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ARTS

BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA

The entrance to the Orange County Performing Arts Center in Costa Mesa is a 120-foot-tall pink granite archway spanning an enormous void—a symbol, perhaps, of what the organization hopes to accomplish in what was once a cultural desert.

Until a few years ago, Orange County's principal cultural attraction was Disneyland. Today, powerful personalities in the community led by South Coast Plaza owner Henry Segerstrom, who has donated \$11 million worth of land and funding, are out to change that image.

For inspiration, they look to the 22-year-old South Coast Repertory Company. Since opening its new theater in 1978—also with Segerstrom's financial aid—SCR has attracted drama lovers from Los Angeles and San Diego as well as a strong local subscription audience. The people at the Center, which is adjacent to SCR, are hoping to accomplish similar miracles.

The would-be miracle worker in this case is Director Thomas Kendrick, who came to the Center in 1985 after more than 20 years of eclectic management experience. As assistant managing editor of *The Washington Post*, he developed the paper's "Style" section, until his fondness for the arts took him to the Kennedy Center, where he became director of operations in 1975.

Kendrick, who is 52, was recently quoted as saying, "The Orange County Performing Arts Center has the best shot in this country to be a powerful regional center with real national impact." Such optimism is bolstered by a promising line-up, beginning with an opening-night gala on September 29th. The sold-out performance—with tickets going for \$2,000 per couple—will feature the L.A. Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Master

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3,000 expected at September 29 gala

A New Cultural Jewel in Orange County's Crown

Henry Moore's "The Reclining Figure," in the courtyard of the Orange County Performing Arts Center.



An Asymmetrical Solution

How can the Orange County Performing Arts Center's 3,000-seat house accommodate a variety of performing artists? The question was addressed at the outset of the design Partnership of Newport Beach with Caudil Rowlett Scott of Los Angeles and help from acoustical consultants Robert C. Atti and Jerald Hyde from Newport Beach. Dr. A. Harold Marshall of Zealand.

These collaborators, working with the building theaters around the theater with irregularly shaped balconies that are cantilevered over the scenium. This gives the audience a closeness not usually found in a theater. "Beverly Sills stood on the balcony and had never before felt so intimate in this size house," reports architect Dick Kitzrow.

More important than price, however, these tiered balconies address the theater's acoustics. The building's theater-design specialist, James C. C. the acousticians' research into asymmetrical design as a means to reflect sound into the dead seating areas. With this arrangement, the design of contemporary theaters.

This creative team designed the theater's adaptability with the scenium to accommodate a massive chorale. The theater's chestra shell that slides the sections forward toward the orchestra pit for concert musicals and operas. □

Photography: Rob Brown

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Chorale of Orange County and the Pacific Chorale. This traditional fare will be introduced by a short "celebratory" composition commissioned from L.A. composer William Kraft, who will position nine percussionists around the theater to play with full orchestra.

The supporters of the Center, as it is called, expect to draw their subscription audience (already more than half sold out for the first season) primarily from Orange County, but hope to garner fans from points to the north, east and south. And since the Orange County Center is a presenting rather than a producing institution, unlike Los Angeles's Music Center which has an active production arm, the relationship between the two cultural centers is less likely to be competitive than cooperative. The Center folk don't expect to draw Angelenos south to see the L.A. Philharmonic, which regularly plays at the Music Center, but they hope a few will stop by to hear Orange County's own Pacific Symphony or a special event like the New York City Opera.

Initially, however, the Center will be somewhat tied to L.A.'s Music Center. For example, the L.A. Philharmonic, conducted on different occasions by Kurt Sanderling, Andre Previn and Esa-Pekka Salonen, will perform at the Center this year, as well as at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. However, Kendrick wants to dispel the notion that the Center will be an adjunct to the Los Angeles Music Center. "In nineteen eighty-six and eighty-seven, we will be presenting the New York City Opera, which hasn't

been on the West Coast in six years; the New York City Ballet, which hasn't been here for twelve years; the Chicago Symphony with Sir George Solti, which will be breaking a five years' absence; the National Orchestra of France; the Warsaw Philharmonic; the Cleveland Orchestra; and the American Ballet Theater with Mikhail Baryshnikov. We are particularly thrilled to have Leontyne Price, who will honor us with one of her rare appearances this fall. Most of these companies and artists aren't performing at the L.A. Music Center. Which, then, is the preeminent center?" asks Kendrick.

Executive vice-president of the Music Center, Esther Wachtell answers, "I don't think it's preeminent, but I'd like to see one or two of the Center's performances. I'd go see the New York City Ballet." She says the Music Center hasn't altered any of its programming in response to the Orange County Center, though. "It has no effect on us

ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT



Photography: Rob Brown

In a business world dominated by men, how did Judith O'Dea Morr get to be general manager of the Orange County Performing Arts Center? By working at theaters since 1962, culminating in a job as manager of theater operations at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. That's where she formed a strong working relationship with Thomas Kendrick, director of the Orange County Center.

at this time. I think it will just expand the audiences for all of the arts. Seeing a good performance is a stimulus to see more good performances."

Orange County now has a population approaching three million, which could provide an ample base of potential culture lovers. Yet, Center spokesmen say they hope to draw their audience from the communities of Los Angeles and San Diego as well. "Opera buffs will travel anywhere," says Dick Kitzrow, the Center's director of public relations. He believes that ballet and symphony fans will also be attracted to the Center, though the tougher challenge will be drawing an audience with more general interests from L.A. and San Diego. The best news, however, is that performing arts companies that can't come to the Music Center—due to its already-packed schedule of events—may be booked at the Orange County Center. Costa Mesa, after Seattle and Berkeley, will now act as the third venue for what has become a viable axis for travel-

ing musicals and concerts.

The Center feels it is important to showcase regional as well as national and international talent. The Orange County Pacific Symphony will be featured regularly, along with the Master Chorale of Orange County, which performs in October with the Music Center's Joffrey Ballet. South Coast Repertory will stage its children's theater in the Center's 300-seat Founders Theater, which is also a TV-equipped rehearsal space. The Center hopes to complete a second, 1,000-seat theater for SCR productions by 1989.

While the question of preeminence will eventually be resolved by the critics and the public, it seems likely that Orange County residents will be the Center's most active supporters. Some \$67 million of the estimated \$71 million in construction costs has come from private contributions by individuals and corporations from the area, rather than federal or state grants. Residents are excited to have a cultural institution they can call their own, with the identity of their own neighborhood.

In the end, freeway logistics rather than programming may be the single greatest key to the Center's success. Kitzrow says, "Orange County is a young community—the mean age is twenty-nine—and it is very family oriented. To see an event at the Music Center often means getting a babysitter, fighting traffic, rushing through dinner and leaving L.A. at eleven at night to come home. It's just easier to stay here." □

For tickets and information, call (714) 556-ARTS.

