

Wisconsin Lutheran College

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The outstanding acoustics, excellent sight lines, intimate atmosphere, state-of-the-art facilities, and prime location of the Schwan Concert Hall made it an almost instant hit with Milwaukee concert patrons when it opened in 1996. The Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra moved to the facility the second year it was opened and many other symphonies use it for rehearsal space. A Milwaukee favorite, pianist Jeffrey Siegel, has moved his concert series to this hall. Schwan Concert Hall also hosts a variety of other visiting and Milwaukeebased groups.

Acoustic panels on the ceiling, stage, and walls provide unusually spectacular natural amplification, and the large trapezoid stage can accommodate solo recitals to orchestras. The sight lines were maximized by a steeper than usual floor slope and alternating the seats between two different widths, offsetting each seat's view from the one right in front. The relatively small seating capacity (370) further encourages an intimate atmosphere and interaction between the stage and the audience.

Wisconsin Lutheran College, founded in 1973, has an active fine arts program, and the building which houses the concert hall represents a major investment in the departments of music, theater, and art. A major donor to the capital campaign was the Schwan Foundation of Marshall, Minnesota. The Schwan Company is fairly well known in Milwaukee and across the Midwest for home delivery of ice cream and other foods. The lovely red brick and clay tile roof exterior matches that of all the other buildings on campus. Inside, the three-story atrium draws the eye upward, past somewhat whimsical industrial decorative touches, to a large skylight in the roof. This ties the building and the arts it houses together and seems to inspire creative dreaming.

In planning the building, a decision was made to build specific-use spaces instead of a general auditorium – smaller spaces ideally suited to each type of arts event. On the first floor, a small black-box theater with movable riser seating and flexible acoustical curtains is used for theater productions and is also a favored recording space. The Raabe Theater, a larger (200 seat) space, features fairly steep risers and a thrust stage and is equipped with a full costume shop, prop shop, and set shop. The Reichel Lecture Hall on the second floor boasts an 80-seat lecture hall with constantly updated media capabilities, making it a favorite for visiting conferences as well as media-intense classes.

The third floor contains the art and music wings. Studios for sculpture, drawing, ceramics, photography, print making, and more are housed in the art wing. The music wing contains practice rooms, studios for lessons, and a composition classroom with individual computer stations. Using the latest software, students can compose and have the computer play back their work through earphones at their station. Students can also have their work projected to the whole room and played back on speakers, allowing for peer and instructor commentary. The third floor also contains the Schlueter Art Gallery, which has year round exhibits from visiting and local artists, rotating to a new show every 4-6 weeks. The gallery is open 9-4 daily and 1-4 weekends.

Early Music Now is glad to take advantage of this excellent facility, a real gem in Milwaukee.

© Copyright 2003 by Anne Humphrey, St. Charles, Illinois