

[BEHIND THE] MUSIC

BY MARCIA MANNA | PHOTOS BY ROB HAMMER

Food fights and squeezing into strange costumes. Singing exercises and silent prayers. If the walls of San Diego's backstage could talk, oh, the stories they might tell. Whether luxurious or spare, the green room or dressing room often reflects the relationship between a venue and an artist. It's the secret place where a musician transforms from person to personality. Here is a behind-the-scenes window into four notable music venues, where a maestro, a Grammy Award-winning musician, an alternative rock singer and an electronic dance band prepare to take the stage.



Jahja Ling



[COPLEY SYMPHONY HALL]

While many touring musicians spend one or two nights occupying a particular backstage, members of the San Diego Symphony have called Copley Symphony Hall home since 1985. The historic venue originally known as the Fox Theatre opened in 1929 and has faced many renovations over the years.

But backstage remained a bleak setting until the 2008-09 season, when a nearly \$2 million renovation project transformed the space into the Grosvenor Family Musicians Center. Now there are three soundproof rehearsal rooms, separate locker rooms equipped with showers, and a main room with comfortable seating areas. Corian counters support a coffee bar with a microwave, situated next to a large stainless steel refrigerator. A flat-screen monitor is mounted from the ceiling, giving musicians a view of the stage.

"It was a narrow, dingy hallway with a bunch of small, damp rooms branching out," recalls clarinetist Frank Renk. "There was no gathering area. I remember when it was done—the aesthetics were so pleasing."

Conductor Jahja Ling occupies a private dressing room with his name on a plaque next to the door. Inside, the décor and paintings are Asian-inspired and elegant. A tall white paper lamp near a chocolate suede couch bathes the room in soft light. There's a desk with a computer, a clock in the shape of a music note and an exquisite antique piano built in 1890 by John Broadwood & Sons. A door in the back leads to a separate bathroom equipped with closets. Ling's most prized backstage possession is a painting of his mentor, Leonard Bernstein, which hangs next to his desk, near an October 2, 2004, Proclamation for Jahja Ling Day from the mayor of San Diego.

Before every concert, Ling has a ritual: "I just say a little prayer, that my work glorifies God and that people will be touched by the music."