**Vision of the Future: Harlem School of the Arts Unveils Stunning New Performance Space Designed by Walters-Storyk Design Group & Imrey Studio LLC**

*Historic arts education center debuts redesigned complex for Harlem’s next generation of artists and performers*

**New York City —**For more than fifty years, the [Harlem School of the Arts](https://hsanyc.org/) (HSA) has been a gathering place for students of all ages to explore art, music, and dance in an encouraging, supportive environment that draws on the rich arts traditions of its historic neighborhood. Early last year the [Herb Alpert Foundation](https://www.herbalpertfoundation.org/) funded ‘The Renaissance Project’, an ambitious $9.5 million-dollar renovation designed to update the aesthetic and architectural footprints of the facility to meet the needs of Harlem’s next generation of artists and performers, as well as update the school’s performance spaces to be worthy of the talent that it has nurtured in the neighborhood for the last half century. [Imrey Studio LLC](https://www.imreystudio.com/) was retained to lead the physical and aesthetic re-design of the project. Recognizing that the new space would also need versatile, professional acoustic design, Herb Alpert personally recommended [WSDG](http://www.wsdg.com/) (Walters-Storyk Design Group), a global architectural acoustics consulting and A/V integration firm, to lead the acoustic and A/V design.

**An oasis for the arts**

As detailed in a recent [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/08/arts/design/herb-alpert-harlem-school-arts.html) feature article, one of the most critical elements of the redesign was the transformation of the school’s main lobby. The new 3,500 square-foot entrance of the HSA was conceived as a visual reflection of the school’s ongoing legacy; a welcoming space for aspiring artists that would realize the dreams of founder Dorothy Maynor. “HSA has always been an oasis on the inside, but that has never been fully reflected by our building’s exterior,” explained Eric Pryor, President of HSA. “To remain relevant within both our local community and the greater artistic community, the public needs to see who we are and what we do.”

In addition to WSDG Founder/Director of Design John Storyk and WSDG Partner/COO/Project Manager Joshua Morris, the project team was a diverse coalition of talents that included Architect of Record Eric Daniels; and Lead Designer Celia Imrey; AVN Systems’ PK Pandey; and Melanie Freundlich Lighting Design. The design team worked to transform the room with a welcoming two-story glass façade facing the street, allowing a large amount of natural light in the space as well as a view into the school’s activities and performances. “The new transparency of Dorothy Maynor Hall both literally and figuratively increases the school’s connection with the vibrant cultural community in Harlem,” said Imrey. “By bringing the street in and the internal activities out, we set the stage for endless possibilities that until now have only been imagined.”

Accommodating the large space and glass wall required the design team to analyze all the contingencies to ensure that it would be easily adaptable as both a gallery and a multi-configurable performance space. WSDG engaged advanced acoustic modeling software to simulate the new lobby and made recommendations for optimal acoustical designs and materials. “Much work was done in collaboration with Imrey Studio to preserve the look and feel of the space while ensuring optimal acoustic quality,” said Morris. “We put a lot of thought into different use scenarios for the lobby and made sure to provide the school with the flexibility to present an extremely wide range of performances without requiring a large production support team.”

**Maximizing the possibilities**

In order to guarantee optimal acoustics in the space, the design team recommended a precise angling of the towering two-story glass wall, an approach that had been successfully engaged by the firm for the [Appel Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center](https://wsdg.com/projects-items/jazz-at-lincoln-center/). Controllable acoustic curtains were hung at the north gallery wall and between the performance area and entry area to provide the room with ‘variable acoustics’-- a custom-designed solution to enhance the reflective or absorptive requirements of the music being performed. “We needed maximum flexibility in how we could use the performance space,” explained Pryor. “The ability to ‘dial in’ the sound by opening or closing the curtains enables us to showcase performances of many sizes and styles here without any compromises in the sound quality of the space.”

The built-in versatility of the space was a key part of the redesign, something that Pryor emphasizes has long-term practicality for HSA. “Having a space that can speak to multiple implementations is what will allow us to continue to evolve alongside the needs of our community and be at the forefront of arts and music education in the city,” he said. “We’re very proud of what the design team was able to accomplish for us, and for the next generation of artists and performers.”

“Herb Alpert has a real appreciation for the critical role that acoustical design plays in performance spaces based on his vast experience as a musician and recording executive,” concluded John Storyk. “We were honored to have him reach out to us to be involved in this project, and to contribute to the rebirth of one of the most crucial arts education organizations in the city.”

For more information about the Harlem School of the Arts, please visit <http://www.hsanyc.org/>

For more information about WSDG, please visit: <http://www.wsdg.com/>

For more information about Imrey Studio, LLC, please visit: <http://imreystudio.com/>

**ABOUT WSDG, LLC**  
For over 50 years, acoustic consulting and A/V integration firm [WSDG](http://www.wsdg.com/) has designed nearly 3,500 media production facilities worldwide and counting. Projects range from Jimi Hendrix’s Electric Lady Studio and Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York, to broadcast facilities for The Food Network, CBS and WNET, over 20 teaching studios for The Art Institutes, and corporate clients such as Sony, IBM and Novartis. Recent credits include Jungle City in New York, The Church Studios in London, private studios for Green Day, Jay-Z, Bruce Springsteen, Alicia Keys, Jack Antonoff, J Cole, Harry Connick Jr., and Academy Award-nominated film composer Carter Burwell. WSDG has collaborated with such noted architects as Frank Gehry, Philippe Stark, Rafael Viñoly, Santiago Calatrava, Grimshaw, and Norman Foster.  An 11-time winner of the prestigious pro audio NAMM [TEC Award](https://www.tecawards.org/) for outstanding achievement in Acoustics/Facility Design, WSDG maintains U.S. offices in New York, Washington, DC, San Francisco and Miami and global offices in Barcelona, Basel, Berlin, Belo Horizonte, Buenos Aires, Guangzhou, Mexico City and Mumbai.

**ABOUT IMREY STUDIO, LLC**

Imrey Studio LLC is an internationally recognized architectural design studio that specializes in the design of museum, cultural, and educational facilities. In addition to HSA, public projects include the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, NY; the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, NY; the Louvre Lens Museum in Lens, France; the Queen Sirikit Museum in Bangkok, Thailand. The firm is a regular advocate for educational and humanitarian causes and provides pro-bono services and fund-raising assistance to schools, community centers and other public organizations world-wide. www.imreystudio.com

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