



New Music Rooms and Quality Equipment at Austin High School Benefit Entire Community

Students Flourishing with New Wenger Music Equipment

OWATONNA – [Wenger Corporation](#) announces the installation of a suite of music products in the newly renovated [Austin Public High School annex](#), housing band, orchestra and choir rooms in Austin, Minnesota. The renovation is the result of a unique partnership between Austin Public Schools, the MacPhail Center for Music, and the Hormel Foundation.

The \$14.5 million “MacPhail project” included a renovation of the existing annex across the street from the main high school building, and an addition for new band, choir and orchestra rehearsal rooms, along with a music library, practice rooms and storage rooms. MacPhail had previously rented space at a local community college but moved into this facility to operate their student and adult music education programs. The Hormel Foundation, known for its community involvement, provided \$8.4 million in funding.

AHS serves 1,450 students in grades 9-12, and the MacPhail programs reach 1,500 students of all ages, including adults. Increased enrollment in both the high school and the MacPhail programs necessitated a bigger space. The music annex was built in the 1940’s and had never received any major renovations. With such a diverse student base and growing need for an improved facility, it was important for the music faculty to supply adequate practice and rehearsal space as well as the latest technology to advance their music education.

“We do a lot of work with schools throughout the state, but this is the only location where we’re fully integrated with the entire district. It’s the first site MacPhail has ever developed outside of the metro area, and it is unique in the country to have a community music school housed inside a high school music site,” says Paul Babcock, MacPhail President and Chief Operating Officer. “Together, we’ve created something really special for the students and surrounding community.”

“We wanted to create a state-of-the-art music and fine arts facility in southern Minnesota to offer something new and exciting to enhance music education and performance,” says Chris Simpson, President and CEO of Wenger Corporation.

The project team included Austin High School administration, architect ATS+R and construction partner, The Joseph Company as well as Wenger Corporation, tasked with installing first-rate acoustic upgrades to refresh and reinvigorate the entire music program.

Improved Acoustics

The Wenger products installed include chairs to promote proper posture, conductor’s equipment and ensemble tools, instrument storage cabinets, a percussion workstation, music library, cello racks, garment racks and StageTek® Staging and Custom Seated Risers.

The highlights for students and teachers, however, are the VAE® Rehearsal Systems that have been installed in the band, choir and orchestra rooms, and the VAE Studios for individual and small group practice sessions, using the same technology.

“They showed us this fantastic technology that can make our practice rooms sound like Knowlton Auditorium, our performance space at the high school,” says Cheryl Berglund, Austin Site Director for MacPhail. “That kind of technology makes such a difference in the way we practice and perform. There’s never enough time to practice in the actual performance hall, so this is a great alternative.”

The Rehearsal Systems include an array of microphones and speakers that can mimic the acoustics of a broad range of performance venues — from a large recital hall to a cathedral to a small auditorium. The goal is to help performers hear what they’ll sound like at a venue they’ll be performing in.

“The system adds acoustic energy back into the room and provides a truly unique teaching tool for the instructor,” says Matt Hildebrand, Acoustics Product Manager at Wenger Corporation. “When the system is off, the classroom is quiet and ideal for spoken instruction or teaching music theory.”

“The VAE system allows us to do things we couldn’t do before, like record a performance and then play it back so the students can get instant feedback and make adjustments,” says Christoph Dundas, Director of Bands. “It encourages them to play like there are 40 people in the room instead of 20, which boosts their energy level,” he says. “They are motivated not only because it sounds so much better, but because they know the community built this specifically for them.”

“For singers, the acoustics of a room are like the body of our instrument: we need it to help us sound our best,” explains Kalle Akkerman, AHS Choir Director. “When we can hear each other, we can fine tune our sound and evolve into more focused music-making.”

The band and orchestra rooms both have complete storage rooms located on the second floor directly outside their classrooms with Wenger cabinets designed specifically to house instruments in the most efficient way.

Grand opening

With the renovations finished and the upper addition completed, the MacPhail Center for Music moved into the former orchestra space on the main floor. AHS will share some common spaces such as a centrally located gathering/performance area that opens into a large “learning staircase.” The staircase serves as both an area for students to congregate, and a place to listen to performances. Additional practice rooms of different sizes and four more VAE® Studio systems were installed on the second floor for individual private lessons and ensemble training. Rounding out the space is an area for music therapy, early childhood music classes and staff offices. The 2020-2021 school year is the first year that the new music annex will be fully operational.

“This new space allows MacPhail and our school to reach more people through music,” says Berglund. “We already had excellent music programs, we just needed room to grow and the technology to flourish.”

MacPhail is completing its fifth year of operations in Austin in 2020. To date, they’ve reached 1,500 students per year out of 25,000 total residents.

“People love hearing about this partnership,” Babcock says. “It’s a really fun story to be part of and a wonderful project that will benefit this community for years.”

To learn more about Wenger Corporation and all of its products, please visit www.wengercorp.com.

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About Wenger Corporation

Wenger Corporation provides innovative, high-quality products and solutions for music and theatre education, performing arts venues and athletic programs. Our products include the Wenger, J.R. Clancy and GearBoss brands of equipment. Products include theatrical rigging systems; acoustical shells and treatment; acoustical doors and sound-isolating practice rooms; fixed and portable audience seating; and portable and mobile staging systems. Our furniture line includes music posture chairs; music stands; conductor’s equipment; and a full line of high-density and portable storage solutions for instruments, garments, sheet music and media equipment. We also offer a complete line of athletic lockers, equipment storage and transport products. For more information call +1.507.455.4100 or visit www.wengercorp.com.

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