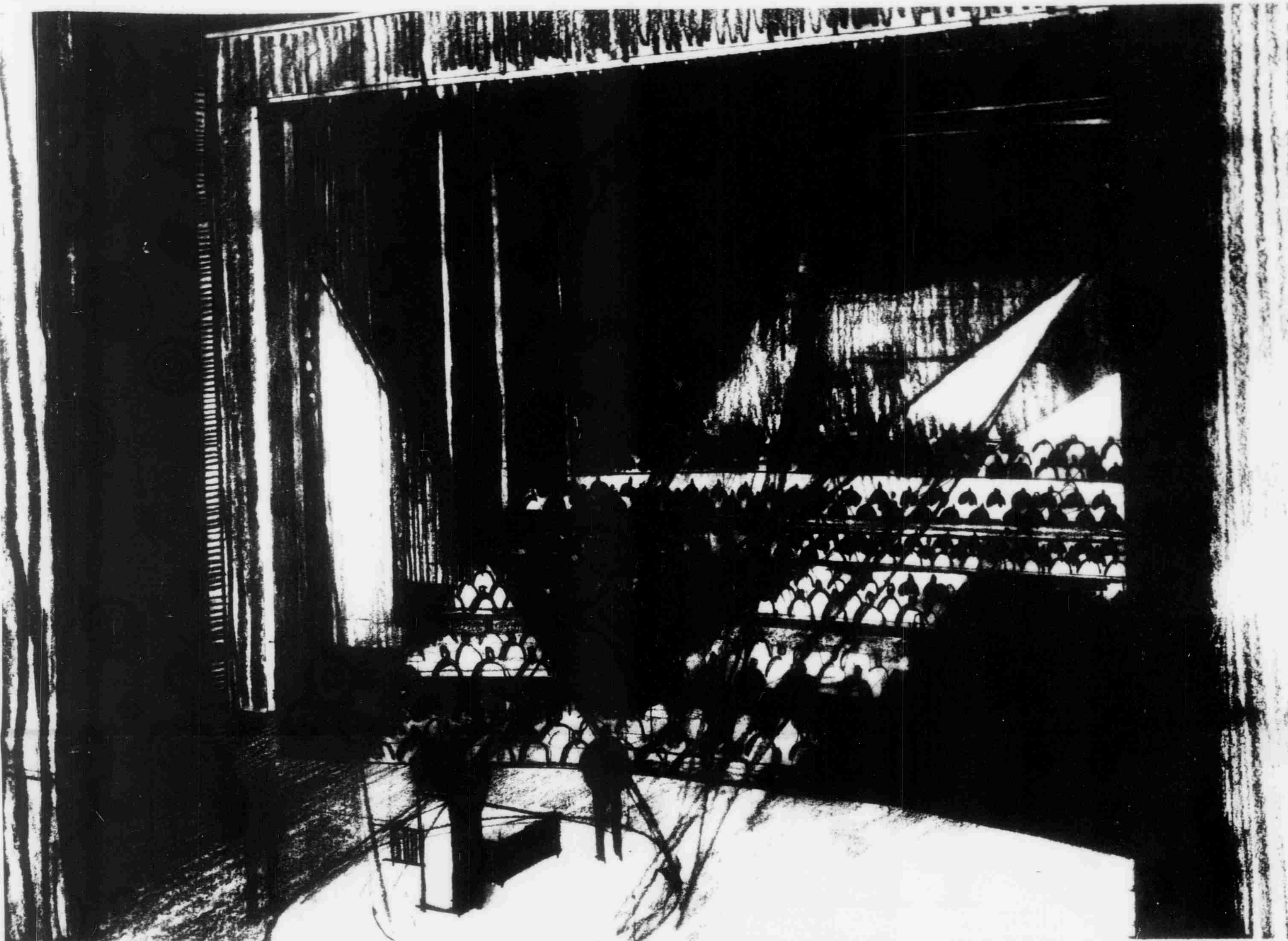


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Section D

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An artist's proposal for the future Playmaker's-Dramatic Arts Theatre as executed by Charlotte architects A.G. Odell, Jr., and Associates.

Initial Drama Center plans unfold

by Bruce Mann
Assistant Feature Editor

What is involved in building UNC's new Dramatic Arts Theatre?

Tremendously complex procedures every arduous but fascinating step of the way, according to Dr. Arthur Housman, the highly motivated, adventuresome new chairman of the Dramatic Arts Department — complexities such as a vision of overall department needs, Advisory Budget Commission and state legislative approval, money, realization of the extraordinarily complicated problems inherent in the project, tenderly balanced teamwork in planning and construction of the theatre, and strong, thorough support by students, faculty, community citizens, and others to help realize the extreme potential that the new theatre offers to the dramatic arts at UNC in Chapel Hill.

Dr. Housman, thanks to the legislature's July approval of the necessary \$2,225,000 funds for the project, has been able to initiate the first planning stages already, and currently he is reviewing all of the old plans, space by space, as well as discussing new ideas in preparation for the major planning of the fall semester.

Aside from this specific planning, though, Dr. Housman explains, in his characteristically artistic but business-like speech unadorned with clichés, that his planning for the building must really start with general considerations of the Dramatic Arts Department's needs and functions.

"We begin, not with the building, but we begin with the idea that it is the function of a department, like UNC's very old and famous one, to continue and expand programs in the training of theatre and in the production of plays which are appropriate to both the past and the present. The building is only one facet. The building is the place within which the programs manifest themselves."

However, Dr. Housman is quick to point out, the building is an especially important and radiant facet in the program.

Outstanding performance programs in the arts, in or out of education, unique to the theatre art, depend absolutely on the facility within which they take place. More than in any other field, the architectural strengths or limitations of the building will determine the quality of the activity which will take place within the building. Therefore, a building can either enhance or very severely limit those activities.

Thus, the theatre building's unique niche in the department's performance program requires that every part of the theatre function in harmony, so that the resultant theatre maximally aids performance. This calls for unusually meticulous pre-planning.

"To give you an idea of the complexity of this procedure, you might take a look, just superficially, at the different kinds of spaces that have to be included. You have at least one theatre in the building and hopefully two for production. You have the very specialized character of your lobby-foyer and its relationship to

the stage. You have a ticket office. You have what is called the artist's foyer or the 'green room,' which serves a very important function as a combination rehearsal room, gathering space, and preparation space for the actors themselves.

"You have your lighting and sound space, your scenic construction and painting spaces, dressing rooms, costume construction and design rooms, and costume storage. You have property and lighting storage rooms, and some administrative office—essentially, the business manager, house manager, and your scenic design and technical director people and staff will be located in the building."

What makes the procedure even vastly more complicated, of course, is that "all of this has to work together — that is, your ancillary spaces and your main spaces have to be very closely interrelated, both functionally and aesthetically. Of all the spaces that I mentioned — their interrelationship is as important as their individual construction.

"For example, a very simple illustration: your costume space normally has to be on the same level as the stages and that makes a problem, because the costume room's relationship to the dressing rooms and the relationship of the dressing rooms to the stages and the stages' relationship to the shop where things are made and probably storage areas, is very sophisticated.

"If, for example, you have your dressing rooms on one floor and one of your stages on the third floor and you have 18th century gowns? Those girls have got to walk up two or three flights of stairs — and you've got a problem. So you've got to think about the problem in advance and solve it before you ever build the space. That's one illustration.

"And that's what makes this all a very difficult problem. It's not purely a matter of the style of the lobby that one considers, or the style of the inside of the house that one considers, or the style of the costume room that one considers, or the style of the exterior facade of the building — it is all integrated. It is impossible to consider the building in less than an integrated way."

Though all the problems are a network of possible flaws, Dr. Housman unequivocally states: "We have the mechanism for solving the problem in a practical way which emerges to be ideal."

Dr. Housman's mechanism is the utilization of a balanced three-man team in the planning and construction of the theatre: a "user" (Dr. Housman in consultation with key staff members of the Department), an architect, and a specialist-consultant. The consultant will offer Dr. Housman and the architect various alternatives and ideas during the planning and basic construction.

As the representative of the "user," Dr. Housman will present to his consultant and architect his basic performance need, which is basically that the future theatre must be capable of competently handling virtually all theatrical events.

"A university theatre is obligated, in my judgment, to present a very broad spectrum of kinds of plays. You have to have your classic plays, your great, great plays from the golden ages of the theatre, which require a certain kind of a space in

which they are produced, while some very contemporary plays dispense completely with the proscenium frame and are simply an environment in which the production takes place. It doesn't work very well in a proscenium theatre. Then, you have, of course, your Elizabethan plays and plays of other periods which are best produced on a thrust-type of stage.

"What I'm saying is that in two spaces, or if we're limited to just one space, we have to have the flexibility which will allow us to present every possible kind of theatre."

It's a tall order for the architect and consultant-specialist, especially when they must also consider problems of audience comfort, sight lines, acoustics, the relationship of the theatre's architecture to other campus buildings, and at the same time keep within the budget.

"As for sight lines, your audience has got to be able to see, it's got to be able to hear, it's got to be comfortable, it has to be safe. Now there is not one of these factors which does not have a high level of complexity. Just seeing means that the architect has to design the space so that people can see all of the action — no posts in front of them, no angles that are bad, etc."

Acoustically, "ideally your theatre should be built so that it will have the appropriate acoustical integrity for either musical or straight state acoustics, the latter predominant with a minimum of adjustment."

Geographically, "you have to think about the way your building relates to the architectural and geological circumstances of the area in which you locate. You would probably build a building at UNC that has the same functional integrity as any other building, but it might differ significantly in its external appearance, in the way you handle the type of soil in which the excavation takes place. Foliage is also important.

"Probably as important as anything is the nature of the architecture of the surrounding area of the whole institution. For example, here is an area which has a reputation internationally for the beauty of its milieu. It is the grace, the taste, the care with which the unified community protected its environment. So, in my judgment, there is a very special obligation to be certain that whether it is in the contemporary vernacular or whether it tends toward classical Georgian, it's got to fit. And this is not simple."

Complexity that's the name of the theatre-building game. Last, however, you begin to think that Dr. Housman is suffering from an edifice complex, please understand that he is truly "more interested in performance than potential."

"I'm more interested in what is going to happen. I have identified, or I wouldn't be here, the enormous excitement and heritage of this department and this university. So, I'm more interested in what excitement will occur and can occur. And I don't mean excitement for the sake of excitement, but rather those kinds of programs which will continue to be appropriate to a nationally distinguished institution, and a nationally distinguished department."