

Silicon Beach: New World Symphony Makes Sweet Music on Internet2

By Maria De Los Angeles in Silicon Beach

Fri., Feb. 5 2010 @ 12:00PM

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If you're wondering what the new construction is just behind Lincoln Road near the corner of Washington Avenue in South Beach, it's not just a new fancy building by Frank Gehry, but a cutting edge facility that will put Miami Beach on the map for music and technology.



José Feghali on stage at the Lincoln Theatre, with a student broadcasting a piano performance live from Fort Worth.

It all started earlier this decade, when the New World Symphony (NWS), America's only orchestral academy, got seed money to implement an Internet2 connection via grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Science Foundation.

Internet2 is not your ordinary interwebs, but rather a special pipeline designated to government, industry and academic institutions. It's less "crowded" than the Internet you and I are used to, so it's more like the express lane on I-95 -- users benefit from exceptional transmission.

From January 25 to 27, NWS held a private Internet2 symposium at the Lincoln Theatre in South Beach with demonstrations and workshops led by an international panel of Internet2 experts. Silicon Beach was present and witnessed first hand just how effectively the technology works.

José Feghali, a classical pianist, professor and techie from Texas Christian University, connected live via Conference XP and Internet2 to a student of his in Fort Worth. The student performed a section of a Rachmaninoff piece at CD level quality with few glitches. Live video and sound streamed with little delay so Feghali could coach his student from Miami without having to be in the same room.

This is not the same kind of technology ordinary folks are used to in video conferencing or even chatting on Skype -- the sound is crisp and clear -- which is crucial for professional musicians perfecting the nuances of their musical interpretative skills.

Other speakers at the NWS symposium included Claudio Allocchio from GARR (the Italian Research and Education Network) and Andrew Gerzso from IRCAM in Paris (Institute for Research on Science and Sound), who highlighted the kind of avant-garde Internet2 music and theater performance projects going on in Europe and Asia.

Projects discussed included a dance and music performance based on the seismic vibrations of a volcano, a laptop orchestra from Catalunya, Spain and live simultaneous music jams online between European cities. NWS is on par with these explorers redefining music in the digital and new media age.

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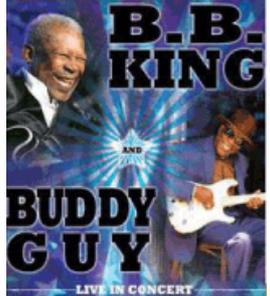
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Internet2 provides "live" broadcast quality with very little latency. Put simply, this means that a violin professor in London can coach an NWS student in Miami Beach without having to cross the pond. This is precisely one of the ways that NWS has been utilizing Internet2 since January 2000 and will continue to do so when it moves from the Lincoln Theatre to the new Frank Gehry building, which will be better equipped to handle the technology.

One of the first major Internet2 projects at NWS featured Micheal Tilson Thomas, the academy's director, coaching a student conductor and orchestra at the Manhattan School of Music in New York. Since then, composers in other cities have addressed Miami audiences and participated in rehearsals of their work at the Lincoln Theatre via Internet2. Numerous master classes have taken place and now Internet2 is part of the academy's daily educational activities.

During his symposium presentation, Claudio Allochio from GARR mentioned that Glasgow was a UNESCO "City of Music," part of the organization's Creative Cities Network, connecting cities who want to share experiences, ideas and best practices aiming at cultural, social and economic development. "Miami is not a City of Music yet," Allochio said, "but could very well be one after the new facility opens."

NWS is scheduled to move into the new facility sometime in 2011.

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