THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION
TO THE PERFORMING ARTS

Dedication of:
The Performing Arts Center
St. Cloud (Minn.) State College
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The building which we dedicate today is more than just another building on a burgeoning campus. It has significance for the future because it is firmly rooted in the past. It is the symbol of much that we lump into the amorphous mass called higher education. In the next ten minutes I will attempt to indicate some implications of that statement.

It would be impossible - and probably not very desirable - to chronicle all of the effort, the thwarted hopes, the aspirations, the dogged determination, the endless hours of research, the frustrating debates, the joy of discovery and accomplishment that have gone into the planning for and the final realization of this Performing Arts Center. But I do want to establish the fact that this did not just happen - it evolved over a period of more than ten years. And in the course of that evolving there was much anguish, and education, and thrilling success. (And, parenthetically, let me add that there is more of the same ahead. For this building is not a perfect facility. There are flaws in it. Flaws that result from our own inadequacies; and there is much that is good and some that is great. We must keep our minds on that positive fact.) At this point in time we have achieved a giant step. Here we learn from our mistakes, count our successes, and dedicate ourselves to the progress of the next era.
A while ago I said that this building came as the result of evolution. And it did. First of all there had to be developed programs in the performing arts. Indeed as I compare the present programs of this college in all of the Humanities with the programs of 15 years ago, it seems to me that this facility is indeed an inevitable result of the truly great progress made. The improvement in the programs in the graphic arts, as well as in Music and Theatre, established the need for this building as no theoretical argument could have done.

I remember all too clearly the endless discussions with the faculty in Art, for example, which resulted in the planning for teaching space in the John Headley Building. Then the music and theatre faculties, exploding with ideas, likewise improved their curricular offerings and demonstrated beyond doubt the need for more adequate working arrangements.

Let me take theatre as an example of the needs which had to be met - and which this building does in large measure satisfy.

The basic problem to be solved was the programming and designing of a series of spaces suitable for the outstanding theatre program that had been developed over the years. The main auditorium, as an example, presented a specific design problem of great importance. To meet the needs of the Theatre Department that auditorium had to be flexible and alterable for
various kinds of modern production: proscenium, area, thrust staging, for instance.

A thrust stage can be constructed over the hydraulic orchestra pit to extend approximately twenty-four feet into the audience. The theatre seats on the entire lower portion of the auditorium are removable and can be repositioned at the side of the thrust when this is necessary. They are specially designed for this theatre and are single-pedestal chairs. Sockets for receiving these chairs have been designed into the lower sides of the theatre, along the thrust area, and into the hydraulic orchestra lift itself. Therefore, the very shape of the lower part of the auditorium can be changed to accommodate changes in staging technique.

Another specific problem was the need for dressing, shop, and costume spaces to be accessible to both theatres easily, and without exposure of performers to any public space. That problem was beautifully solved. Actors and technicians may go directly to either theatre from these corollary spaces as a result of carefully planned crossover corridors.

Another specific problem was the need for intercommunication between the ticket office, the manager of that office, the lighting master, and the stage manager, who begin each production. This, too, was nicely solved, since the house manager's office was
designed to communicate directly on the same level as the lighting master's area through a corridor-like passage faced with glass. This whole area is at the back of the theatre. The stage can be viewed along the entire length of this corridor. In addition, the ticket office itself is in direct communication, by a short stairway, with the house manager's office. In the ticket office is a door which allows direct communication to the lighting and sound masters' areas. A superb intercommunication system has been designed which links all production spaces. These are a few examples of the design problems that have been solved.

Everything that has been said about theatre can be paralleled in Music. My point is two-fold. First, this building is the result of attention to the needs of the curriculum. Second, this building is for people - and the design and execution involved literally scores of people - knowledgeable people whose standards of professional excellence I have not seen equalled anywhere.

Without naming those people - the architects, builders, members of the State College Board, State Department staff, but most of all the faculty on this campus - I want to pay tribute to all those who toiled mightily and reached greater achievements than any, individually, could ever have done.

Let me at this point direct your thinking to the philosophy underlying the program in the Performing Arts.
Less than a year ago, in celebration of its Centennial year, the University of Illinois produced Gunther Schuller's "The Visitation". In the program notes for that production are two paragraphs I would read to you, as follows:

"Gunther Schuller's "The Visitation", in the eighteen months since its premiere, has already undergone more extremes of adulation and condemnation than the majority of major operatic works achieve in fifty or a hundred years. Extravagantly hailed in its first production, in October, 1966, by the Hamburg State Opera, which commissioned the work originally, it was rejected with almost equal extravagance by the New York audiences who saw the same Hamburg production in June of the following year. The pendulum swung once again, with a new production by the San Francisco Opera in October, 1967, which has proven to be one of the most successful and enthusiastically received efforts of that distinguished company's adventurous career.

"The present production at the University of Illinois is not based on an attempt either to reproduce the triumphs of Hamburg and San Francisco or to repudiate the catastrophe of New York. Rather, it endeavors, through collaborative
production efforts of a kind and scope which are perhaps available only in a major American university, to introduce a new dimension into the career of a remarkable work of operatic theatre. In short, the justification, the intent, and the hope of the present production are to demonstrate, . . . the extent to which the performing arts, and the University's involvement in them, are relevant to the most pressing matters which face contemporary society."

I quote these paragraphs because they identify a problem - support for the arts - and suggest a solution - the colleges and universities.

The reams of writing on the modern performing arts in America seems eventually to boil down to one statement: "One of the most pressing problems of the artist and the arts as a whole is that of financial support." Ours is a society, according to Thorstein Veblen, which has an "instinct of workmanship," which always desires to see man laboring at productive work, a society that is at heart pragmatic, having little to do with art except in the sense of its most immediate entertainment value or its established commercial value.

Amazing as it may seem, it is only in recent years - we may narrow that to this decade - that the performing arts have been recognized as a unit that represents an important part of any society -
its cultural heritage. Scattered about the country earlier than this, of course, we had history of art being taught, but it was only in 1945 that Clemens Sommer, Professor of the History of Art at the University of North Carolina, could make the statement, "There can be no longer any doubt about the pertinence of art to the humanities." Only within our decade have scholars attempted to bring public attention to the dilemma which should be faced in regard to our performing arts.

A few examples should illustrate this. It was not until 1961, with the publication of the third edition of Webster's International Dictionary, that the phrase "performing arts" was recognized by any of our authorities on language. It was still five years later that sufficient articles were written on the performing arts as a unit that the standard indexes to articles and essays included such a subject heading in their listings. It is also interesting to note that the comprehensive Library of Congress Subject Headings catalog still does not have such a listing, except in regard to "performing artists, legal rights of."

The implications behind this are fascinating, although a bit shameful in historical perspective. It was recently pointed out by Albert Bush-Brown, President of the Rhode Island School of Design, that we in America regard art as a purchasable product rather than as a process. "Hence," he concludes, "we value arts, rather than artists. To protect the value, we enshrine the product in museums and theatres and concert halls, but we don't nurture the
artists, nor do we admit them and their process to our patterns of work, government, and recreation."

In the past an artist, if he were fortunate, could look forward to having a patron support him. Today patrons have virtually disappeared, and in their place has appeared a new phenomenon - the large, financially secure corporation. Owing to its commercial orientation, many artists have refused support from this source. Instead they have sought employment outside their field or in education. (And this is a great boon for education. We must not let the advantage escape us.)

Either choice has meant that the artist has had to relinquish a large portion of his time and independence, and consequently has in many instances lowered the amount of his work though, hopefully, not his standards of quality. This has meant that society as a whole has not received the benefits of the artist which should accrue from his labor. Despite recent publicity that the situation is improving, the fact remains that at the present the artist is in a financially and morally precarious position and that he must continue to labor outside the field of his chosen profession if he is to survive.

In regard to amateur art, too often we shift our emphasis from the finished product to our personal acquaintance with the performer. Tom, Dick, or Mary dancing, acting, or painting,
colors our reaction to their ballet, drama, or exhibit rather than the quality of their particular performance. And in too many of the smaller communities of America it is their performance alone which constitutes any idea of "live" art which the citizens of that community may have.

And too often the reaction of such communities is, "So what?" They have, and prefer, professional media for entertainment: television, phonograph recordings, magazines, and radio. While these have become a significant part of our cultural heritage, they obviously do not constitute its whole.

There, then, in perhaps oversimplified terms, are our needs today: (1) a preservation and attractive presentation of those arts of our past which constitute our cultural heritage, and (2) encouragement of performing artists in our own time, and (3) the development of an appreciative audience of both past and present efforts.

The responsibility of preserving this cultural heritage of a civilization has devolved in almost every society except ours on the shoulders of its government, which assumed this duty from patrons of an earlier age who were virtually the state. In the United States, where there are some patrons of individual arts and occasional artists in restricted geographical areas, on the whole the responsibility has come to rest on our colleges and
universities. But even here we are faced with the fact that too often the performing arts are regarded as pretentious interlopers into the academic world: which once more brings us to that vital question of audience.

Alexander King, in his *Mine Enemy Grows Older*, emphatically states, "Art needs a proper climate. The average Frenchman is no more artistic than the average American. . . . But the French climate is good for art, because in France an artist isn't expected to earn as much as a stockbroker. He is justified in his existence even if he is a little artist. He doesn't have to be a Picasso. He counts as a necessary human factor although he hasn't reached the very top."

There is another important factor, too, in this whole business of relating the arts to the academic enterprise called higher education. The truth is, the way some artists go about their work is discouraging, to an almost impossible degree, to those who would try to fit them and their arts into the regular patterns of academic life. What they do is often not designed to make life simple for deans and registrars. (And that is probably the understatement of the week).

I speak, of course, of the problem of evaluating the work of the student artist. We are confronted with a whole new kind of educational material. We are in the realm where the sound
of music, the play of the colors, the mood of the scene
present themselves for analysis and evaluation. Here we must
deal with emotion, and taste, as well as technique.

How are we, for instance, to get at a meaningful
evaluation of examples of what has been called the "dribble-and-
blop!" school of painting? How are we to handle some of our
avant-garde music? Recently I read about a piece called "Three
Minutes of Silence". To execute it the orchestra sat on stage
with instruments poised and did absolutely nothing for three
minutes by the stop-watch. This had been submitted by a student
to meet the requirements of a course assignment. How would
you like to be the teacher called upon to give a grade for that?

Obviously, in an educational setting, this sort of thing is
not acceptable. That kind of response is stupid and pathetic,
as well as smart aleck. The kind of artistic creativity that has
relevance for colleges and universities requires measurable
intellectual and imaginative effort.

"The educational establishment," says Canfield of Yale,
"must stand firmly on the conviction that it is the function of art
to communicate. It must array itself on the side of those who
believe that in order to reach perfection as an artist the most
rigorous discipline of mind, imagination, and will are demanded."
In this connection, the late President Griswold of Yale, has said, "Of all fantasies none is more absurd than the notion of the artist as a boozy Bohemian fashioning his works out of hunches and knee jerks. No art worth hearing or looking at was ever fashioned in this way or in any way other than through long and painful submission to one of life's sternest task masters. Few apprentices to that task master ever achieved greatness who were not, or did not make themselves in the process, supremely intelligent, cultured, and even learned men."

You are aware, as I most certainly am, that the subject of "The Performing Arts in Higher Education" cannot be handled in a time span of ten minutes. (And that was the time assigned to me - a period which I fear has already been exceeded).

In these brief statements it has been possible only to skim the surface of a topic which deserves exhaustive treatment. Each individual among you must complete the details of the picture, for I have been able only to outline its dimensions in broad brush strokes.

By way of conclusion - for I must indeed stop somewhere - let me express an opinion:

Poets for centuries have been speaking of the marriage of form and content. It is time for us now to bring about a union of
and between and among all of the Performing Arts in such a way as to attract audiences - first for entertainment, but ultimately for cultural awareness.

Today it is only the college, committed to excellence in the Performing Arts, that may act as minister in this marriage - but only after having first served as matchmaker.