

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, IOWA CITY, IA

PROJECT CASE STUDY

“Wenger was tremendous working with us, responding quickly and installing our practice rooms under a tight timeline. We now have 84 rooms, most with VAE technology that can make your sound anything from a practice room to a performance hall.”

– Kristin Thelander
Collegiate Fellow

Professor and Director of Planning for the School of Music at the University of Iowa



SOUND-ISOLATION PRACTICE ROOMS

CHALLENGE

Provide interim and long-term practice facilities for individual musicians and small ensembles.

WENGER SOLUTION

Designing specific room layouts to maximize number of practice rooms and best utilize existing building square footage. Installing sound-isolation rooms at several locations under tight deadlines. Testing acoustical performance before and after installation to ensure superior sound isolation and effective teaching/practice environments.

BENEFITS

- Modularity provides rapid installation and future flexibility
- Digital record/playback capability enables evaluation, self-critique
- Acoustical simulations aid learning and teaching in an environment that encourages practice
- Guaranteed acoustical performance safeguards investment
- Room-to-room closures provide a finished, built-in appearance
- UL®-classified electrical system and integrated ventilation creates completely self-contained room

HIGHLIGHTS

In June 2008, flooding of the Iowa River forced the evacuation of the University of Iowa's music building, along with much of campus. Following the flood, before the start of fall semester in late August, the School of Music was dispersed to 17 leased locations around Iowa City, including local churches, schools and retail buildings. No one knew how long those temporary spaces would be needed.

One downtown location, formerly retail space, was quickly outfitted. "We thought of Wenger practice rooms right away and ordered 22 of them, including four with VAE technology for piano practice," recalls Kristin Thelander, Collegiate Fellow, Professor and Director of Planning for the School of Music. VAE® (Virtual Acoustical Environments) technology simulates the acoustical characteristics of different spaces and provides record/playback capabilities.

When these 22 rooms were installed in mid-September, just four weeks into fall classes, they were the only dedicated practice rooms available in what's now called the Clinton Street Music Buildings.

"Wenger was tremendous working with us, responding quickly and getting everything put together," comments Thelander. "It was quite a miracle to get them installed that quickly."

A flooded art museum on campus was later re-opened and re-configured to feature two large rehearsal rooms. Wenger installed 12 more practice rooms in this building – eventually 15 total – and all feature VAE technology. The University also bought a former church building, now called the Riverside Recital Hall, where Wenger installed three practice rooms – one green room for warming up (with VAE technology) and two used as recording studios.

In January 2009, the University decided the old music building was not salvageable; long-term interim facilities were needed. University Capitol Center (UCC), just a block from the Clinton Street facility downtown, was identified as the largest interim solution.

Neumann Monson Architects helped plan the two-story site – formerly a multi-screen movie theater. Fortunately, floor construction of this building was judged suitable to support the Wenger practice rooms.

Project timing was compressed by a mandate from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that all interim facilities be completed by mid-August, 2009.

"This deadline was a tremendous challenge for the architects, the construction company and for Wenger manufacturing and installing the rooms," explains Thelander. "We've been extremely impressed with how much Wenger has helped."



Dwight Dobberstein, Principal with Neumann Monson Architects of Iowa City, says Wenger practice rooms were the only way to meet this accelerated schedule. “Building stick-built rooms would have taken a lot longer,” he states. “The Wenger rooms were a known product that already had the necessary sound isolation built-in.”

He says Wenger responded with a team of people to design these 44 rooms and help lay them out to fit within the space. “This was no small task and Wenger was very good to work with,” says Dobberstein, adding that the Wenger rooms achieve much more sound isolation than the original built-in rooms. He concludes, “It makes sense that rooms built in a controlled, factory setting offer better results.” The rooms’ modularity was also a plus because eventually they can be moved into the future School of Music facility.

Acoustician David Kahn, Principal with Acoustic Dimensions, New York, N.Y., also praises Wenger’s involvement, including assembling a variety of mock-up rooms on-campus for preliminary acoustical testing.

Due to the building’s lightweight construction, there were initial concerns about sound flanking from room to room through the floor slab. Floating floors were considered but testing revealed they were not necessary.

“Our firm’s reputation was on the line so we wanted to be sure this installation would succeed acoustically,” explains Kahn. After the facility was complete, Acoustic Dimensions and Wenger performed independent acoustical tests, including comparisons with stick-built rooms, and found their results were consistent.

“We believe Wenger practice rooms can be more cost-effective than stick-built – because they work,” states Kahn. “So many things can go wrong with stick-built rooms, but the acoustical performance of Wenger modules is guaranteed.”

Wenger installed 44 practice rooms at UCC, all featuring VAE technology designed to maximize the effectiveness of music practice and instruction. Most are teaching studios ranging from 180 to 300 square feet; ten practice rooms feature grand pianos. In total, Wenger installed 84 practice rooms at the University of Iowa, approximately 70 percent with VAE technology.

“VAE technology can make your sound anything from a practice room to a performance hall,” says Thelander. “The recording and playback feature has been tremendously useful.” Faculty had this capability in their previous offices, but she says the VAE technology is easier than using stereo components and a microphone.

“The VAE technology works great and students can download their lesson to their computer and take it with them,” she adds.

Ben Coelho, Professor of Bassoon, is also enthusiastic. “The VAE technology’s recording/playback is a fabulous teaching tool that I use in lessons,” he comments. “By listening to themselves, students get immediate feedback and awareness of how they actually sound.” Coelho believes the Wenger practice room works out very well as his teaching studio, especially the excellent sound isolation.

One of Coelho’s graduate students, Sarah Wildey, really enjoys altering the acoustics with the VAE technology. “Most practice rooms have an incredibly deadening effect on the sound you hear, which leads to playing overly loud and having less stamina,” explains Wildey. “The acoustic options enable a longer, more fulfilling practice session.”

She also considers the acoustical settings a “huge benefit” when preparing for auditions. “I can adjust the acoustics from a very lively space to a very dead one and learn how to alter my dynamics and articulation to be prepared for any situation,” Wildey notes.

The School of Music, currently spread across eight different sites in Iowa City, eagerly anticipates the opening of its new facility. Thelander says they are strongly considering incorporating the Wenger rooms.

“The ability to move and reconfigure the Wenger rooms is a definite advantage,” she explains. “I believe we would want VAE technology for the recording and acoustic possibilities.” Thelander adds, “Students love the Wenger practice rooms and the faculty are very grateful to have them.”



PRODUCT LIST

Sound-Isolation Practice Rooms, some incorporating Virtual Acoustical Environments (VAE®) technology, Student Chairs, Musician Chairs, Cello Chairs, Tablet Arms, Chair Move & Store Carts, RoughNeck® Stands, Acoustical Shields, Conductor's System, Instrument Storage Cabinets, Whiteboards, Versalite® Platform System and Acoustical Panels.

