



Michael Avedon

# N.C. School of the Arts— Fame Starts in Carolina

by Mary D.B.T. Semans and James H. Semans

**M**el Tomlinson, a Raleigh native, now dances with the New York City Ballet. *The New York Times* called one Tomlinson appearance the best individual dance performance of 1981. Terry Mann, currently starring in the Broadway hit *Cats*, has built his stage career on talents ranging from juggling, mime, and clowning to acrobatics, jazz dancing, and stage fighting. Glenn Basham holds a principal chair in the Detroit Symphony. Debbie Hendricks, a Winston-Salem product, is assistant director of productions for Barry Manilow and Olivia Newton-John. Tomlinson, Mann, Basham, and Hendricks—while in different areas of the performing arts—have something very important in common. They all attended the N.C. School of the Arts.

In its brief 17-year history, the School of the Arts (NCSA) has come to equal the finest conservatories and art schools in the United States. Students from 46 states and 11 nations have gone through the school, leading to seats with major orchestras, roles with prominent

American dance and theatre companies, and positions with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, the Netherlands Dance Theatre, and dozens of other performing arts companies. Three of every four NCSA graduates are employed in the arts or engaged in further study of the arts, according to a recent survey conducted by the school.

Many of these persons—perhaps even Tomlinson, Mann, and the other “blue-ribbon” alumni—owe their success to the long-held dream of an Italian-American named Vittorio Giannini and to the political perseverance of a governor named Terry Sanford. Giannini, a New York musicologist and composer, worked

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*For many years, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans and James H. Semans have supported the N.C. School of the Arts and many other arts institutions of the state, including the N.C. Museum of Art. The Semanses and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation have stimulated the artistic environment of the state through visible efforts like the Mary Duke Biddle Gallery in the Museum of Art as well as through painstaking behind-the-scenes work. Photos courtesy N.C. School of the Arts.*



David Reavis

#### Backstage in the costume shop.

in the North Carolina mountains with, among others, James Christian Pfohl of the Transylvania Music Camp in Brevard. N.C. Governor Terry Sanford (1961-65) wanted to offer special educational opportunities to young persons with particular needs and turned to a member of his staff, the novelist John Ehle, for advice. Ehle and Pfohl put their heads together and introduced Giannini to Sanford. The match worked.

Giannini had a vision of a residential arts school, for high school and college students, where music, drama, and dance would be taught on a single campus. The physical proximity would benefit each of these arts, Giannini felt, because they were so interrelated. Teachers needed to be performers who could transmit technique and attitude—in short, prepare students to be professionals. But Giannini felt strongly that artists should be “whole” people who could also master a full program of academic study. Gov. Sanford bought the Giannini concept. The two of them began selling the idea across the state.

The Giannini idea—dubbed the “toe-dancin’ bill”—met determined opposition in the General Assembly. Intense lobbying convinced some skeptical legislators, including the late John Kerr, a powerful representative from

Warren County. Kerr brought along the needed votes, so the story goes, when he announced to his colleagues, “If there’s going to be toe dancin’ and banjer pickin’ in the state, I want to be in the audience.”

But the blessing of the General Assembly<sup>1</sup> wasn’t the last step in Giannini’s dream. A campus had to be found, teachers enlisted, and most importantly, students enrolled. In a dramatic show of support, community leaders in Winston-Salem organized a telethon which netted almost \$1 million in 48 hours. The city offered this seed money, a former high school building, and 22 acres of land to the state for the chance to have Winston-Salem be the school’s permanent home. How could the state refuse? With a home and some start-up money, the state signed on Giannini as the school’s first president. In 1965, the school opened its doors. But the school had only just begun. Sanford’s successor, Gov. Dan K. Moore (1965-69), took the school on as a high priority. Also, the school’s subsequent chief administrators—President Robert Ward (1967-74), a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, and Chancellor Robert Suderburg<sup>2</sup> (1974-present), himself a noted composer—along with an impressive network of public and private supporters, carried NCSA to a position of prominence within the national arena of the performing arts. After 17 years, the N.C. School

of the Arts is still the country's only residential state school for the performing arts for high school and college students.

The vision of Vittorio Giannini and of Terry Sanford, combined with the support of the General Assembly and of Winston-Salem, has produced a unique educational opportunity—for the students who attend and for the state which supports it. The financial support and the excellent reputation generated by the school testify to the value of the state's rather modest investment. A brief description of the school's admissions procedures, curriculum, funding and structure, and performance schedule will provide a clear picture of how the school functions. The value of the state's investment will then become clear.

**Admissions.** The school offers courses of study for grades seven through the senior year of college. And in 1982, graduate programs in design and production and in music (still in the planning stage) were initiated. Admissions are determined primarily by auditions, a rigorous and exciting search for talent much like the opening scenes of the movie *Fame*, where high school students in New York auditioned for a limited number of spots in the city's performing arts high school. The school's catalogue

describes the overriding criteria at the auditions: "The first requisite is demonstration of talent, achievement, and career potential in the field of dance, drama, music, or design and production." Students must re-audition each year to demonstrate progress in their field.

The school attempts to have about 50 percent of its students from inside North Carolina. Its acceptance of out-of-state students helps achieve high standards at the school and offer more diversity. Attracting students from across the country and from many foreign countries also provides a way of spreading the word of North Carolina's commitment to education in the arts. Of the 735 students now enrolled in the school, 41 percent are from North Carolina and 12 percent are minorities. About 200 of the 735 (27 percent) are in the high school program. (See page 58 for more on admissions, especially recruitment and geographical spread within the state.)

**Curriculum.** There are four major schools—music, drama, dance, and theater design and technical production. The School of Drama begins at the college level. In addition, there is a small high school program in the visual arts. Degrees conferred by the school include high school diplomas, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Music, and Master of Fine Arts. While the school focuses on preparing students for careers in the performing arts, it continues to subscribe to Giannini's tenet that artists must

NCSA's Workplace houses classrooms, practice rooms, and the library.

Charlie Buchanan





**R.J. Reynolds Industries**  
presents  
the N.C. School of the Arts  
in A Traveling Show on the History of Jazz

develop as "whole people." As Giannini put it: "Skill and comprehension in English, a historical perspective, competence in a modern foreign language, and understanding of scientific and mathematical principles and methods are essential to the educational development of a citizen in the 20th century."

Study in the humanities is vital in some areas of the performing arts, and the school's director of academic studies has structured courses which relate to and embellish the professional disciplines. Theater students cover the history of drama, for instance, and singers are given instruction in French, German, and Italian—languages in which they will likely perform.

The school does not attempt to provide a full liberal arts education, but it does provide a good balance between academics and performance training. To meet the state's public school requirements, the high school academic curriculum must take about one-half of a student's working time. College students spend about one-third of their time in academic study. Accommodations are made for production schedules, and academic classes are arranged with performance and training in mind.

**Funding and Structure.** The School of the Arts is one of the 16 institutions within the consolidated University of North Carolina, a unique position in light of the middle and high school part of the curriculum. There are 98 faculty members, many of whom are professional artists. State teacher certification requirements do not apply to the faculty, which is chosen according to professional criteria appropriate to each artistic field. The average faculty salary is \$21,406, the lowest among the 16 schools of the University of North Carolina system.

The School of the Arts, with an annual budget of over \$7 million, receives funding primarily from three sources: 1) as a member of the University of North Carolina system, the school will receive \$4.8 million in state funds for 1982-83, about two-thirds of its annual budget; 2) the NCSA Foundation administers donations

from the private sector, including foundations, corporations, and individuals, for a total of \$1.3 million this year; 3) another \$1.1 million came to the school from student tuition and fees.<sup>3</sup> The school's charter states that private funds must be obtained along with state funds, in order to attract the quality of faculty members necessary for the excellence required at the school. The school landed an initial \$1.5 million Ford Foundation grant, which made the original faculty possible.

Corporate donations make possible some of the schools' most visible programs. Each summer, for example, the school offers its International Music Program, sponsored in part by J. A. Jones Construction Company of Charlotte. A professional orchestra of young people—including many NCSA students—performs in North Carolina and on a four-week concert tour of Italy and Germany. The school also often joins forces with R.J. Reynolds Industries, Inc., now its single most generous corporate donor through cash and program sponsorships. In 1982, R.J. Reynolds supported NCSA's "Jazz Is" revue by providing a special bus with built-in stage for the troupe, which performed from New York City to California and across the state.

Another partnership arrangement has been worked out in current state solicitations for the school. In some areas of North Carolina special funds are being created through donations to the school. The funds are to remain in each community to be managed by a bank of the community's choice. The income from the account provides NCSA scholarships for the community's talented young people or brings artistic productions from the School of the Arts to that area.

**Performance Schedule.** Students participate in more than 400 performances per year. These range from the school's International Music Program in Europe to local performances in Winston-Salem. In addition, several professional groups have a close working relationship with the school. Giannini gave considerable thought to how the school's graduates would enter the professional world. He envisioned the school helping to start small professional companies which would provide opportunities for new graduates from the school and for other applicants as well. The North Carolina Dance Theater of Winston-Salem began in this fashion; this professional company has received accolades throughout the country and in Europe. The Piedmont Chamber Orchestra, also in Winston-Salem, features NCSA faculty and graduate students. The newly formed North Carolina Scenic Studios, Inc., a professional affiliate of design and production at



Charlie Buchanan

Between performance classes, students pursue academic study.

NCSA, assists drama companies throughout the country in staging, design, lighting, costuming, and other areas of production. Finally, the school works closely with the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival, held in High Point each summer.

Performances, however, must start at home; they must be a part of the school's daily life in order to benefit the students the most. And, in April 1983, the school will have a notable new performance facility with modern rehearsal space, the Roger L. Stevens Center for the Performing Arts. Created out of the old Carolina Theatre in downtown Winston-Salem, the Stevens Center was a gift to the School of the Arts from the Piedmont Publishing Company, the parent company of the city's two daily papers, the *Winston-Salem Journal* and the *Winston-Salem Sentinel*. The Stevens Center, named after the first chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, represents in its most tangible form the kind of support the school has been able to attract in just 17 years.

Wherever we go, we are asked to talk about the School of the Arts. From the beginning of what we call "Giannini's dream" to today, the school has been like a family. The feeling of family at NCSA is not a cliché, but the result of 17 years of work creating a mutually supportive environment for students, faculty, and supporters—all of whom benefit from the school's training and performances. With a student body of 735 and 1 faculty member for every 7½ students, one-to-one communication and

personal attention are of the highest importance, particularly for the 200 students in grades 7-12. Each of these teenagers may have already determined his or her life's work. But like the student/performers in the movie *Fame*—now a popular television series—these adolescents require special supervision and guidance.

The family-style relationships within the school extend past graduation. In the New York City area, where so many young artists congregate as they seek jobs, the knowledge is widespread that the NCSA alumni have their own "network," that the graduates there have developed a person-to-person assistance mechanism in finding housing or part-time jobs.

Vittorio Giannini and Terry Sanford envisioned a North Carolina School of the Arts as an institution with an unusual and important purpose. The school has not let them down. When Gov. Sanford was working to extend the state's educational opportunities, he said: "We build the state and the nation by investing in human capital." The international recognition and support received by the School of the Arts represents a tremendous return on an investment in creativity. □

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See N.C.G.S. Chapter 116, Article 4.

<sup>2</sup>The title changed from "president" to "chancellor" in 1972, when the school was incorporated into the University system.

<sup>3</sup>Tuition varies according to grade and state of residence. For grades 7-12, tuition is \$20 (in-state) and \$860 (out-of-state); for college, tuition is \$666 (in-state) and \$2,190 (out-of-state). Seventy-six percent of all students currently receive some form of scholarship assistance. Room, board, and general fees for all students living on campus average a total of \$2,251.