

Remarks on the Dedication of the Theater February 1998



IT IS MY PLEASURE TONIGHT TO THANK MANY OF YOU assembled here and many others who are unable to be with us tonight for the vision, the gift, the opportunity that our new theater represents for the students of St. Andrew's.

This theater is a remarkable accomplishment, for it is so dramatically different from the old auditorium that seemed so very resistant and stubbornly immune to change and renovation. And while it is true that great teachers and great directors can perform their magic in the most ordinary and stifling environments, we needed desperately to make a change. My predecessor, Jon O'Brien, captured, in his distinctive voice and prose, the very significant limitations of this space:

. . . the facility lacks volume. The ceiling is low, leaving little space for lighting and no area for fly space. The acoustics are also bad. Lack of backstage space is also a serious drawback. We have no dressing rooms, no green room, no make-up room, limited space for carpentry and set design and only one bathroom. The room becomes warm and close in the warm seasons of the year. In sum, no one would ever design a similar theater again.

The room we will enjoy tonight represents a remarkable renovation. It is truly a theater; it is truly an appropriate hall for visiting speakers, lecturers to address the St. Andrew's community.

I am particularly excited about the new theater, because I so deeply believe that participation in drama is central to the education and the development of high school students. Drama teaches students to work together in a collaborative way; drama uncovers the bright light of creativity and inspiration in our students; drama, by its poetry, setting and action, teaches our students important lessons about the nature of humanity; it reminds us of our great accomplishments, our sheer delight in the wonder of life, our frailty, our sufferings, our ability to confront and surmount the conflicts of our lives. Just as I believe that each St. Andrew's student should graduate with the experience of playing on a team and working to extend himself or herself in the pursuit of athletic excellence, so, too, do I believe that every St. Andrew's student should experience the thrill, the sense of excitement, collaboration, creativity of participating in a theatrical presentation.

Hoover Sutton, one of the great directors in the history of St. Andrew's theater, described his love of the theater in schools so very well during his years here. His goal was to extend, develop and inspire great student actors and actresses; but he also felt that each production inevitably uncovered several students who were essentially transformed by the opening of the curtain and the lights slowly coming up. This new theater provides an attractive stage for future St. Andrew's students to shine.

Because one of our goals as a school is to prepare students to live responsible, active lives of service in the world, it is important for us to invite distinguished speakers to our campus on a regular basis. Our students and faculty naturally crave the intellectual and cultural stimulation that these events provide. What a magnificent lecture hall this theater has turned out to be.

Most importantly for me, the theater now stands proudly with our Chapel and dining room as a place to gather the entire School community—whether the event be a play, an assembly, a lecture or an announcement of a School holiday, the theater now becomes a place that somehow captures and enhances the spirit of a great school. For this theater, for this lecture hall, for this community assembly hall, I thank you all.

“I believe that every St. Andrew's student should experience the thrill, the sense of excitement, collaboration, creativity of participating in a theatrical presentation.”