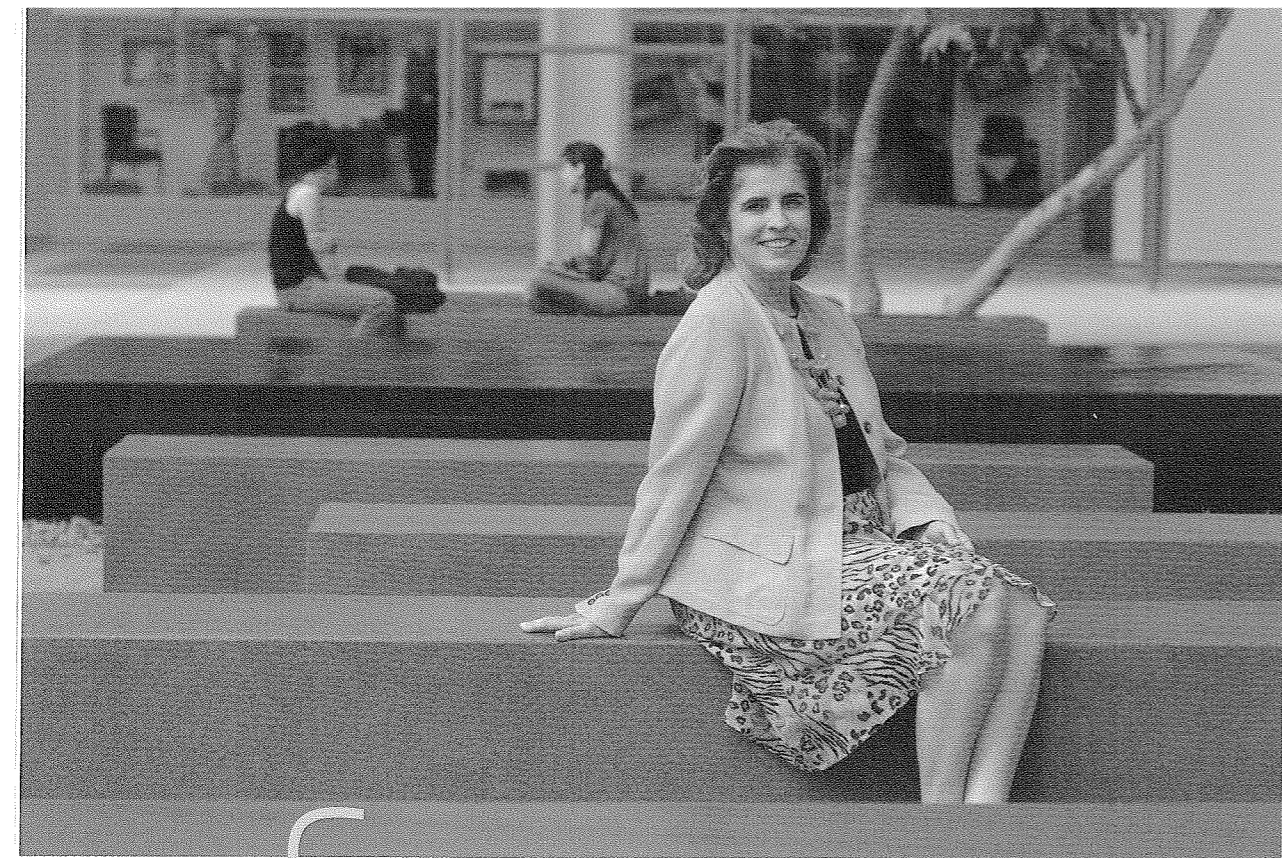


# on a high note

By Mark Chalon Smith



Arts dean and pilot Nohema Fernández has a bird's eye view of the Claire Trevor School's place in the world

to look into areas of animation, motion capture and other areas of technology. We have to see where art is going, where students are going, and grow accordingly with the challenges."

Fernández's own early experiences were marked by challenges. She was born in Cuba and left at 17, two years after Castro had overthrown the regime of Fulgencio Batista. Fernández's father, who owned a printing company, and her mother, a kindergarten teacher, decided life in Havana was becoming too dangerous and sent her and her brother to a refugee camp in Miami, and then to a town near Chicago where they lived with a foster family. Fernández's parents joined them a year later.

Fernández, who had made her debut as a concert pianist in Havana at 16, continued her musical studies while adjusting to American life and eventually made her New York debut at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. She has since performed around the globe and has recorded CDs reflecting her Cuban heritage. A folk song from her most recent CD, "Serenata Cubana," was chosen by actor/director Andy Garcia as part of the soundtrack of his latest movie, "The Lost City," which recounts the days before and after the Cuban revolution.

"My memories of Cuba are always close to me," Fernández says. "They remain vivid and fresh."

## Eye on horizon

But she'd rather look to the future. There's always more to be done at the arts school, especially when creating awareness of what the school is up to. Dozens of drama, dance and music performances and gallery exhibitions occur each year, offering insight into what students and faculty are all about. "More than 33,000

people attend our events each year," she notes. "We hope they come away entertained and enlightened. We need to be their partners in the arts."

The school also has formed relationships with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Program at UC Irvine Extension, which provides educational opportunities for the retired and semi-retired, and local arts institutions like Pacific Symphony and Opera Pacific.

"This gives us the chance to provide groups our expertise and experiences. We can all grow creatively by sharing information."

It's a demanding – and sometimes exhausting – challenge. To re-energize, Fernández turns to her plane. She unwinds by flying her Cessna 182, usually once a week, to small community airports like Lancaster, Camarillo and La Verne, "spots where they have good cafes." Occasionally, she feels more ambitious and visits family and friends in the Bay Area or Tucson, Ariz.

"I wish I could fly more. Being dean is such a full-time job now, but I do manage to fly when I can," Fernández says. "Getting up in the air, even with no destination, is such a joy."

Nohema Fernández, far left, enjoys the "whispering benches" and water table in the new Arts Plaza. An avid pilot, above, she loves flying her Cessna 182. A song from her CD, below, was heard on the soundtrack of the movie "The Lost City."



From an airplane's cockpit, neighborhoods merge, regions meld and even countries become part of a larger whole.

This awareness of the bigger picture, where universality and inclusion seem obvious, is one of the joys of flying for Nohema Fernández, a licensed pilot since the early 1990s. It also infuses her vision as dean of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Fernández believes it's not enough to send actors, dancers, artists and musicians into the world – you have to bring the world to UCI.

The arts school, one of UCI's founding academic units, has distinguished itself over four decades with its creativity and quality. Fernández says the school's innovative Arts Plaza, designed by renowned artist Maya Lin and opened to the public about a year ago, is symbolic of its efforts to draw people both near and far to the campus.

"We are creating a bridge, both into the school and beyond," Fernández says. "It's both an inward and outward exploration that reflects our growth, now and in the future."

Like any pilot with a flight plan, the dean has clear goals for the arts school: building on well-established international ties; enhancing its already prodigious efforts in blending the arts and technology; and adding to its renowned faculty to meet growing demands.

Global connections bolster the academic experience and are central to the school's progress. An example is the ongoing relationship between the drama department and Korean National University of Arts in Seoul, South Korea. UCI students joined their KNUA counterparts to develop "Birds in DMZ," a topical adaptation

of Aristophanes' classic play "The Birds." The production was hailed when presented in Seoul and was recently restaged to acclaim in Italy.

The music department also has been active internationally for years, as has dance. Five dance majors and several professors spent a week last summer at the prestigious Conservatoire de Paris in a performance and educational exchange program.

## In tune with community

Fernández, who became dean in 2003, says she's gratified by Chancellor Michael V. Drake's public statements stressing the value of the arts at UCI to the surrounding community. In technology savvy Orange County, the school's melding of arts and technology is especially germane. The school's Beall Center for Art and Technology is one of the world's leading digital exhibition showplaces and promotes new forms of creation and expression using the latest digital technologies.

So, how do you build a broader, stronger bridge to the outside while fueling scholarship evolution within? One way is through a faculty that is relevant to the changing times and growing as the student population increases. Thirteen professors have been hired in the past year, with more expected. Michael Hooker, who worked as senior media designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, joined the drama faculty this year to lead a new graduate program in sound design.

"Professor Hooker will help us with new technologies in sound design; he's a good example of how the school is responding to art's evolution. But we will need