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Private Practice



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State-of-the-art
practice rooms
at CFA

By Susan Seligson

WITH CLOSE TO 500 PERFORMANCE majors, the BU School of Music is a conservatory within the College of Fine Arts, turning out instrumentalists and vocalists who often soar to the top of their professions. Whether it's Carnegie Hall or La Scala, to get there takes practice, practice, practice. And in the past two years, thanks in large part to the generosity of alumni donors, CFA has nurtured and inspired student talent with its new state-of-the-art practice studios.

The practice rooms are part of phase one of CFA's first comprehensive facilities renovation project: For the Love of Music: Practice Studios for Twenty-First Century Musicians. Completed in 2010, the \$15 million renovation doubled the number of rooms, to 120. Spacious, soundproof, acoustically sophisticated, and climate-controlled, the rooms reflect a dramatic step forward for the college and a boost in the quality of life for all music students, says Robert Dodson, director of the School of Music and an adjunct professor of music.

The school, celebrating its 140th anniversary as the first degree-granting music college in the United States, has always attracted top-notch faculty, fed largely by Boston Symphony Orchestra professionals. It was time, says Dodson, for the

infrastructure to achieve the highest professional level as well.

The practice rooms are open to all BU students, from music majors to those pursuing minors in music performance to instrumentalists in other academic departments who are keeping in shape. The rooms are an inspiration. No longer do woodwind players have to block out the crash of a snare drum or upright bass riffs in neighboring practice rooms. Percussionists, who now have their own wing, can play their hearts out in total sound isolation. A pair of pianists can rehearse a duet on a set of perfectly tuned baby grands. Banks of outsized instrument lockers easily accommodate cellos, string basses, and tubas.

"A lot of students bring their laptops and do recording sessions," says Casey Soward, School of Music assistant director of production and performance. Wending his way along the gleaming corridors in the secure basement network (entry is controlled with pass cards), Soward points out the wall-mounted control panels for recording practice sessions, with USB ports so students can store and edit their music. Behind glass-paneled doors, the rooms, created by the Wenger Corporation, contain virtual acoustical environments. The technology makes it possible for students to manipulate the acoustics with a flip of a switch to resemble an arena, a cathedral, or a smaller baroque recital hall. "We have flip cameras students can use to see themselves playing, check their postures," he says.

And because it's not all about practicing, a roomy, welcoming lounge gives students a place to meet and discuss projects.

The old practice rooms were probably "the most intensively used, and least satisfactory, facilities on campus," Dodson says. The new rooms have made a big difference, not just in the quality of life for current students, he says, but also in recruitment.

