

March 7, 1961

General Taylor

FROM: Jack McNulty

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~~To Speechfile~~

Tail

THE HIGH COST
OF CULTURE

SHOWBILL

TWO-WAY STRETCH



LINCOLN CENTER: The High Cost of Culture

/ Stuart W. Little

After five years of organization work and preparation, the first building of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts — Philharmonic Hall — is just beginning to take shape in steel and concrete. Around it, the rest of the fourteen-acre site above Columbus Circle—the largest such cleared construction site in the city since the U.N. — is all uneven terrain — deep excavations and mounds of earth over which swarm trucks and tractors and helmeted construction workers. Beneath the tower derricks, a start is being made.

A gigantic construction job is underway, yet the worries of the creators of Lincoln Center are only just beginning. In the first place, the Center is by no means paid for yet. It still lacks some \$65,000,000 of its \$132,000,000 construction goal and contributions have slowed up. Government money, however, is apparently coming to the rescue. The brightest piece of news for Lincoln Center in recent months is the announced willingness of state and city governments to foot the bills for one major theatre and for the combined library-museum building to a total of nearly \$30,000,000.

Nevertheless, money worries and plans and construction problems have repeatedly forced Lincoln Center officials to order postponements, the latest one putting off completion of the opera house until the spring of 1964.

And, once the Center is open, much more intricate problems will appear—

problems pertaining to the continuity of artistic effort and to the economics of artistic effort, problems for which the Center cannot and does not disclaim responsibility. Such problems, in fact, do not wait upon the opening of the buildings. They are already troubling some of the prospective tenants.

On the whole, Lincoln Center officials may congratulate themselves on knowing that they will have something to put into the new theatres they are building. The Met will move into the new opera house. Leonard Bernstein and the Philharmonic will move into the concert hall. An expanded Juilliard will occupy a building that will wall in the Center on the north. The New York Public Library's theatre collection will fill part of the proposed library-museum to be built with city funds. And so on. In this, Lincoln Center is considerably more fortunate than the proposed National Cultural Center in Washington, which is supported by act of Congress but lacks ready-made theatrical or musical organizations to fill the halls on a regular basis. For two years now Washington's center has been stalled because the conception of an ideal art center jumped ahead of the necessity for one. A belatedly named board of trustees, brought together under the Eisenhower Administration, has been criticized by Congressman Frank Thompson of New Jersey for being patronage appointees of the White House with a low rating in knowledge of

the arts. And the board, as evidence of its own indecision, hired a New York firm to investigate the question of what to put into the five proposed halls of national culture.

Happily, the Met and the Philharmonic, and the loyal audiences they bring with them, give Lincoln Center an artistic identity card at birth. But the Center still faces the obligation of growth and maturity. It must draw more existing artistic institutions into itself, attract visiting productions to use its halls and build new companies to fill the theatres as well as help to find the audiences to support them. None of this will come about as easily and as naturally as the Met and the Philharmonic will fall into place as the rightful occupants of the two major houses of Lincoln Center.

Lincoln Center is reasonably sure of attracting the New York City Center — one of the city's major artistic institutions—as permanent tenant of the proposed Dance-Operetta Theatre dominating the southeast corner of the site — geographically as well as figuratively the cornerstone of the whole project. Such a move is almost certain now that the state and the city have signified their willingness to appropriate the \$19,000,000 needed to build such a theatre. City Center officials have had their reservations about the move. For one thing, they know that it is more expensive to maintain a new theatre than an old one, and the City Center right now is housed in a very old one indeed in its cavernous Masonic Hall on West 55th Street. City Center officials estimate that the move could triple or even quadruple their operating costs. There are many unknowns in such an equation. But it is not difficult to foresee the hard necessity for a city subsidy of some kind to assure the continuance of City Center.

To take a slightly different problem, Lincoln Center has been forced to create an entirely new theatrical organization from scratch to justify building the Repertory Theatre. The people charged with

the responsibility for this project at the moment are more worried about the creation of such an organization in human terms than they are about construction of the building. Where to begin? Whom to sign as actors? How to set artistic policy? What to charge for admission? Here, too, is an equation full of unknowns.

The Lincoln Center halls and theatres cannot be filled by the regular companies alone. They will depend on the activity of such independent impresarios as S. Hurok, but Mr. Hurok, while welcoming the development of Lincoln Center, has been critical of the Center for the size of some of its theatres. For example, Mr. Hurok says he is able to support a limited New York engagement of the Comédie Française at the City Center at the fixed top ticket price of \$3.95 only because of that theatre's generous 3,000-seat capacity. He could not afford to run the Comédie Française, he says, at the 2,500-seat Dance-Operetta Theatre. With such theatrical attractions as the Comédie, Mr. Hurok would not be restricted to Lincoln Center. He could put the French company conveniently into a Broadway musical-size theatre and profitably support a run at the higher Broadway ticket scale.

With big ballet companies it is different. No major ballet company in the world, Mr. Hurok contends, could afford to play the Dance-Operetta Theatre. When Hurok imported Margot Fonteyn and Britain's famous Royal Ballet this fall, his payroll listed ninety in the company, sixty in the orchestra. He said he needed to gross \$450,000 for the four-week engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House, with its 3,600 seats, just to break even. He would have to rely on the success of the subsequent national tour to write off the travel expenses of bringing such a large company across the ocean. He needed bigger and cheaper theatres, not smaller and more expensive ones.

The burden of answering all such critics falls largely to Reginald Allen, the patient, able and artistically knowledgeable execu-

mize on such production items as costumes and scenery. Against the ugliness of the present theatre even economized work looks good. But a modern ornamented theatre would compete with the stage, City Center officials believe, and force costume and set designers to more lavish (and costly) display. Then, too, production staffs get by in rather cramped quarters. The office lay-outs in the new theatre would be more generous, and more expensive to maintain.

All these matters give City Center pause, and still something even more serious. The move may well and safely be made from every material standpoint, yet what of the human? Those responsible for the operation of City Center, for example, are frequently inclined to worry over whether so great an art as that of George Balanchine, which has taken root at the City Center, can accept transplantation. Can it flourish as happily in the new soil and stone of Lincoln Center? A lot of intelligent citizens are looking the Lincoln Center gift horse squarely in the mouth.

Whatever the costs and sacrifices, there is little doubt but that City Center will become an important part of Lincoln Center. But on its own terms. It applauds the willingness of the state and city to build the Dance-Operetta Theatre. Yet it might make the best of both worlds by retaining its present building on 55th Street. The City Center schedule is crowded, different producers within the City Center family are competing for time and expansion is in sight. Eventually the managers of City Center might like to see a five-tiered operation: opera, ballet, musicals, a repertory of Gilbert and Sullivan, drama and such visiting foreign attractions as Marceau, the Comédie Française and the Kabuki.

It is not altogether unlikely that City Center might elect to go into Lincoln Center on this basis: ballet, a musical season expanded to a whole repertory of American musicals and the foreign attractions into Lincoln Center; opera, Gilbert and

Sullivan, drama and extra attractions like *The Visit* to remain behind on 55th Street.

For the new Repertory Theatre Association, whose producing directors are Robert Whitehead and Elia Kazan, the problem is still different. It is their job to find the talent, the program and the style to fill the nation's first permanent repertory theatre. The theatre will be built, regardless of whether they succeed or not, and it is in the nature of theatre that their own success is very little dependent upon the relative excellence of the theatre building they will occupy. In this they, like the City Center people, will only find their errors emphasized by the purity and beauty of the physical surroundings.

Robert Whitehead has already told the trustees of his association the bad news of theatre economics. He estimates that the operation of the repertory theatre, with its permanent company of some thirty actors and a small attached experimental theatre and workshop, will come to \$1,000,000 a year. Given capacity business in the new 1,100-seat house for a thirty-five-week season, Whitehead believes he can better than meet this budget with a \$5 theatre ticket throughout 60 per cent of the house. He is wholly opposed to such a price scale, even though it is considerably lower than Broadway. He would like to confine the \$5 allotment to 30 or 40 per cent, graduating the scale in the balance of the house down to \$1 in the balcony. Doing this, he would wind up — still assuming capacity business — with a \$50,000 loss.

No theatre man in his right mind can assume capacity business indefinitely. Broadway producers with dramatic shows generally plan to break even over the course of a run with an average of little better than 50 per cent of capacity business. It seems obvious that the new repertory theatre will be running an annual deficit and that this must be met by public subsidy, and Mr. Whitehead has already so told the association trustees.

Continued on page 15

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Sidney Crout	LIONEL JEFFRIES
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CLOSE-UPS

PETER SELLERS (Dodger Lane) took America by storm when he played three different roles in *The Mouse That Roared* (1959). Since then, pictures in which he appears have been opening up with frequency here in New York (*Battle of the Sexes*, *I'm All Right, Jack*) and at the moment he is the hottest property England has exported since Alec Guinness. Born in Southsea in 1925, he began his comic career doing impersonations at camp concerts in India while with the R.A.F. In 1949 he broadcast the first radio performance of *Goon Show*, which was a tremendous success and ran for ten years. In 1951 he made his screen debut in *Penny Points to Paradise*, and has since appeared in such comedies as *The Smallest Show on Earth* (1957), *tom thumb* (1958), and *The Ladykillers* (1956). He now has a five-year contract with the Boulting Brothers, who made *Man in a Cocked Hat*. He has also appeared in *Orders Are Orders*, *John and Julie*, and *Up the Creek*. The television shows Mr. Sellers has appeared in include *Idiot Weekly*, *A Show Called Fred*, *The Son of Fred*, *The Cathode Ray Tube Show* and *Gently Bentley*. His first American film, *The Millionairess*, based on the Bernard Shaw play and co-starring Sophia Loren, will be released later this year. Mr. Sellers also directed and starred in a short

film which won a number of awards entitled *The Running, Jumping, Standing Standing Still Film*.

WILFRED HYDE WHITE (Soapy), born in Gloucestershire in 1903, graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and made his West End debut in 1925. His first movie role was in Alexander Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936), and since then he has become a familiar face to filmgoers on both sides of the Atlantic, appearing in such outstanding movies as *The Winslow Boy* (1950), *The Third Man* (1950), *Trio* (1950), *The Browning Version* (1951), and *Outcast of the Islands* (1952). In 1957 he played on the Broadway stage in *The Reluctant Debutante*, doing the role he had originated in the London production. Other films include: *Gilbert and Sullivan* (1953), *Man with a Million* (1954), *I'm All Right Jack* (1960), *Adam and Evalyn* (1949), *Golden Salamander* (1951), *Betrayed* (1954), *Duel in the Jungle* (1954), *March Hare* (1921), *Mr. Drake's Duck* (1951), *Mr. Denning Drives North* (1953), *Rainbow Jacket* (1953), *To Dorothy a Son* (1953), *Quentin Durward* (1955), *The Silken Affair* (1957). Mr. White has appeared on many television shows in England and America.

Mr. Whitehead and Mr. Kazan are also anxious to assure the minimum training of a company of players, and they want their cast to work together for at least five months before they go before the public. Mr. Whitehead regards this "work period" as all important, and he is almost more anxious to secure funds for this purpose than he is for the construction of the theatre. He estimates that he will need \$500,000 even before the theatre is open and ready for business.

More intangible than any of these problems, but perhaps more vital, is the search for an artistic point of view for the new theatre. As Mr. Whitehead advised the trustees: "There is an enormous impatience on the part of serious professionals to find new significant theatre forms, but bold departures are too hazardous for the high production costs of the Broadway show shops. Art does not improve, it changes; and if it ceases to change, it eventually ceases to exist."

Such are some of the hesitations of the tenants-to-be. As landlord-to-be, Lincoln Center is sympathetic and can be expected to help. For one thing, it has already demonstrated a willingness to be concerned about where audiences for all the artistic events the Center will sponsor will come from. The effect of Lincoln Center in operation will be to double the existing seasons for the performing arts in New York. On a night when everything is going, it will take about 11,000 persons to fill every hall and theatre. Given a metropolitan population of over eight million, Mr. Allen does not think the hope of such a turn-out is "straining too hard." But he is not relying upon the so-called "cultural explosion," if there is such a thing, to fill Lincoln Center. The citizens are rarely to be discovered beating down the doors to the halls of culture. Lincoln Center accepts its obligation to go out and find them.

"Very often I'm invited to speak at conferences about the performing arts," Mr. Allen said. "The subject is generally about the education of the artists, the

training, for instance, of young musicians. It's all very well to train young musicians, I say. But who's going to listen to them. I'm interested in the training of young audience members. To paraphrase Madison Avenue, there must be a 'want-to-hear' factor."

Lincoln Center is already making use of the income from \$5,500,000 earmarked for "education and artistic development" to interest New York school children—future audiences—in symphony and opera. The money is being used currently to enable students to attend rehearsals of the Philharmonic, and to finance a series of special concerts for the young.

It is a fortunate coincidence, Mr. Allen believes, that Lincoln Center is expected to be in full-time operation at the time of the 1964-65 World's Fair. He expects the Center to start off on the right foot with the performances of the great artistic companies of the world. The people will follow. The World's Fair, Mr. Allen says, will give a "jet assist" to the idea of public acceptance.

"To make Lincoln Center self-supporting may not be instantly accomplishable," Mr. Allen admitted. "Some houses will have to be dark some of the time. There will be some absorption of loss."

Lincoln Center aims to attract a wide enough audience to be self-supporting within each of its units. But the management is already frank to admit this may be impossible, that they very likely may have to go regularly to the public for financial support, that to have what Lincoln Center promises New Yorkers will have to pay now and pay later as well.

No amount of doubt or skepticism can hold off or even modify very much what many citizens of good will and high purpose have already set in motion. Slowly, perhaps painfully, with certain delays, Lincoln Center is coming into being—not the creator of art but a home for the arts, not the end and accomplishment of all this city seeks in artistic expression and enjoyment, but a beginning.