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MacPhail unveils plans for new home

Linda Mack, Star Tribune

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MacPhail Center for Music is leaving its aging home for a brash new flagship on the downtown Minneapolis riverfront. Twin Cities architect James Dayton's plan for the music school, to be unveiled today, should bring more modern pizzazz to a district already brimming with design cachet.

MacPhail plans show an urbane \$12.5 million tin, steel and glass headquarters on 5th Avenue S. and S. 2nd Street near French architect Jean Nouvel's Guthrie Theater and Tom Meyer's Mill City Museum.

"If there was any doubt that the riverfront was becoming a neighborhood, having another cultural institution pretty well seals the deal," said Nina Archabal, director of the Minnesota Historical Society, which owns the Mill City Museum.

The dramatic design shows a six-story tin-clad tower of music studios framing a two-story auditorium sheathed in rusty steel that appears to float on a glass understory. The auditorium will seat as many as 225 people for public concerts and recitals.

New MacPhail Center for Music
Courtesy Of James Dayton Design
The sought-after Dayton, who worked with architect Frank Gehry, designed the acclaimed Minnetonka Center for the Arts and a just-announced luxury condo project a block away from the proposed MacPhail.

The 98-year-old music school also will announce plans to open an outpost in Apple Valley, the first of a series of suburban "access sites." MacPhail plans to share space with the Paideia Academy, a charter school renovating the former Apple Valley movie theater at 7200 W. 147th St.

Site of new MacPhail Center for Music
Tona Dove of the Paideia Academy board said that MacPhail will run the school's music program when it opens on Aug. 8 and the board is discussing ways for MacPhail to offer its own programs in the same building.

"Students will still come to the flagship for master classes or a speaker," said David O'Fallon, MacPhail's president. "But you won't have to drive downtown every Saturday morning or Thursday afternoon for lessons."

He said 3,000 of MacPhail's 6,500 students use the downtown classrooms. Others are served through partnerships with schools or community groups.

MacPhail has been looking for new quarters since before 2000, when the University of St. Thomas purchased its 1923 building. In 2001 the music school hired the Chicago firm

of Nagle Hartray to design a building for the riverfront site, but the plans were shelved.

"They've waited a long time for this," said Minneapolis City Council Member Lisa Goodman, who represents downtown. "There were fits and starts, they had an uninspired design, they tried to find a building to renovate. This design, this architect, this location-- it's just perfect for that site."

Downtown

At 55,000 square feet, MacPhail's new quarters will be 10,000 square feet larger than its present home and will have features the current 82-year-old building lacks, such as air conditioning and acoustical control. O'Fallon said a flexible auditorium will allow concert seating for 225 or a more intimate arrangement for chamber music.

The current fourth-floor auditorium seats 160.

The new building will also have a glass-walled studio for rock music on the top floor, first-floor spaces for early-childhood arts classes, and a second performance space off a three-story atrium that will lend itself to informal jam sessions.

Manon Gimlett, a voice teacher who heads the school's teenage Prelude program, especially liked that performance space.

"It's really flexible," she said.

The new building will also offer community spaces where parents can wait for children, have a cup of coffee and be comfortable, O'Fallon said.

A suburban strategy

In Apple Valley, MacPhail plans to renovate 4,000 square feet in the same building as the Paideia Academy. A final agreement has not yet been signed.

The idea of bringing faculty to students was driven by studies of population growth, traffic and other trends, said Tom McEnery, who chaired the board's strategic task force. "What are the barriers to access? Traffic is one," he said.

If cost estimates, fundraising and other matters all fall into place, MacPhail plans to break ground on the downtown flagship next year in order to finish it in 2007, the institution's 100th anniversary.

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