

February 23, 2003

## **Streetscapes/Manhattan School of Music, 122nd Street Between Claremont Avenue and Broadway; A Campus With a Century of Architectural Design**

By CHRISTOPHER GRAY

THE Manhattan School of Music, on 122nd Street between Claremont Avenue and Broadway, offers a kaleidoscope of urban architecture -- a richly styled Edwardian building from 1910, a sleek 1930's Art Deco addition by the architects of the Empire State Building, an ultramodern 1960's expansion and a nuanced 2001 residence hall that responds to the older structures, though not slavishly. The four-building ensemble, built over nearly a century, is one of the richest architectural compositions in the city.

The 1910 building was put up for the Institute of Musical Art, which had been established in 1905 with an endowment of \$500,000 by James Loeb, a retired partner of the Kuhn, Loeb investment firm. By 1909 the institute had 110 students, and it announced plans to build a new four-story building at the northeast corner of 122nd Street and Claremont Avenue. The dean, Frank Damrosch, was the godson of Franz Liszt and was from a musical family.

The cornerstone of the limestone building was laid in 1910, and the ceremonies began with students singing "Awake" from Richard Wagner's "Meistersinger." The mansard-roofed building was completed later that year.

The journal *New York Architect* called the building, designed by Donn Barber, a "free adaptation of the Adam architecture of Bath, England, treated in a French Renaissance manner," with double-walled teaching rooms with cork floors. *Architects' and Builders' Magazine* praised the building, singling out "one room possessing great attraction" -- what is now Greenfield Hall -- "decorated with a rich simplicity which approaches perfection," with extremely handsome interiors, even its "extremely odd chandeliers." The room no longer has its chandeliers, but much is still intact.

On the third floor of the building's exterior, violins, sheet music, trombones, bagpipes and other musical instruments are carved in limestone. Barber also designed a 1924 addition facing 122nd Street.

In 1926 the Juilliard Musical Foundation, established by the will of the textile merchant Augustus D. Juilliard, merged with the institute, bringing along its endowment of \$13 million. The merged institute ultimately came to be known solely by the Juilliard name.

In 1930, John Erskine, its president, told *The Times* that there was "no future for opera" as produced in the major houses. "I don't think it has even a present," he said, adding that what America needed was a native opera, in the vernacular, with present-day themes.

In that year the school began a large addition, completed in 1931 -- seven stories high on Claremont Avenue, wrapping around the original complex to 122nd and Broadway, designed by Arthur L. Harmon, of the firm of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, which had just designed the Empire State Building. The addition's interiors were by Elsie Sloan Farley. According to "Morningside Heights: A History of Its Architecture and Development" (Columbia, 1998), by Andrew Dolkart, the mansard roof on Barber's 1910 structure was removed at this time so the old building would be in harmony with the new, simpler structure.

The exterior of the limestone addition was fairly reserved, essentially traditional, but what remains of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon's original design on the inside is one of the Art Deco treats in the city. The foyer to the 1931 auditorium, now the Borden Auditorium, is a cubelike space lined with gray and tan marble squares heavily veined with yellow and deep red. In the corners rise two perforated Art Deco metal cylinders with brass accents, apparently air ducts. The room evokes the architects' Empire State Building lobby.

The auditorium itself, designed with a stage large enough to present opera, has been roughly treated and has lost its original light fixtures, decorative painting and strawberry-colored seat coverings. But it still has its high wood wainscot, Art Deco metalwork and exit lamps and fluted wall decoration, all with the 1930's look of Radio City Music Hall.

The addition also had a gym, a cafeteria, a radio lab and a rehearsal room suitable for a symphony orchestra. The Shreve, Lamb & Harmon annex was dedicated in 1931, with a student orchestra led by Leopold Stokowski playing a program that included Handel's "Water Music" and a work entitled "Negro Rhapsody," by Rubin Goldmark, then the chairman of the school's composition department.

When Damrosch retired as director in 1933, *The Times* asked him why modern composers could not seem to produce masterworks. "You can't produce a great composition with a thousand automobiles roaring past your window and with all the other distractions of the modern age," he said. He added that in his opinion "jazz will pass with this generation."

Damrosch died in 1937, and thus missed the lectures given at the school in 1943 by the clarinetist and bandleader Benny Goodman, who spoke to students on "The Clarinet in Swing and the Classics." After playing "Body and Soul," he told them, according to *The Times*, that "jazz is here to stay."

After World War II the school had 1,800 students, and the Institute of Musical Art's name was completely phased out. Juilliard later made arrangements to move to Lincoln Center, which was built in the 1960's. In 1969, it occupied its modern building, designed by Pietro Belluschi, with Eduardo Catalano and Westermann & Miller, at 66th Street and Broadway.

The Manhattan School of Music, founded in 1918 as a neighborhood music school in East Harlem, bought Juilliard's 122nd Street building and retained the architects MacFadyen & Knowles for a \$1 million alteration and expansion. The aging modern-style interiors in the 122nd Street lobby and the double-height glass-roofed cafeteria on the Broadway side apparently date from that alteration.

The lot just north of the 1931 addition had been vacant since the 1960's, and in the 1980's the school proposed a 34-story apartment house for the site. The apartment house was not built, but in 2001 the school completed its G. Chris and SungEun Andersen Residence Hall on the plot, designed by Beyer Blinder Belle. The new 19-story building, the school's first residence hall, is mostly dormitory space, with 517 beds. It also has 58 practice rooms, as well as offices and other spaces.

On Claremont Avenue, a limestone base rises five stories, with the 14 residential floors in gradual setbacks above. Executed in mottled, yellowish tan brick, the tower is a dignified and intelligent addition to the Manhattan School of Music complex, and gently mixes both originality and tradition. The lobby has broad, off-center curved surfaces set underneath high ceilings, with 1950's-style retro light fixtures next to supersized aluminum cooling air vents that look like the eyeball-shaped air vents above airliner seats.

"Previously you had oboe players living in a spare room in a West Side apartment, trying to practice at 1 a.m.," said Richard Southwick, a partner at Beyer Blinder Belle. "This has given the school a sense of campus for the first time."