

If Walls Could Talk: A History of Northrop

By Laura Weber

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the University Artists Course in 1944, its impresario, Mrs. Verna Scott, wrote, "It would be difficult to enumerate many artists of the past two decades who have not appeared on the University Artists Course." Half a century later, Scott's assessment is equally applicable to Northrop Memorial Auditorium, the Artists Course's long-time home.

The transformed landmark at the heart of the University of Minnesota's east bank campus has indeed hosted a dizzying array of artists, entertainers, and public figures in its eighty-five-year history: Igor Stravinsky and Santana; Mikhail Baryshnikov and the B-52s; His Holiness The Dalai Lama and the Grateful Dead; Merce Cunningham and Perry Como; W.H. Auden and Marian Anderson. U of M students and arts patrons have been joined over the years in experiencing Northrop's aura by tens of thousands of Minnesota citizens, perhaps as school children bused in to hear the Minneapolis Symphony (now Minnesota) Orchestra or as proud relatives attending commencement ceremonies.

A railroad runs through it

The need for a central campus gathering place became acute by the turn of the twentieth century. The University was outgrowing its campus surrounding the Knoll, off University Avenue. The Board of Regents held a design competition for a campus expansion plan in 1907. St Paul's Cass Gilbert, who by this time had designed the Minnesota State Capitol in the early 1890s and moved his growing practice to New York, won the competition. Gilbert's notion was a classically inspired mall, based on City Beautiful principles ascendant at the time, which would extend from the old campus district south to the river. Though Gilbert's design changed a

few times, and was never fully executed, he ultimately sited the mall's main building at the head of the proposed mall, where Northrop now stands.

In this period, the Armory, built in 1896, was the only gathering spot on campus suitable for arts performances or ceremonial occasions, though the drafty structure was not built primarily for either function. Athletics were played on an adjacent open field. President Leroy Burton (1917-1920) saw the need to create "rich, abundant, unified, [and] coherent" student life on campus, with more suitable gathering spots. He sought to revive the shelved Cass Gilbert plan. In particular, Burton felt an auditorium was needed to serve as "a lively center for of the arts." The auditorium was to be named for Cyrus Northrop, the University's second president, who served from 1884 until his death in 1911.

There was, however, a significant impediment to Gilbert's plan for campus expansion. The tracks of the Northern Pacific railroad crossed a nearby bridge over the Mississippi River and ran across the southern edge of campus, the area roughly below today's Northrop Plaza. Burton's successor as University president, Lotus D. Coffman, finally negotiated a solution in 1922. The Northern Pacific would reroute its trains to nearby Great Northern tracks, leaving their old right-of-way available to build not only Northrop Auditorium, but also Memorial Stadium, and the other buildings that eventually filled in the mall.

Coffman, like Burton, had a vision for the University's place beyond its nineteenth century emphasis on agriculture, lumbering, and mining. Coffman spoke of the importance of making the Twin Cities the intellectual, cultural, and educational center of the Northwest, as they already were the financial center. A facility such as Northrop Auditorium was essential to achieve this goal.

Coffman's foresight extended to seeing private fundraising as a complement to state support. The Greater University Corporation, made up of 20,000 alumni and friends of the University living in Minnesota, was formed. They launched a fundraising campaign in 1922 to

raise \$2 million dollars to construct both a stadium (dedicated to the 3,200 Minnesotans who had died in World War I) and the auditorium dedicated to Northrop's legacy. Fifteen hundred enthusiastic students, faculty, staff, and friends pledged \$665,000 in the first four days of the fund drive alone. Homecoming floats, campaign buttons, and cannon blasts were some of the creative ways boosters used to drum up pledges.

Once made, however, fundraisers found it difficult to collect on many pledges, particularly from students. Memorial Stadium was completed in 1924, but by 1926, only 22 percent of overall student pledges had been paid. Alumni and friends had made good on 83 percent of their pledges; faculty had paid 64 percent of their pledges. With Northrop building costs going up to \$1.3 million, the Greater University Corporation took drastic measures. In 1928, one student was taken to court as a test case over his unpaid \$100 pledge, shocking the public. It was the first of several such cases to go to court.

The “grand dame” of Twin Cities theaters

The design for Northrop Auditorium is attributed to Clarence H. Johnston Sr., state architect from 1901 until his death in 1936. In this role, Johnston was responsible for the design of over a dozen buildings on the Twin Cities campus. He was assisted by the University's Advisory Architect, who was responsible for overseeing the sitting and preliminary design of campus buildings. In 1925, Frederick Mann, head of the School of Architecture, had been given the title. The following year, Mann prepared sketches for the proposed auditorium design, which Johnston gave final execution.

Despite the shortfall of funds, ground was broken for the 4,847-seat Northrop Auditorium on April 30, 1928, on the site of a former medicinal plant garden established in 1911 by Dean Frederick Wulling of the College of Pharmacy. Plans for the stage and wings were altered to cut costs. Mann expressed concern about acoustics. The smaller stage would have

precluded presentation of opera and orchestra concerts. Verna Scott, manager of the University Artists Course and wife of Music Department head Carlyle M. Scott, “determined to fulfill her dream of great cultural enrichment opportunities for the University,” enlisted the help of two sympathetic friends in the state legislature to secure the funds needed to complete the wings and stage, which was now half the size of the auditorium.

The monumental Classical Revival building was dedicated on October 22, 1929, and is of red brick with stone trim with a gabled and parapeted roof. Its dominant feature is its imposing colonnade of Ionic stone columns with long bronze-framed windows extending through the second and third floors. Oak-paneled double sets of doors, marble balustrades, and terrazzo and marble floors inlaid with linoleum, greeted visitors to the new auditorium. The three-story lobby, dubbed Memorial Hall, contained tablets engraved with the names of founders of the state and University. Not everyone was impressed, however. A letter from an art student preserved in the University Archives bemoans the fact that “Architect Johnson [sic] did not design a building of beauty and grace.” Decades later, architectural critic Larry Millett deemed Northrop Auditorium “ponderous and embalmed.”

The dedication, 1929

The University celebrated Northrop’s opening with three dedicatory concerts in the fall of 1929. The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, soon to take up residence in Northrop for the next 44 years, led off, on October 22. Henri Verbrugghen was the conductor; pianist Eunice Norton was featured soloist. On October 30, the Boston Symphony, under the baton of Dr. Serge Koussevitzky, performed. President Coffman presided over the third event, the Alumni and State Program on November 15. The University Band and Singers performed, followed by speeches by past regent and governor John S. Pillsbury, “the father of the University,” speaking on behalf of the Greater University Corporation; Governor Theodore Christianson; and Regent

Fred B. Snyder. Rev. Henry Steffans, pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, concluded with a speech entitled "Cyrus W. Northrop."

The Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ

Northrop's famous Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ was installed in four sections; the first in fall 1932, the second in September 1933, the third in early 1934, and the final section in August 1935. Charles Courboin of Philadelphia performed at the dedicatory concert in 1936. The pipe organ was the second largest in the Upper Midwest, after that of the Minneapolis Auditorium. Its 6,975 pipes—ranging from the size of a pencil to 32 feet high—were located above the stage in a room as big as the stage, and were reached by climbing three flights of stairs and two fire escapes. It was played from a four-manual console located in the orchestra pit. Organ scholars attest to the Aeolian-Skinner's historic value as a completely unaltered and intact example of the organ builder's skill. The organ is currently disassembled and in storage, awaiting funds for its restoration and reinstallation in the revitalized Northrop.

The inscription

The final element of the building to be completed was the inspirational inscription on the building's façade. Discussions as to its need and content began even before groundbreaking in 1928. As Northrop was completed, there was still no final decision. The financial effects of the Great Depression precluded further discussions until 1935. After a number of versions were considered, the inscription was finally carved in June 1936. It reads, "The University of Minnesota/Founded in the faith that men are ennobled by understanding/Dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth/Devoted to the instruction of youth and the welfare of the state."

In 1946, ensconced for a decade and a half as a center of campus life, Northrop underwent its first major renovation. The hall was completely repainted in a shade of eggplant purple and the stage curtain and seats were washed for the first time in 18 years. Two years

later, Harry Rowatt Brown, a local businessman donated a set of carillon bells (which are actually bars) to Northrop in memory of his wife, Francis Miller Brown. Generations of students, faculty, and campus visitors heard the bells chime on the hour, at noon recitals, and for a final daily rendition of “Minnesota Hail to Thee” at 9:00 pm. Noted choral and operatic composer Stephen Paulus was responsible for the bells’ day-to-day operation when he was a music composition graduate student in the 1970s.

Campus center for learning and gathering

Northrop was integrated into the campus life of University students for decades. Convocations, free and open to the public, were held weekly in the auditorium until 1969, and less frequently into the 1970s. Convocation speakers drawn from the political, scientific, and cultural arenas, initially selected by Malcolm Willey, administrative vice president, and later by a campus convocation committee made up of students and faculty. Students were exposed to an extensive range of speakers, as can be seen from a sampling of just a few convocation speakers from 1959 to 1961: choreographer Agnes DeMille, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., psychologist Albert Ellis, tennis champion Althea Gibson, and historian Arnold Toynbee. Music professor and University organist Arthur B. Jennings gave half-hour recitals before the Thursday convocations. During the 1930s, campus radio station WLB broadcast live records of convocations and other special guest occasions from Northrop. Cap and Gown Day and Commencement were rites of passage associated irrevocably with Northrop’s grandeur.

The stairs and plaza in front of Northrop were a natural gathering spot, whether casual lounging between classes or for rallies and protests. Noon Summer at Northrop concerts (now known as Music on the Plaza), have been a campus tradition since they began in 1954. Only a partial version of Clarence Johnston’s original plans for the Plaza was able to be built due to lack of funding. Northrop Plaza was finally completed in 1965, paved with granite, according to

plans developed by Advisory Architect and professor Winston Close. The now-iconic umbrella tables on plaza were installed in 1967.

Department of Concerts and Lectures

In 1944, the Department of Concerts and Lectures was created as an umbrella unit for activities at Northrop and beyond. Under the direction of James Lombard, Concert and Lectures oversaw weekly convocations, special lectures (such as the Gideon Seymour Lectures, which hosted T.S. Elliot and Robert Frost), Summer at Northrop , and the annual appearances of Metropolitan Opera. Concerts and Lectures also provided crucial University outreach services to the state and region by operating a talent and booking service used by outstate cities and schools. Concerts and Lectures offered a roster of speakers and artists that could be booked for school assembly and convocation programs, high school commencement speakers, concerts, lectures, and plays.

Students experienced Northrop in additional ways. In Northrop's early days, the indefatigable Verna Scott had argued successfully that its use for classroom instruction would degrade and damage the fine hall. It was not until 1969 (long after her 1944 retirement) that Psychology 1001 and other large lecture courses began to use Northrop's large auditorium, at least until other suitable lecture halls were built. Northrop's basement was, until 2009, the home base for rehearsals and uniform and instrument storage for the 200-plus member University Marching Band, and the auditorium site of its annual indoor concerts. Concerts and Lectures supplemented its paid usher staff with student ushers who donated their time in exchange for seeing free shows.

Venue for the arts and lectures

The Twin Cities is today blessed with so many performance venues and arts and entertainment options that it is hard to conjure a time when they were much more limited. Northrop was the

first large multi-purpose hall in the area. Its importance to the cultural life of the entire community from the 1930s to 1970s cannot be underestimated.

Artists Course

Northrop's early years revolved around the University Artists Course, founded by Scott in 1919 as an addition to the University's extension service. Classical music was the mainstay of the recital series, held in conjunction with the Music Department. Mezzo-soprano Ernestine Schumann-Heink was its first featured artist. Violinist Fritz Kreisler, pianist and composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, violinist Jasha Heifetz, coloratura soprano Lily Pons, and pianist Vladimir Horowitz, are just a few of artists Scott brought to Minnesota audiences.

The Artists Course was the first such series under college or university sponsorship and was widely imitated. For 25 years, it was a vital, unique component of cultural life in the Twin Cities. Northrop's presenting function for performing arts events of all genres, popular and classical, fell under the Artists Course name until 1978, when it was retired in favor of Northrop Dance Series. (See below.)

Scott described the Artists Course's first ten years in the Armory as "enjoyable intimate evenings," in spite of "glaring lights, drafty windows, creaking bleachers, and occasionally broken chairs." By contrast, the move to Northrop's "cushioned seats, shaded lights, and modern stage equipment" was "history-making." The new facility also allowed the Artists Course to expand its offering to include dance. Northrop's first dance performance, by modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman on January 12, 1932, was particularly bold. Its boldness was noted in a 1986 thesis on the Artists Course for the German expressionist "Priestess of the Dance" performed solo, in the simplest of costumes, and on the barest of stages. The same year Scott requested and received \$2,000 from University administrators to furnish and decorate a suitable reception room in Northrop for her numerous distinguished visitors. The room was also used as a second "green room" on performance nights.

University Art Gallery

President Coffman's desire to make the University a cultural center for the community included a place to "display pictures." In April 1934, Coffman and Malcolm Willey began the University Art Gallery—initially known as the "Little Gallery"—as an experiment in the fine arts (now known as the Weisman Art Museum). The Art Gallery occupied five small rooms on the fourth floor of Northrop. Art dealer and collector Hudson D. Walker, grandson of lumber baron and Walker Art Center founder T. B. Walker, was the Little Gallery's first curator. He stayed but a few months. Walker contributed immeasurably to the gallery, however, when in 1950 he placed on permanent loan his private collection of contemporary artists. The collection was donated to the University after his death in 1976. Walker's successor was Ruth Lawrence, widow of former assistant to the president James Lawrence. Lawrence's appreciation of contemporary and American art meant the University was virtually the only place in the area it could be viewed.

Lawrence's ingenuity can be seen in her notion for the Fine Arts Room, a place furnished with contemporary furnishings and a few art periodicals. It was designed for no other purpose than the contemplation of a single work of art. Seven hundred people braved a snowstorm to attend the room's opening in February 1936. The painting on view was Lawrence's first acquisition, Georgia O'Keeffe's *Oak Leaves, Pink and Gray*. Students, alas, did not use the room as intended, and the Fine Arts Room experiment ended in the early 1940s.

Early exhibitions were designed to support instruction. Faculty and student artwork were also regularly displayed. The exhibitions were quite popular, so much so that the gallery began to use the corridors of the third and fourth floors of Northrop, and by the early 1960s, expanded to the second floor and main floor. Galleries were open on concert evenings so patrons could spend intermission immersed in even more culture. The gallery also operated an art rental service for faculty and staff that continues to this day at the Weisman Art Museum.

Among gallery staff were student workers from the National Youth Administration who packed and unpacked exhibitions, framed artwork, and monitored the Fine Arts Room. From 1938 to 1942, sixty Works Progress Administration workers joined the staff as a unit to compile and arrange a vast accumulation of research material from hundreds of sources. New Deal funds were also allocated to purchase and commission artworks by Minnesota artists that were added to the gallery's collection. One example was Gerome Kamrowski, a 22-year-old WPA artist from Warren, Minnesota, who created two murals for the auditorium in 1936. The mural on the east end of the hallway represented music, ballet, and cinema. The other depicted drama, architecture, and the "graphic and plastic arts." The "unsentimental abstractions" were said to be the first of their kind in the Twin Cities. The murals have been recreated in their original location in the revitalized Northrop, and can be seen at the stairway entry points to the fourth floor.

In the 1960s, the University Gallery added important Pop Art works to its collection. Two 20-foot-square murals exhibited at the 1964 World's Fair, one by University alumnus James Rosenquist, the other by Roy Lichtenstein, were displayed on floor of Northrop's lobby in 1966, as they were too large to display in the gallery. Both murals were gifts by the artists to the University. The following year the Art Gallery added its first Andy Warhol piece, a silk-screen print from Warhol's Marilyn series, a gift by local art dealers and hair salon owners George Shea and Gordon Locksley.

Minneapolis Symphony (Minnesota) Orchestra

The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1903. In its early years, it performed in various locations in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, including the Armory. The Minneapolis symphony, renamed the Minnesota Orchestra in 1968, made Northrop its home from 1930 to 1974. Northrop's location on the University campus, midway between the Twin Cities, was seen as a neutral ground. The U of M was one of the few colleges or universities in the country to be

home to a major orchestra. The elegant new hall was welcomed by all, but concerns about acoustics for orchestra performances led to the installation in 1940 of a plywood acoustical shell to enhance sound.

In 1953, Northrop received what the Minneapolis *Tribune* called an “ear-lifting,” including a new acoustical shell. Most of the \$100,000 project was devoted to improvements in the technical capacity of the hall. The back wall and front of the balcony were given acoustical treatment to reduce sound rebounding. New stage lights, a prompter’s box for opera and theater, and new backstage equipment were added. The orchestra pit was dropped 32 inches and pushed back four feet under the stage so that orchestra would be less conspicuous at ballet and opera performances. Seats were ripped out and replaced, as was the curtain and carpeting.

As a multi-purpose auditorium, Northrop was used for many events that would not come close to filling the 4,800-seat hall. A retractable curtain used to cut the size of Northrop to 1,228 seats was added in 1956. At the time, the next largest auditorium on campus seated only 550. A special lighting effect made the curtain appear to be part of the marble walls, giving the effect of a full appearance for smaller lectures

Sound quality for audience and performers of the Minneapolis Symphony continued to be a concern. In response, Northrop installed the world’s first 12-gauge steel acoustical shell in 1961, replacing the 1940s plywood version. (The 1953 shell was used to enhance the smaller recital-sized performances of the Artists Course.) Sound reflecting baffles were designed to eliminate auditorium dead spaces. In 1969, California acoustical consultant Paul Venaclausen directed more acoustical improvements: a 20,000-pound canopy, a steel structure with plaster covering suspended over the front row of seats, a new shell covered with strips of cloth, vinyl, and wood that extended far out into audience, and a system of movable panels that went on the orchestra’s sides. At the back of the shell was a scrim screen that allowed sound to go through it to the building’s hard rear wall and be reflected back into the auditorium.

“At last, it is hoped the hall’s notorious sound and sight problems finally been overcome,” wrote Peter Altman, music critic for the Minneapolis *Star*, and “for the first time the audience can be able to hear what’s being played.” Within five years, the renamed Minnesota Orchestra left Northrop for its new home on the Nicollet Mall, Orchestra Hall.

Metropolitan Opera regional tour

The Metropolitan Opera made Northrop a regular stop on its national tour beginning in 1945. Opera patrons flocked from a nine-state region and Canada to attend opera week each May. The Opera was a joint production of the University Artists Course, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, and a region-wide committee of sponsors. In the 1950s, James Lombard and Mrs. F.K.O. Weyerhaeuser were responsible for instituting the Met’s first auditions to be held outside of New York City.

Before 1964, when Northrop added air conditioning, if a May heat wave coincided with opera week, the elegantly clad opera-goers and elaborately costumed singers experienced discomfort. (Northrop was not used in the summer until the air conditioning was installed.) Heat of a different sort was conjured deliberately for a production of Don Giovanni during the Met’s very first Northrop season. Lombard recalled in 1969, on the occasion of his retirement after 25 years of service, “We used steam from the powerhouse for visual effect when Don Giovanni is drawn into hell. The stagehand who was handling the pail full of steam forgot to put on his asbestos gloves before he picked it up. The pail of steam shot across the stage like a cannonball.”

Touring costs mounted as the years went by. The Met was forced to drop cities from the national tour, but never Minneapolis. The Met’s biggest stars increasingly refused to tour and regional audiences heard less skilled singers, those either on their way up, or down. When the Met discontinued touring altogether in 1986 only four cities, from a high of fifteen in the 1950s, remained on the tour.

The 1970s—a turning point

As Northrop Auditorium approached the half-century mark, it experienced a series of turning points. The facility was aging and the recital business, staple of the University Artists Course for decades, had seriously declined. The most crucial turning point occurred in 1973, when the Minnesota Orchestra left for its acoustically superior and smaller home, Orchestra Hall. Northrop began running deficits. Under Dr. Ross Smith, who arrived as Concerts and Lectures director in 1968, Northrop looked for innovative ways to fill the hall.

The Board of Regents provided one boost. After prohibiting outside promoters from renting Northrop for their own profit for decades, regents voted to reverse the policy in 1974. The University required a guaranteed minimum of \$1,500 or 10 percent of admission revenue for outside events. In 1974, concerts staged by outside promoters netted a profit of \$11,000 for the University. Featured artists were The Letterman (lowest gross profit), Arlo Guthrie, Marshall Tucker Band, Gordon Lightfoot, the Pointer Sisters, and a religious opera, “I am the Way” (which yielded the highest gross profit).

Dance provides the niche

Dance would prove to be Northrop’s niche. In the 1970s, interest in the art form, always part of Northrop’s programming mix, was gaining in popularity. Northrop’s seating capacity and the size of its proscenium stage made it one of the only facilities in the region with the ability to present major touring dance companies. The Northrop Dance Season was established in 1970-71. Northrop irrevocably committed to dance in 1975, when it invested \$30,000 to overlay its old floor—1.5 inches of fir over concrete and sanded enough times it was becoming dangerous—with a new sprung wood floor consisting of overlapping wood strips. The floor was called a “Balanchine basket weave,” duplicating what George Balanchine developed for the New York City Ballet at its home in New York State Theater in Lincoln Center. The new stage was

elevated above the footlights, which had previously cut the dancers' feet and legs from view of audience members in the first 20 or so rows.

The number of dance companies booked by at Northrop rose from three in 1969 to twelve in 1975. These included three of the country's top troupes, Alwin Nikolai, Alvin Ailey, and Martha Graham, and a 17-performance World Dance Series featuring contemporary, ballet, and folk miniseries. Smith was instrumental in arranging the collaboration between the Minnesota Dance Theatre, the Minnesota Orchestra, and Northrop in presenting *Loyce Houlton's Nutcracker Fantasy* for many holiday seasons.

The list of dance legends Northrop Dance Season presented in the twentieth-century is so long that to enumerate even highlights risks becoming a laundry list, but here are some nonetheless: Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolf Nureyev, Merce Cunningham, Mark Morris, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp; New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, Stars of the Bolshoi Ballet, the National Dance Company of Senegal, and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

Northrop Dance Season replaces Artists Course

Citing Northrop's role as a major dance presenter, and wishing to avoid confusion, an almost-gleeful sounding press release from Northrop in September 1978 announced that the child, Northrop Dance Season, had usurped the parent, the venerable University Artists Course. "The Department of Concerts and Lectures is pleased to announce that the University Artists Course is officially dead. Alive and well in its place is the Northrop Dance Season, which sponsors the World Dance Season, Metropolitan Opera, Nutcracker Fantasy, and other events noted on this letterhead." (University of Minnesota Marching Band, Summer Session entertainment, and special events.)

In 1980, *Minnesota* magazine reported that in the previous decade, more than 600,000 people had seen 161 performances under Northrop Dance Season auspices and the department

was slated to finish in the black for the third year in a row. Ross Smith stated that the only great dancer who hadn't appeared on the Northrop stage was Isadora Duncan. Northrop Dance Season was regarded as one of Smith's most important legacies. It was continued and enhanced by his assistant Dale Schatzlein, who became Northrop director in 1985. (After Schatzlein's death in 2006, Northrop Operations Director Sally Dischinger served as interim director. Ben Johnson served as director of Northrop Concerts and Lectures from 2007 to 2013. Christine Tschida is Northrop's director today.).

In 1980 Northrop began regularly hosting distinguished lectures by world leaders when the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs' Distinguished Carlson Lecture Series made Northrop its home base. The late Curtis L. Carlson, founder and chairman of the board of Minneapolis-based Carlson Companies felt Northrop had the stature and respected tradition to host the endowed series. Over 50 dignitaries, including U.S. presidents Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush (when he was vice president), and Bill Clinton, have stood at Northrop's podium. In 2001, Carlson lecturer His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama received an honorary University degree on the Northrop stage as part of his visit to campus.

Competition for the arts dollar in the Twin Cities heated up in the 1980s as an arts "edifice complex" of new performance venues, including the dance-friendly Ordway Music Theater in St. Paul, exploded. Of the shift in the cultural landscape, *Star Tribune* critic Mike Steele wrote in 1984, "Fifteen years ago we piloted our sedans and hurried off to Northrop, scurrying through the warren of winding streets and ivied halls so that we could see, well, almost anything." Yet, he continued, "Northrop was sooo big. And difficult. And outré. The sound was bad. The parking was impossible. And it was on a university campus. Everyone agreed that we needed something better..." Despite such sniffing, by 1992, Northrop Dance Season counted 3,000 subscribers and overall attendance of 40,000, with a department budget of \$2.5 to 3 million. Programming focused on artists from a variety of cultures: Africa Oya, Sankai Juki,

American Indian Dance Theatre, Maria Benitez Spanish Dance Company, Imperial Bells of China, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

The Art Gallery moves on

Meanwhile, another important Northrop tenant, the Art Gallery, was contemplating its future in the 1970s and 1980s. The fourth floor rooms and auditorium corridors were never meant to be the gallery's permanent home. But there the gallery's 7,000 pieces valued at some \$6 million remained, scattered about the building in cramped storage spaces with no temperature control. "While our collections, exhibitions, and outreach program continue to grow in terms of public recognition and respect," read a 1976 report, "our lack of adequate physical facilities stymies us on every front, from fund raising to day-to-day activities."

A few years later gallery director Melvin Waldfogel reiterated that inadequate facilities mean that donors were hesitant to give their art collections to the University and some gifts had to be declined. Under Lyndel King, who became director in 1981, the gallery made plans for a suitable facility. In 1983 the Board of Regents approved a name change to University Art Museum to better reflect its mission. In 1988, regents approved a proposal for \$4 million for a new building, if the museum could raise a similar amount. Finally, in 1993 the no-longer "little" museum moved into its own building, a landmark Frank Gehry-designed facility. The museum changed its name once more, to the Weisman Art Museum, after benefactor Frederick R.

Weisman, prominent art collector and native of Minneapolis.

Presenting scope expands

Northrop's presenting scope expanded in 1987 when it joined with the Walker Art Center in launching the Discover Series to showcase new directions in performance, drawing its season roster from contemporary artists in opera, dance, music, theater, and mixed media. Notable past performances have included Phillip Glass, Martha Clark, Diamanda Galas, the Wooster Group, Spalding Gray, Kronos Quartet, Trisha Brown Dance Company, and Urban Bush

Women. The Discover Series received a boost in 1990 when Northrop was one of three arts presenting organizations nationwide awarded a three-year grant of \$249,00 from the Northwest Area Foundation to co-commission and present new large-scale works in order to introduce audiences to contemporary visions in the performing arts and enabling emerging and established artists to create new work.

In 1993 Northrop became one of 20 jazz presenters nationwide to join the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest National Jazz Network, paving the way for the Northrop Jazz Series, which offered larger concert hall jazz events as a compliment to the club scene. Charlie Haden Liberation Music Orchestra was the first artist to perform as part of the Jazz Season. Sonny Rollins, Wynton Marsalis, Cassandra Wilson, Herbie Hancock, Maria Schneider, and the Bad Plus are just a few who followed.

Plans for revitalization

In 1986, Northrop made much-needed modifications for handicapped accessibility, including an elevator and more bathrooms. In 1991 two ramps made the plaza accessible. But so much more was needed to ensure that the venerable Northrop would be viable in the twenty-first century. Northrop Dance Season audiences surveyed in 1999 indicated the words or phrases that came to mind in association with Northrop Auditorium were, in order: dance, large/huge, old, uncomfortable seating, parking difficulties. The University conducted 11 studies for the future of Northrop, beginning in 1993.

In the early 2000s, University officials enlisted the expertise and visions of key constituents and outside experts for the future of Northrop. In the meantime, provisions were made for the present. The building received a new roof in 2001. A Gold Room for special events was created on the fourth floor in a former gallery. In 2006, the building received \$15 million in

exterior and mechanical repairs (tuck-pointing, stone repairs, caulking, waterproofing and more/replaced window and repaired roof) over a 17-month period.

“No aspect without issue”

In 2007, the Future of Northrop Advisory Committee (co-chaired by Vice President for University Services Kathleen O’Brien and College of Liberal Arts Dean Steven Rosenstone) stated “there is no aspect of Northrop without issue.” The configuration and use patterns of the “sacred, aging, and crumbling icon” made only a modest contribution to the academic priorities of the University. A vision for a “multi-use, daily-use facility” featuring a reduced-size auditorium to allow creation of gathering spaces and academic program offices was advanced.

Funding for the long-planned \$88.2 million renovation was finally secured in 2010. Memorial Hall would be preserved, but the rest of the interior was essentially gutted (save the familiar proscenium arch). Historic artifacts, including the loggia (series of columns that were inside the main theatre) and six stone medallions, were preserved for later reinstallation.

Though Northrop’s doors closed in 2011, programming continued during the revitalization. The dance series (Northrop MOVES) continued at downtown theatres and through the Women of Substance partnership at O’Shaughnessy Auditorium at the University of St. Catherine. Summer at Northrop became Music on the Plaza and continued uninterrupted.

In 2011 Northrop became administrative home for the McKnight Foundation’s Artist Fellowships for Dancers and Choreographers, which annually awards three fellowships of \$25,000 each to Minnesota dancers, and three fellowships of \$25,000 each to Minnesota choreographers. Northrop is also home for the McKnight International Fellowship, which brings one international choreographer to Minnesota each year to create new work with and for Twin Cities dance artists.

Northrop reborn

The new multi-purpose 2,700-seat main theater features state-of-the-art acoustics, improved sight lines, cutting-edge technologies, and updated amenities including rehearsal studios, receptions rooms, and more concession stands and ticket windows. A second hall, the 168-seat Best Buy Theater adds flexibility for lectures and recitals.

Visual art returns to the fourth floor with a new art gallery. The new Northrop is also home to three University-wide programs: Honors Program, Institute for Advanced Study, and College of Design's Travelers Innovation Lab. Seminar and meeting rooms, study spaces and student lounges, and a café round out the mix.

What began as the Artists Course almost a century ago is today Northrop Presents. All of Northrop's residents will work collaboratively on the new vision for Northrop: to expand programming in ways that will enlighten, challenge, and engage students, faculty, and the community.

By putting the most compelling artists of the day on stage at the center of campus, matched by world-class technical capabilities and acoustics and comfortable surroundings, the newly revitalized Northrop will again become a destination, the hub for arts, culture, and academic activity it was originally intended to be.

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