

The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music

**Q & A with Rona Sebastian
President, Herb Alpert Foundation**

Question: The Foundation's wish was to support UCLA's vision for "a School of Music for the 21st Century." What does that mean to the Foundation and how will that vision be realized through this gift?

Today we live in a global environment where information is shared instantaneously and competition in all fields of endeavor is fierce. Technology is making profound changes in the way music is made and shared — audiences are changing, and artists who choose a life in the arts must be able to navigate some very challenging waters. The gift will support an innovative curriculum designed to prepare students to successfully take on these and many other challenges after they graduate.

Q: Los Angeles is sometimes called "the creative capital of the world." Do you subscribe to that line of thinking, and how does UCLA fit into that picture?

Los Angeles consists of an amazing diversity of peoples and cultures, and its cultural institutions, both the large, well-established ones, as well as the smaller grassroots ones, reflect that diversity. At the same time, Los Angeles has historically been the center of the broader entertainment industry and the music industry. These are potent factors that have stimulated experimentation. This type of environment that is diverse and very rich in contrasts can nurture creativity. And UCLA's student body and its vast array of programs mirror that richness.

Q: Why do you think this gift is well placed in a university setting and, in particular, UCLA?

Part of the objective of this gift is to allow the faculty to create a curriculum that will broaden the student's experience of music, and of the world in general. UCLA has an incredible array of resources in all areas — it offers studies in all the arts, business, the law, medicine, etc. And being set in Los Angeles, within a community that is diverse and culturally innovative, makes it a perfect place to introduce the kind of integrated educational paradigm we have envisioned.

Q: What does it mean to you to know that musicians such as jazz great Kenny Burrell, sitar master Shujaat Husain Khan, film composer Paul Chihara, and noted scholars such as MacArthur Fellow Susan McClary will be benefiting from this gift and extending its benefits to the students they teach and the audiences they reach?

Its very exciting to know that we will be helping these great artists and teachers do what they love to do and what they do so well – teaching and inspiring the next generation of artists. The new curricular model integrates all existing areas of music studies ---- classical music, world music, jazz, music history, music research – so faculty will have

more opportunities to impact more students —not just the ones who were traditionally studying in their particular areas of expertise. And since the new model will introduce innovative approaches to instruction such as team teaching, this great faculty will itself also have more opportunities to work together.

Q: How would you describe the Foundation’s philanthropic mission?

Our mission is to touch lives in a positive way -- to help make a difference. We focus mostly on youth, and try to find ways to help them reach their potential and lead productive and fulfilling lives. This involves helping young people to discover, harness and fully develop their special talents and unique creative energies. And we see the arts as a primary tool for making that happen.

Q: What inspired a gift of this magnitude at this time?

Over the past few years the Foundation started thinking about making a significant gift that would support our mission and values and stand the test of time. We wanted to focus on music in particular, and in surveying the possibilities, looked at many institutions and programs.

In the discussions held with UCLA, it became clear that we shared a similar vision of what music education could, and should be, to fully prepare students for personal and professional success. It was the right moment on both sides.

Q: Clearly, one of the strengths of The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music will be its emphasis on cross-cultural understanding through music. How does this fit with Herb Alpert’s own views and interests?

Herb Alpert has always been interested in music across many boundaries, and he has considered the arts, and music perhaps in particular, the universal language. It can bridge many gaps, and to the degree that you embrace its diversity, you ultimately can embrace the diversity of the human race.

Q: What musical influences inspired and shaped Herb Alpert and what was missing? How will this gift to UCLA Arts give young people what they need to succeed in a musical career and fill some of the gaps that he might have experienced in his own education?

Exposing students to all types of music, and ensuring they learn all the skills necessary to be well-rounded musicians, is very important. But it’s also very important to understand the world around you and be exposed to things beyond your music studies ---- to understand the nature of the business world so you know what to do to prosper in your career, to understand how music and other disciplines interconnect, to understand how the stresses and strains on the human body that you may encounter as a performer can impact your life as a musician. There are lots of things that are important for developing the “full musician”, and that’s what’s usually missing in more traditional, “conservatory”-style music education.

Q: What hopes does the Herb Alpert Foundation have for The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music in terms of the effect its curricula and programs will have on students' understanding of music and the larger world around them?

Again it's about developing the "full person" —so that music students can navigate the challenges that their career goals may present and be successful. And to think of their connection to music as one aspect of a full and rich life that values many types of experiences.

Q: What legacy does the Foundation hope to create with this gift?

The legacy we wish for most is that this inspires other donors to support the arts at significant levels. It is not unusual to hear about major gifts being made to support business, law, medicine, etc., —and those are all important areas and need to be supported generously — but it is far less often that we hear about major support to the Arts. The Arts are key to nurturing a civil society, and to the degree that we value and cherish them and appropriately support them, that's the degree to which we can be assured of a rich and meaningful existence.

Q: Herb Alpert speaks of a "never ending quest of discovery and trying to be the person that you're intended to be." How does the Foundation envision this gift furthering and supporting that same journey for UCLA students and faculty?

Its about having and seizing opportunities that enable you to explore new things that can enhance your understanding and appreciation of life, and thereby of yourself. To provide those opportunities to many young people —That's our goal.

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