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Robert Harris
Director of Security, Walt Disney
Concert Hall



Walt Disney Concert Hall: Orchestrated Security



Office Buildings

When Robert Harris was planning security for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, little did he know that some

day he would be in charge of one of the city's newest cultural landmarks. He is now director of security for the Walt Disney Concert Hall, which is the new home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. When the Music Center Operating Company opened the facility's massive, glass doors to the public in October of 2003, the building immediately made history. It is already being hailed as an architectural landmark of original brilliance. It is one more high-profile triumph for internationally renowned architect Frank Gehry, and its silver walls reach over the downtown skyline like a metallic volcano.



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The steel frame is considered one of the most intricate and complex in the United States. The metal-clad façade, or surface skin, is composed of 6,400 stainless steel panels, spanning more than 160,000 square feet.

As Harris and his security manager Robert Lankford have been watching the serpentine walls go up around them, they have been working to create a security system that does not exist in any manufacturer's catalog. "Obviously, this is a unique structure, and we have a whole new set of challenges to secure it. There are lots of nooks and crannies," Lankford says. "There are lots of places we just can't put cameras. We have to integrate the use of security officers, train them on the equipment, and plan the way they will do their patrols."

Harris and Lankford have been meeting with product vendors and sub-contractors, studying schematics and marking floor plans. So far, the equipment that will make up the core of an integrated system includes 97 American Dynamics dome cameras, with a combination of fixed and pan/tilt/zoom. They are operated on the American Dynamics Intellex v3.1 Digital Video Management system, and the related MegaPower matrix switcher/controller system.



The Network Client Remote Management software will allow for multiple control rooms that connect by International Fiber Systems

Digital audio and data communications systems. The proximity card system will be a proprietary configuration by PCSC, with the capability of custom graphics and artwork for each user.

Anticipating the flow of the crowds soon to be walking through the facility, Harris, Lankford and the rest of the security staff have been walking every square inch of the complex. While the official literature indicates that the complex contains 293,000 square feet of space, there are actually no square feet to be found anywhere. There are no straight walls, no right angles, and no obvious 90-degree corners. Instead, the walls and columns curve and arc, piercing the rooms at extreme angles.

The entryways are wide and grand, with a warm, maple veneer. Many of the halls and stairways narrow down to snake-like passageways. "On any given day," Harris explains, "up to 10,000 people could be walking through this area."

Some of those people could be walking up the stairs, or riding up the escalators, after parking in the 2,188-space, 7-level, subterranean parking garage. It is actually an extension of the original county parking structure built in 1985. It has public, uncontrolled access through ticket-dispensing machines from the three surrounding streets. Employees of the nearby Los Angeles city and county office buildings can park there on work days. The parking lot is also used by employees, as well as the celebrities, musicians, singers and performers who will be appearing at any of the venues that make up the Los Angeles Music Center. It is also a parking area for the general public who will be attending performances at the complex's various stages. These include the 752-seat Mark Taper Forum, the 1,400- to 2,000-seat Ahmanson Theatre, and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, with a capacity of 3,189 people.



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The only part of the parking garage that will have controlled access via the proximity card system is the “Founders’ Area,” where major donors will park their cars, or their drivers will park their limousines. They also have their own elevator, lobby, lounge and seating area in the auditorium.

“We have the public coming in here all the time,” Harris says. “We have people walking along the sidewalks, out on the streets. We’re right in the middle of downtown. There are the busloads of tourists and hundreds of school tours every week. This is why it is so critical that not only do we choose the right equipment, but that we also place it strategically. We need to know where the critical areas will be.”

“This is vastly different from policing in other venues,” he continues. “We must provide security for government officials and visiting dignitaries.”

Harris is applying what he has learned during his diverse experiences as a policeman in Kansas, a fraud investigator for Kaiser, and one of the emergency response planners for the Los Angeles Olympics. “Basically, we will use a combination of foot patrols and some stationary personnel. It is important to secure the perimeter,” Harris explains. “If you can secure the perimeter, you’ve got 60 percent of your area covered. However, this place has lots of hidden corners. It is a strange configuration.” He has started bike patrols through the grounds and around the city block.

Lankford says that he considers each part of the security system to be critical. “We have our personnel, the patrols, the prox cards and the cameras. They are all important, however, the

balance is that with the 360-degree-view on the cameras, we can use fewer cameras. Each camera now has a wider field-of-view.”



Harris has to stay aware of not only the security and strategic side of his job, but also the financial plan that keeps the complex in business. “The Ahmanson, Mark Taper Forum, The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and the resident companies such as the opera and the master choral, all have rental agreements with us throughout the year. The Music Center Operating Company is the landlord for the county. These venues have to be rented out to fill the space,” Harris says. “Every lobby, hallway and area of the gardens outside will be rented as a gathering place for events, such as cocktail parties, book signings, speakers or receptions. In addition, we have government officials coming through here all of the time for meetings and receptions.”

“This is exactly why the proximity card system is so versatile,” he adds. The cards feature Passive Proximity, at 125 kHz, with a 9- to 11-inch range of response. They are UL 294 listed and FCC-compliant. Each special donor or performer will be able to have custom photos and graphics on the access cards, making each card not only an access device, but a souvenir.

“It is much more difficult to change things once you have a turnstile installed. With the proximity cards, we can move and change the access levels and users,” Harris says. “We’ll be setting up tents in the plaza, then taking them down and arranging tables near the fountains.”



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The main auditorium is one area that will not be monitored by the security camera system that watches the rest of the complex. This is by unanimous decree of the planning board. Only the video, film and television cameras will be allowed inside the performance area. Since there are no security cameras in that area, the only way for the security staff to observe any activity in the auditorium is to walk over the stage through the catwalk system, communicating with Motorola radios.

The entire security infrastructure is already in place. The cabling was installed during construction, and most of the cameras and card readers have been installed. However, the project is designed for change at a moment's notice. "We won't really know what we need until people actually start arriving. We have to see what happens," Harris says. "We have to be flexible when we first go in. The alarms, cameras and access control devices can all be modified. The first few months will be the key. Together, Lankford and I will continuously analyze and re-strategize the access levels, the equipment, and the methods. It is so much easier to give and take away card access on a daily basis, at any given time." □

System Summary

Project:

Walt Disney Concert Hall

Location:

Los Angeles, California

Products:

**Domes, cameras, Intellex,
MegaPower and Network Client
Remote Management.**

tyco / Fire &
Security