

MUSIC CENTER NEWS

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Art and Architecture Buff

Frederick M. Nicholas Heads Disney Hall

With one building project already completed — the Museum of Contemporary Art; another through the planning and design and almost to the construction phase — the Dance Gallery; and yet another in the very beginning stages — the Walt and Lily Disney Hall, real estate attorney Frederick M. Nicholas is playing a major role in changing the face of Bunker Hill's Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. Recently, the *Music Center News* interviewed Nicholas in his Beverly Hills offices, and found him to have decided opinions about art, architecture, and the new task he has undertaken.

Obviously, Fred Nicholas enjoys challenge and hard work, above and beyond his role as president of The Hapsmith Company, a real estate development firm. Chairing the building committee for MOCA and facilitating the development of the Temporary Contemporary took four and a half years. Now he has accepted the *pro bono* role of chairman of the



Frederick M. Nicholas

building committee for the Walt and Lily Disney Hall, a project he estimates as taking — "hopefully" — four years. As chairman, he is responsible for the supervision of all activities relating to the Music Center's expansion plans.

"I feel I can make a contribution for the benefit of Los Angeles," Nicholas offers as an explanation. "It is a unique opportunity to positively influence the cultural well-being of the city and I anticipate that it will be a positive experience for me. The challenge is immense, but the rewards are great. Besides, the Music Center has many talented people who are going to help and be involved, otherwise I couldn't take on a job like this."

World Class Concert Hall

Nicholas' first step, before accepting, was to meet with Mrs. Lillian B. Disney. "She assured me that she was committed to building a world-class concert hall," he says. There is no doubt that he shares that commitment absolutely.

"We want to build the best concert hall in the world," he says enthusiastically. "Musicians should be excited about playing there and the hall should inspire their best performances.

"It will be a single-purpose hall," he adds, "not a Dorothy Chandler Pavilion or an Orange County Performing Arts Center. It is being built solely for symphony orchestra performances, and perhaps chamber music, which means a concert hall in the 1,800- to 2,500-seat range for the best acoustics."

How does one begin a project of

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Frederick Nicholas — (continued from page 1)

this magnitude? He has organized and is chairing the Walt and Lily Disney Hall Committee. The members are: Lillian Disney, her daughter, Diane Disney Miller, and Mrs. Disney's attorney, Ron Gother; F. Daniel Frost, chairman and chief executive officer, and Joanne Kozberg, vice chairman, of The Music Center Board of Governors; Michael Connell, president, Ernest Fleischmann, executive director, and Sidney Weiss, principal concertmaster, of the Los Angeles Philharmonic; and Charles Schneider, chairman, The Music Center Operating Company. The Philharmonic's Music Director, Andre Previn, is serving as an *ex officio* member.

Six Subcommittees

The Architecture Subcommittee is one of six subcommittees established. It is chaired by Richard Koshalek, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art and a trained architect. Members include Earl Powell, III, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; John Walsh, director of the Getty Museum; Robert Harris, Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California; and Richard Weinstein, Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA. All three of the museum directors have been involved in major building projects. Serving as consultants will be conductor Pierre Boulez, an expert in acoustics, and violinists Isaac Stern and Itzhak Perلمان.

This committee will recommend and develop the process for the selection of the project architect and consultants. They will recommend whether

there should be a competition and, if so, how the competition should be conducted, as well as recommending architects who have designed world-class concert halls, including local architects. "By the end of the year," says Nicholas, "we should have in place a process by which we can choose the architect." The Disney Hall Committee will make the final selection.

"Wish List"

The Budget Subcommittee will recommend, prepare and supervise the overall development budgets. The Construction Subcommittee will recommend, supervise and select the general contractor and coordinate the activities of the architect, consultants and general contractor during the construction. The Investment Subcommittee will supervise the investment of the \$50 million Disney gift. The Public Relations Subcommittee will handle government and media relations.

The Site Study Subcommittee is responsible for developing, as Nicholas describes it, the Philharmonic's "wish list" or what they want in the building. They will also analyze outstanding music hall facilities throughout the world, among them Symphony Hall in Boston, Philharmonie in Berlin, Alte Oper in Frankfurt and Salle Pleyel in Paris.

As for a time frame, Nicholas estimates that the selection process should be in place by the end of the year, reviewing the candidates could conceivably start at the beginning of 1988, and the architect could be chosen by March or April of 1988. Then, he expects it will take a year

and a half to two years for design and planning, and two years to build. "We are hopeful we can break ground on the Music Center's 25th Anniversary in 1989," he comments.

"We are going to hire a great architect," says Nicholas. "That's how you get great architecture." He grins, then adds, "I have a theory about architects. If you give an architect a difficult site and a difficult job to do, he usually does a better job if he is put to the test than he would if he had a simple site and a simple solution. The more difficult the problem, the better the solution. It certainly was true for MOCA. I was a member of the building committee for the Beverly Hills City Hall. Charles Moore won the architecture competition for that project. The problems in Beverly Hills created what I consider to be a great solution.

"For the concert hall, the main problem will be the acoustics. We are going to construct this hall from the inside out. The acoustics are going to be the most important quality in the building and that's going to be our main concentration. We want to select the acoustical expert at the same time we select the architect so they can work closely together from the very beginning."

Acoustics the Key

In constructing MOCA, the analogous problem was light. Whether sound or light, Nicholas considers solving the problem an art form, not a science. "There are very few museums that have good lighting — MOCA happens to be one that does," he says. He believes that sound is harder to control than light. "Great acoustical engineers can come up with bad acoustics. There are too many

variables — the shape and height of the hall, the materials used, the number of seats." The solution — whether it be light or sound — takes investigation, care, and also, he acknowledges, luck.

While he does not have a pre-conceived notion of what the building is going to look like, and sees his role as managing and developing the process, leaving the aesthetics up to the architect, he does have definite ideas about architecture.

"Los Angeles is desperately in need of good architecture. It is just starting to become an international city, but it lacks great high-rise buildings. Los Angeles does have great residential architecture, but in terms of office buildings, we are nowhere near Dallas, Houston, San Francisco, Chicago or New York. I can't think of more than two or three buildings in Los Angeles which are outstanding in terms of architectural design. I like Crocker Center and the Pacific Design Center. We are just starting to see some great architecture happening downtown. The best building downtown, in my personal opinion, is MOCA."

He also appreciates art, particularly contemporary art. His attractive offices are, in fact, decorated with art he has collected. Among the artists he enjoys are Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg and Donald Judd. "And I like Picasso," he adds. And ethnic art too, apparently, since the entrance doors to his offices are flanked by two large wooden carved totems from New Guinea.

"I like art and architecture," he states simply, in his direct, to-the-point way.

— S.L. ○