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July 24, 2018

Re: Coconut Grove Playhouse (DA01070), 3500 Main Highway, Miami, Miami-Dade County

Dear Messrs. Timothy Parson and Ruben Acosta:

I forward this letter in an effort to help clarify and correct the National Register Nomination's assessment of the integrity of the existing interiors of the Coconut Grove Playhouse.

The National Register Nomination for the Coconut Grove Playhouse establishes 1927 as the first of two periods of significance. The 1927 period is referenced under "...Criterion C in the area of architecture for the Mediterranean revival façade." (Sec. 8, pg. 1). The report includes an assessment of the "Architecture Integrity: exterior" (Sec. 7, pg. 12). It states "the building's integrity varies between the exterior of the property and the interior. Externally the building retains a sufficient level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship associated the original 1926 Kiehnel and Elliot design. The central pavilion of the primary façade facing the intersection of Charles Ave. and Main Highway retains most of the original features." This assessment, with its emphasis on the integrity of the features of the principal façade, coincides with the conclusions of the local historic designation report.

The Nomination also identifies the years 1955-1970 as a second period of significance under Criterion A, in the area of historic events in entertainment and recreation. The nomination does not cite Criterion C, for the association with master architect Alfred Browning Parker for the years 1955-1970 because of the loss of fabric, in great part, the interiors which Parker installed in Kiehnel's 1927 structure. After 1970, the Parker interiors were removed and replaced numerous times over, with subsequent interiors of no import. This is documented in Figure 4 of the Nomination. The National Register Nomination proceeds to argue that the hollows of space, from which Parker's interior designs were removed, evoke, in their current condition, sufficient association with the settings of the midcentury period of significance, 1955-1970. The nomination proposes the inclusion of the current interior spaces, as they exist today, under the protection of the National Register listing.

That argument is flawed for numerous reasons. The most important is that these spaces suffered multiple changes and reconfigurations in the forty-eight intervening years since 1970. These changes involved the loss of design, materials, workmanship and, in many areas, changes in use and spatial configuration. In short, the features and structure of the 1955-1970 interiors were changed. The finishes, materials, workmanship and design changed. The style and idea of these interiors were changed. The hollowed out surfaces absent the materials, workmanship, finishes, forms, elements, spaces and style of Parker's designs have been repeatedly altered since 1970. They are now mostly a pseudo-Mediterranean false style and do not evoke an association with historic recreational and entertainment events that occurred in the Playhouse from 1955-1970. Instead, they misguide the visitor and confuse the viewer. The interior spaces, there today, trigger a false reading of the interior settings of the period of significance where the entertainment and recreational events of 1955-1970 took place.

A careful look at plans incorporated to the report and identified as Figure 3: plans of 1955-56 (Sec. 7, pg. 9) and Figure 4 plans of 1982 (Sec. 7, pg. 10) and other material sent by me to Department staff for review, documents the changes that have occurred, including alterations to spatial configurations and uses. These changes are causal to disassociations with the history and memory of the Playhouse interiors during the period of significance (1955-1970) under Criterion A. Additional changes made after 1981 further complicate the associative memory of the interior settings and question the assessment of the interior integrity of the historic resource in relation to the 1955-1970 period. A reference to the following excerpt concerning nominations to the National Register from the *National Register Bulletin, Chapter VIII, How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property* is pertinent here;

Interiors... "In some cases, the loss of an interior will disqualify properties from listing in the National Register- A historic concert hall noted for the beauty of its auditorium and its fine acoustic qualities would be the type of property that if it were to lose its interior, it would lose its value as a historic resource. In other cases, the overarching significance of a property's exterior can overcome the adverse effect of the loss of an interior.
In border line cases particular attention is paid to the significance of the property and the remaining historic features."

For reasons stated above, the Local Historic Designation does not include protection over the interiors. By omission, it frames an accurate understanding of the lack of integrity of the historic interior fabric of the Coconut Grove Playhouse, resultant from the ensuing forty-eight years of interior changes, since 1970.

Thank you for your consideration to this important matter of accuracy with regards to the integrity of the interior of the Historic Coconut Grove Playhouse. This matter should be corrected before the nomination is sent to Ms. Joy Beasley, the Keeper of the National Register.

Sincerely,



Jorge L. Hernandez, AIA

CC: Michael Spring, Senior Advisor, Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor
Sarah Cody, Historic Preservation Chief, Miami-Dade County
Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Miami Planning Dept.
Max A. Imberman, Historic Preservationist, Florida Department of State