

# The Drama Building

The Drama Building, a modern, colonnaded building of white concrete textured with earth-toned marble chips and the first of three units that will comprise the University's Fine Arts Center was dedicated with a flourish. On Sunday, Oct. 24 Roger L. Stevens, chairman of the recently created National Council on the Arts, was the speaker at the formal dedication ceremony and on the following night Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* opened to a black-tie aggregation of first-nighters-by-invitation-only, formally christening the beautiful Rupel I. Jones Theatre (pages 12 and 13).

Since its founding the School of Drama has existed with only minimal facilities. In its early years it shared Holmberg Hall with the Schools of Art and Music, then moved to a frame building on the north campus after the start of World War II. Since the school has made the best of the old Science Hall, oldest building on the campus.

The new home includes classrooms for ballet, modern dance, drafting and makeup as well as for acting and diction. At the heart of the building is its most important classroom—Rupel J. Jones Theatre, named for the school's late director. Everything else complements this laboratory. Adjacent to the 45-foot-deep stage are the scene shop and the Green Room. The versatile stage will adapt to several types of production. The forestage is in two sections mounted on elevators to provide an orchestra pit or two variations on a semicircular thrust stage. Three groups of steps are concealed by traps on the foremost thrust and two vomitoria give access to the steps from basement by removal of 24 seats and the two trap lids.

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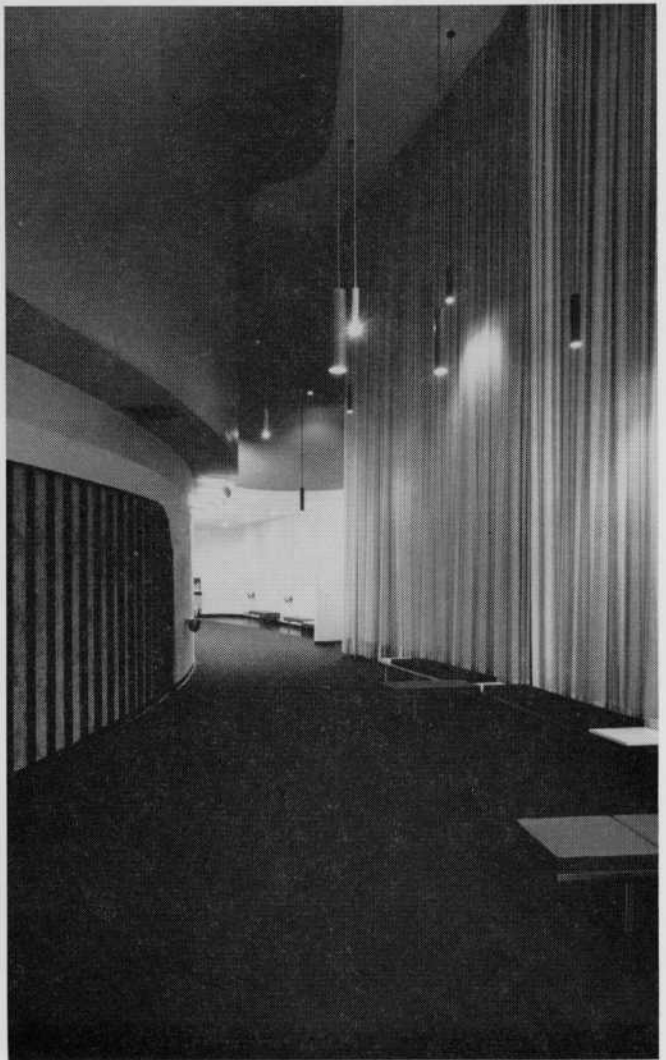
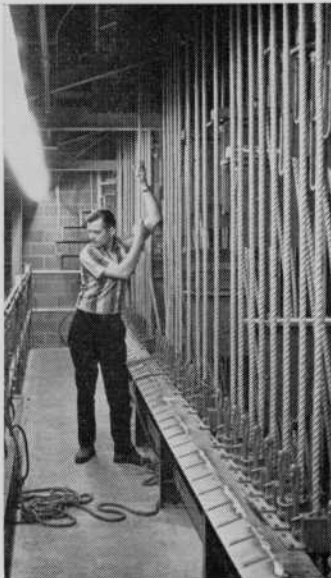
*The colonnaded Drama Building houses the 668-seat Rupel Jones Theatre.*





*THE DRAMA BUILDING*

*The difference between the cramped, dingy conditions of their former home in Science Hall and the resplendent new Drama Building with its modern equipment and tasteful design is dramatic. Students now have adequate room for scenic designs (above left), the light control board is topnotch (above right), the backstage facilities (below left) are the answer to a director's prayer and the setting for theater-goers borders on the luxurious—for example, the theatre lobby at right.*



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Maximum seating for the continental style theater is 668. When a pit orchestra is used, seating is 640 and use of the thrust brings it to 578.

The theater has excellent equipment for training in lighting and sound work. Walkways across the ceiling give convenient access to all beam lighting, and a lighting console in a single booth at the rear of the house provides total lighting control. There are three separate sound systems: one each for stage sound, intercommunication and monitoring. All stage sound is controlled from a booth next to the light booth.

## *A tribute to Rupel Jones*

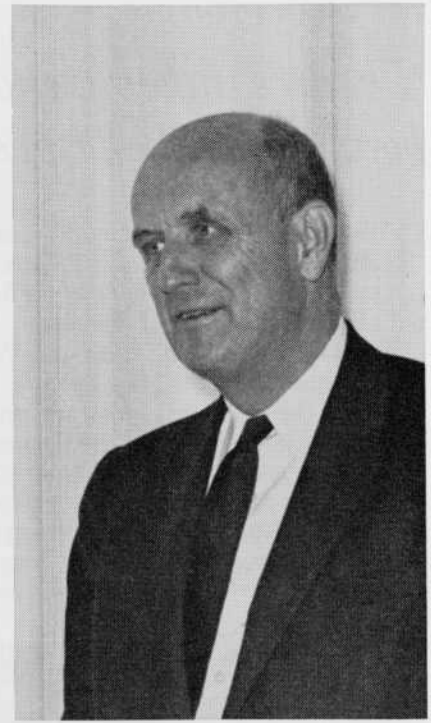
For more than three decades Rupel Johnson Jones was the theater at the University. When he died Nov. 17, 1964, he left a legacy of progress. The successes of his students were his greatest source of pride, but his accomplishments touched many areas.

He was nationally prominent in educational theater as a charter member of the American Educational Theatre Association and the National Theatre Conference. In 1948 he helped organize the Southwest Theatre Conference. He was selected in 1960 by the AETA to take a company of student actors on a series of one-night stands at American military bases in the Orient.

Rupel J. Jones loved the theater. The accomplishments of his students, the excellence of his teaching and the School of Drama he built all testify to that love. The list of alumni includes actors, playwrights, designers and teachers. Jones was named Regents professor of drama in 1962 in recognition of his outstanding service to the University. His devotion to the theater was perhaps most aptly expressed by his own students when they chose to open a four-night run of *Guys and Dolls* the night after his death. "We feel he would like to be remembered in the place where he created so much magic and majesty," they said. The magic and majesty are now perpetuated in the Rupel J. Jones Theatre.



*Director of the School of Drama, Dr. Nat Eek, spoke at the dedication ceremony Oct. 24.*



*Broadway producer Roger L. Stevens, chairman of the National Council of the Arts, was the main speaker.*



*The late Rupel J. Jones, Regents professor of drama, for whom the Drama Building theatre is named.*

## Theatre takes initial bow with Shakespeare

The premiere production by the School of Drama in the glittering new Rupel Jones Theatre was that venerable but vital comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*, by that grand old playwright, Will Shakespeare.

To play the leads of Kate and Petruchio the school engaged the talents of Miss Barbara Baxley and George Grizzard (below, right), who are principally Broadway performers but who have also appeared in motion pictures. A countryman of Shakespeare's, London's Frank Dunlop, was signed as the play's director. Dynamic and tireless, Dunlop promised to recreate the comedy as he thought Shakespeare would have done it for the audience today. "Shakespeare was extremely successful in making

contact with his audiences," said Dunlop, "and we hope to be as successful with our presentation." He was.

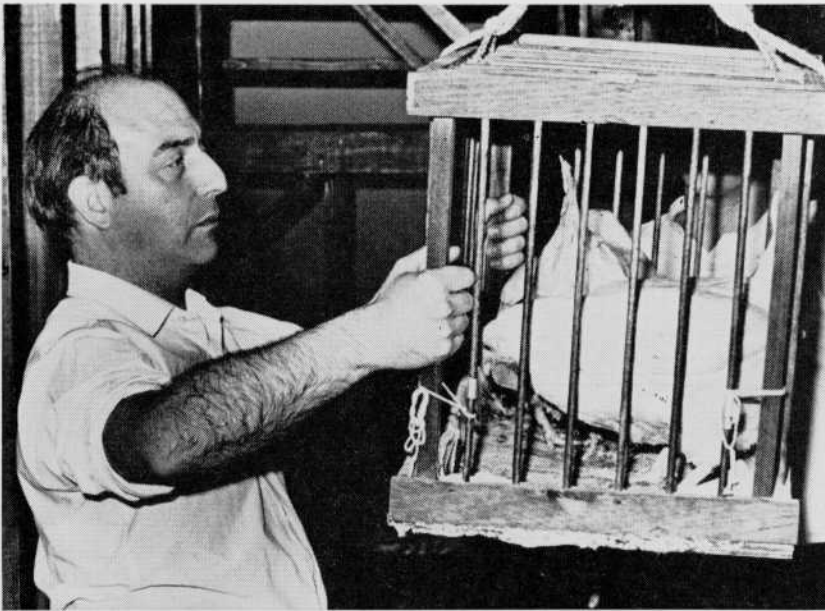
Dunlop flew into Norman a month before opening night to begin work with the supporting student cast, pausing long enough to praise the new theater and to express amazement at the proficiency of the students. "I was surprised at their high standards," he said. "They are quite a bit better than I expected and some of them have remarkable talent."

Two weeks before the opening curtain Miss Baxley and Grizzard arrived to begin rehearsals. "The future of the American theatre lies here," said Grizzard in an interview, "in communities and universities. Eventually I want to teach and this experience is proving valuable for me."

Including the opening night, black tie and by invitation only (below, left), *Shrew* enjoyed a successful run, playing to full houses in each of its six evening and two matinee performances.

Audiences and critics alike were appreciative. Representative of the complimentary reviews received by the





*Director Dunlop instructs two supporting actresses who appear in Shrew. The witty, exuberant Briton in addition to directing a considerable number of human beings also had to work with a shaggy dog, two chickens and even auditioned a horse.*

production was the following by Henry Hewes, theater writer and noted critic for the *Saturday Review*.

"At the University of Oklahoma's new 668-seat Rupel J. Jones Theatre, the forward-looking head of the School of Drama, Nat Eek, is most pleased at the results obtained by bringing from New York performers George Grizzard and Barbara Baxley and from London director Frank Dunlop for an inaugural presentation of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In it, Mr. Grizzard plays Petruchio as a man of the world, suave and calculating and at the same time a bit melancholy at the ease of his success. As Kate, Miss

Baxley gives one of the best performances of her career as she makes Kate's shrewishness emerge from anger at the world. But what is best is the way this pair works to create and sustain an underlying sexual attraction that nudges their stormy relationship to a triumphantly harmonious end. Mr. Dunlop has surrounded their sophisticated mating dance with Christopher Sly sequence set in a Wild West dance hall, and although the setting of the main story is Renaissance Italy, we happily pardon Jerry Hargis for fashioning his amusing Grumio after the somewhat anachronistic image of Bonanza's 'Hoss' Cartwright."

*Savoring the Elizabethan fare at a banquet following the opening night performance are from (from left) set designer Ray Larson and wife, Grizzard, Miss Baxley, Dunlop, costume designer Nancy Gade and the Nat Eeks.*

