

Students and faculty occupying the new Stanley B. Catlett Sr. Music Center are running out of appropriate adjectives to describe their delight with the first phase of architect Charles Stark's unfinished symphony.

# PLAYING TO RAVE REVIEWS

By PAULA BAKER  
photos by Gil Jain

**A**coustics and aesthetics are the key words to describe the first movement of a symphony in architecture that premiered on the University of Oklahoma campus in June. The new Stanley B. Catlett Sr. Music Center has been playing to rave reviews from students and faculty ever since.

The gabled building of red brick and white limestone was designed by architect Charles Stark of Toledo, Ohio, to make a statement about the University.

"The University respects the past but is on the front edge of education," Stark says. "Catlett Music Center suggests the Cherokee Gothic architecture of the central campus without duplicating it."

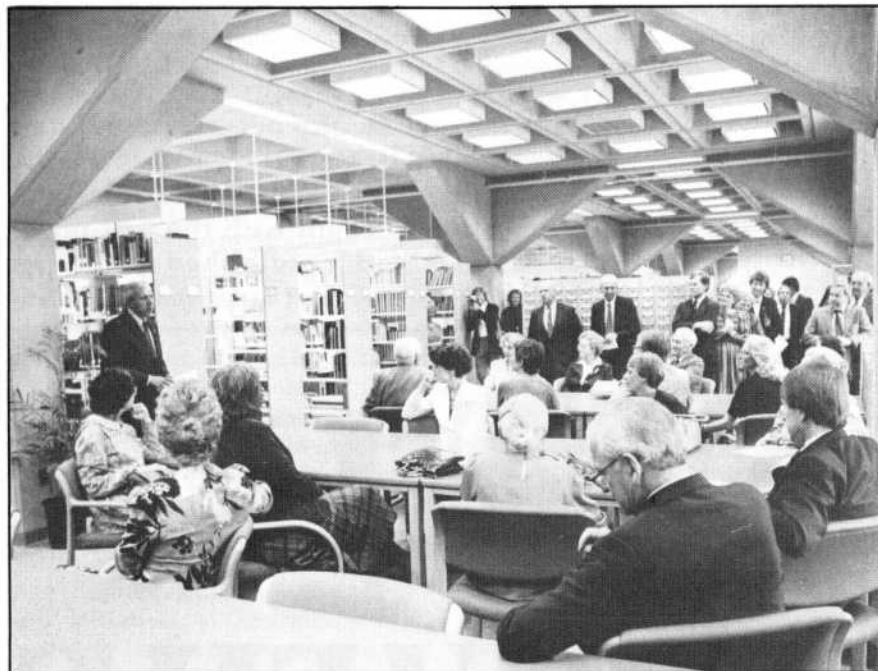
The \$7.1 million structure is the first unit in a building designed to be constructed in stages as

funds become available. The 55,000-square-foot edifice houses large rehearsal rooms for band, chorus and orchestra, the fine arts library and audio-visual resources, classrooms and studios. The next unit will contain large and small concert halls and additional studios and rehearsal areas.

Catlett Music Center stretches along the south side of Boyd Street from Elm to College avenues. Across the street are other OU fine arts buildings including Holmberg Hall, the 1920 School of Music structure, which will remain in use.

Rectangular cuts in the new building's three main gables lighten the massive structure and are reminders of the crenelated rooflines of Holmberg and Evans halls. King-sized brick (4-by-12 inches instead of the usual 2½-by-8 inches) scales down the structure.

*Continued*



*Benefactors of the Catlett Music Center, shown here in the Grant Library, are treated to a special tour with mini performances by grateful OU musicians.*



*Stanley B. Catlett Sr., for whom the new music center is named, is a 1921 OU law graduate and an original trustee of the Rapp Foundation of Oklahoma City, a \$2 million donor.*



*The Grant Library in the new music center honors the late Thomas Sherman Grant and Lizzie Lou Oter Grant, pioneer parents of a major donor to the project, Ruby Grant of Norman.*

"This new facility represents a cultural center not only for our campus but also for the community and state," says University President Frank E. Horton. "It will serve OU faculty, staff and students by bringing together under one roof music instruction, performance, creative activity and research.

"The Catlett Music Center will provide a cultural focus for the state of Oklahoma and greatly enhance OU's growing national reputation in the arts—an increasingly important factor in economic development," Horton adds. "It is a beautiful example of what can be accomplished when the University, state and private sectors join together."

Designed especially for music, the building "is very functional, while also being beautiful and elegant," says Allan Ross, director of the OU School of Music. "It will be a great help in recruiting. The seniors who toured the building before May graduation were sorry they couldn't begin college over again!"

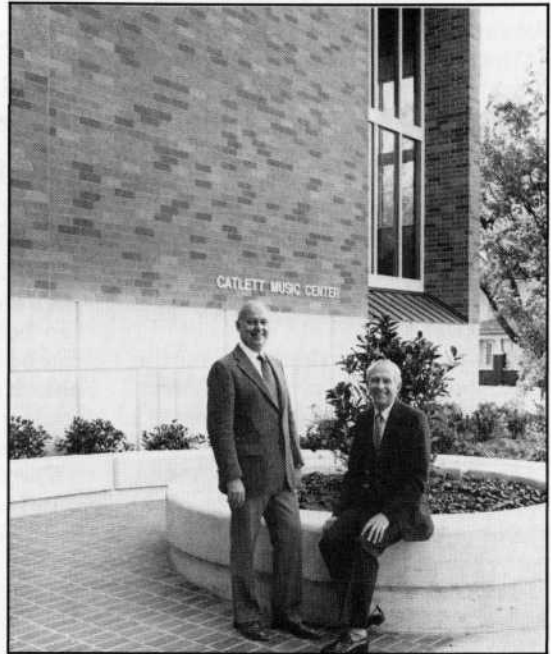
Architect Stark notes that architecture has been called "frozen music." Thus, he reasons, this first phase of the Catlett Music Center "might be considered the first movement of an 'unfinished symphony.' It has a structure and a rhythm but the first consideration in its design was aural, rather than optical."

A music building presented many acoustical challenges for Stark, whose firm is Bauer, Stark and Lashbrook Inc. Kaighn Associates Architects Inc. of Norman served as on-site architects with the participation of OU's Architectural and Engineering Services, directed by Arthur N. Tuttle Jr. Acoustical consultants for the building were Bolt, Beranek and Newman Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

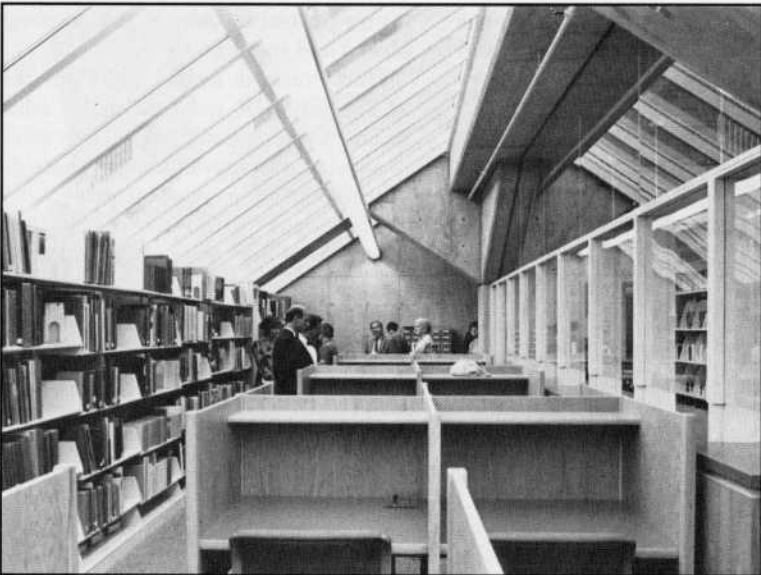
"You don't want a percussion room on top of a choral room," Stark explains. "There are fewer conflicts when the major spaces are arranged horizontally. However, it is difficult to express a Gothic pitched roof on a horizontal building. I used the spirit of Gothic in a rhythm of gables across the north side of the building. There also is a rhythm in the way the limestone on the ground floor is scored in



*The choral rehearsal hall can be "tuned" by adjusting its acoustical wall panels to fit the needs of various types of vocal groups.*



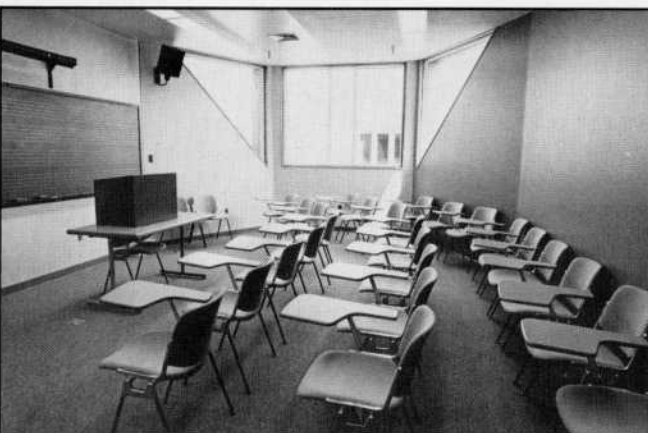
*Fine Arts Dean Nat Eek, left, and Music Director Allan Ross pause outside the new music center.*



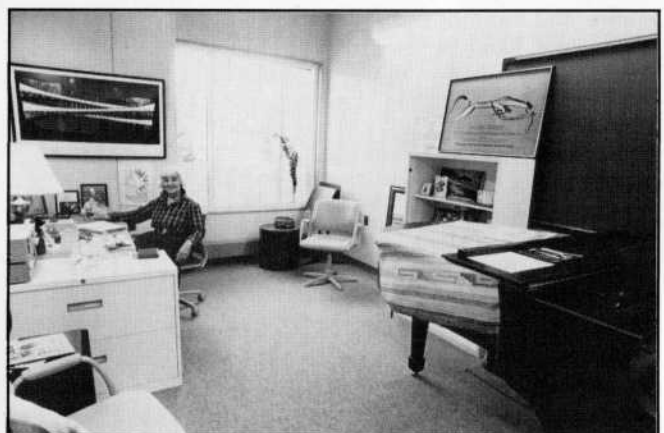
*Skylights dominate the design of the library's listening carrel area.*



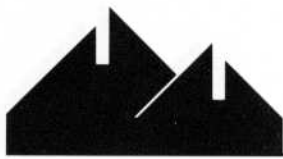
*The choral library serves faculty and students.*



*Two classrooms stand empty until the next building phase provides the exits necessary for fire marshal's approval.*



*Associate Professor Marjory Cornelius basks in the light streaming from the window of her spacious new office/studio.*



**“There aren’t enough superlatives to say how I feel about the new orchestra room. The shape, lighting and acoustics are wonderful. Everyone’s attitude is improved.”**

smaller and larger ‘beats’ that correspond to the width of the window panes.

“The ground floor skylights over the library are intended to look like flying buttresses, another Gothic element,” Stark adds.

The library’s partial underground location takes advantage of the slope of the site. Skylights on the north and east enable natural light to illuminate individual listening carrels and study areas.

The lounge and study tables on the south side of the ground floor also receive natural light from a courtyard surrounded by the building on three sides. The interior courtyard, planned to facilitate constructing the center in units, will be enclosed when the next phase is built.

“The sky is one of the most beautiful things about Oklahoma,” comments Mary Doezma, a music graduate student from Norman. “It is just wonderful to be able to sit under a skylight and study something I love so passionately and be able to look up at the blue sky as well!”

The blue is repeated in many of the tables and chairs in the building and intensified in the walls of the orchestra rehearsal room. Shades of mauve and burgundy are used in the choral and band areas, respectively, providing a “sunrise, sunset” theme appropriate to a building where long hours of rehearsal and study are the norm.

“The workmanship and materials are of the highest quality throughout the whole building,” says Dennis Shrock, director of choral activities. “The acoustical ambiance is just wonderful! The choral room was customized to fit my needs after the acoustical engineer and I went around to all the places where OU choral groups sing. I explained what I liked and didn’t like about the sound in them.”

The choral room is the only one of the three large rehearsal rooms that can be “tuned.” Panels on the walls can be opened out or remain flush to absorb or reflect sound, depending on the size and type of ensemble performing there.

The public will have frequent opportunities to enjoy the choral room’s acoustics. The room is booked for numerous recitals during the year and is the site of the Sutton Chamber Music Series. The room has 75 fixed theater seats, room for 60 temporary seats on the floor, rehearsal space for 150 singers and a viewing balcony.

“There aren’t enough superlatives to say how I feel about the new orchestra room,” symphony conductor Legh Burns says. “The shape, light-

ing and acoustics are wonderful. Everyone’s attitude is improved. Now we are looking forward to the day when we have a performing facility as good as our rehearsal facility.”

Among the acoustical features in the rehearsal areas are double-doored, small entry areas that provide a “sound lock” and double floors. The top floor “floats” on a layer of plywood supported by neoprene pads that inhibit vibrations from passing into or out of the floor below.

The walls separating one acoustically critical area from another are made of heavy duty concrete blocks filled with sand for additional mass, explains David Nordyke, project architect for OU’s Architectural and Engineering Services. Two Sheetrock layers on either side of the concrete blocks add more mass.

Duct work is suspended from the acoustical deck work to make additional volume possible. The duct work is painted a lighter shade to create an aesthetically pleasing pattern.

Classroom ceilings over the lecturer’s area are made of Sheetrock so



*The term “faculty office” is deceiving in the School of Music where teaching is often one-to-one, and the office is also the studio, equipped with the necessary musical instruments to accommodate individuals or small groups of students. The main feature of Eugene Enrico’s office/studio is his harpsichord.*

the hard surface will reflect sound, Nordyke says. Ceilings over student areas are absorbent to mute such sounds as papers rustling and pencils dropping. Sample classroom chairs even were submitted to a "squeak test" before furniture was ordered.

In addition to accolades for acoustics, the building is getting raves for its spaciousness and "people services."

"The band room is unique," University Bands director Gene Thrailkill insists. All 300 members of the Pride of Oklahoma marching band can rehearse inside merely by opening the sliding glass partition to the lounge to accommodate the percussionists.


"It was convenient to rehearse in Memorial Stadium during football season, but you can't weigh six performances a year against 99 percent of the time," Thrailkill adds. "It was hard to leave some 45 or 50 years of tradition behind when we vacated the stadium, but students who were against the move changed their minds when they saw this facility."

The band area features storage space for hats and uniforms, offices and a loading dock so equipment can be unloaded easily.

"The OU School of Music, as personified by its director Allan Ross, was the best client I ever had," Stark says.

"He understood and supported what I was trying to do and was instrumental in the way the building came out."

The building was financed by a combination of state and private funds. Major private donors were the Rapp Foundation, which gave \$2 million, the Sarkeys Foundation, which gave \$1 million, and Ruby Grant of Norman. The building is named for a longtime trustee of the Rapp Foundation.

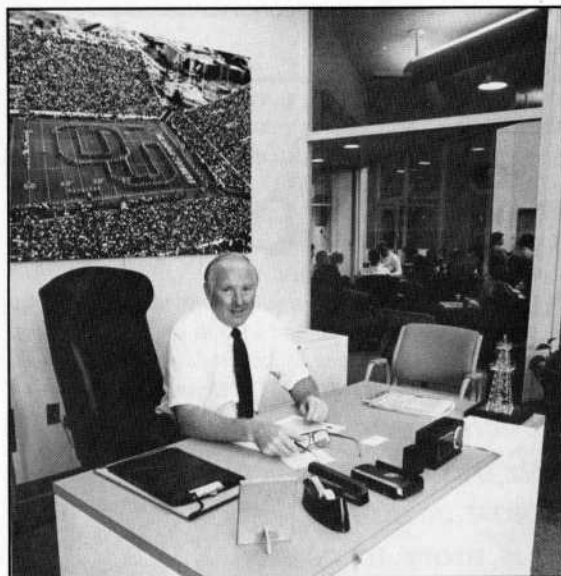
The contractor for the building was Flintco Inc. of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, which began construction in the early spring of 1984 and completed the structure in the spring of 1986. 



The band rehearsal hall is used by all sizes of instrumental groups, from the jazz ensemble to the full marching band.



When rain forces the Pride inside, glass dividers slide back to allow the percussionists to set up in the lounge area.



Band Director Gene Thrailkill has the only administrative office in this phase of the center.



A long narrow room on the second floor provides storage for the uniforms and accessories required to field the Pride of Oklahoma.