will be honored tonight during opening night festivities for the play.



Marymount College students Hector Hsu, left, and Maria Elena Gonzalez rehearse a jazz piece at the Grand Annex in San Pedro as they prepare for the opening night of the college's stage production of "You Can't Take it With You," at the Warner Grand. (Sean Hiller / Staff Photographer)

the campus and downtown, a better rounded education, Brophy said. "Palos Verdes is many things, but it can often be seen as geographically isolated from Los Angeles," Brophy said, noting that surveys show many of the school's students come to Marymount specifically because it is in the L.A. area. "If they come to L.A. to go to college, they want L.A. to be their classroom," he said. The campus also does not have its own theater. "We want them to have a site that's fitting for their education and the Warner Grand is a gorgeous site. They have a big, beautiful theater and along with the annex they have lots of room to work in terms of technical production."

The school also recently went from a two- to a four-year campus, meanwhile, and was simply in need of more space as its student population begins to grow. The students, said theater arts Professor John Lane, "love it." "This theater has a lot of history to it," he said this week as student crews worked to put together the stage props behind him at the Warner Grand.



Downstairs, student actors were putting on makeup in preparation for a dress rehearsal for the 1930s era play that opens at 8 tonight and also has performances Friday and Saturday nights. Loren Benn, a freshman who sings for the jazz ensemble and also is playing the role of the maid in the play, is thrilled. "I started singing" the first time she walked into the theater, Benn said. "This is so awesome. If there's a full house, that's our dream. We're excited." Sophomore Shannon Delehanty plays a character she said is "the Lindsay Lohan of the 1930s." She acknowledges having some preconceptions of downtown San Pedro initially. But along the way, she's "discovered little gems" like the Sacred Grounds coffeehouse and Niko's Pizza.

There have been logistical challenges to the production. Sean Lane, the son of the theater arts professor who is assisting with the technical end of the play, described the process of creating props in sections at the annex and then having to transport them along the sidewalk several doors away to the theater, where they then had to be assembled. But working in a real theater is worth it, he said. "This is a good space, there's a lot of room," he said.

Lee Raby, who teaches many of the college's music classes, described the downtown district as eclectic and with an "artistic vibe" that is well suited to young, up-and-coming musicians, actors and other artists. "I hope we can continue to be part of that," she said.

Want to go?

What: Marymount College production of the 1930s comedy "You Can't Take It With You"

Where: Warner Grand Theater, 478 W. Sixth St., San Pedro

When: 8 tonight, Friday and Saturday

Information: www.marymountpv.edu/ or 310-377-5501; tickets available at the door, \$15 general, \$10 students and those over 65; advance tickets available from any Marymount college theater student or online at www.BrownPaperTickets.com/event/167351.

Jazz Ensemble: The Marymount College Jazz Ensemble will perform from 6 to 9 p.m. May 5 during First Thursday open house in downtown San Pedro at the Grand Annex, a 99-seat concert venue at 434 W. Sixth St.



