

Urban Renewal Success

As a catalyst for urban renewal of the surrounding Upper West Side community, Lincoln Center has received mostly ecstatic reviews. As early as 1961, while the campus was still under construction, Herbert Kupferberg, noting how “Impetus has been given to improvement plans for the entire West Side,” called the center “a magnificent success.”¹ The following year, in an article entitled “Lincoln Center Sparks Vast Renewal on the West Side,” the *Times* reported on a spate of new development consisting of office buildings, apartment houses, motor hotels and institutional buildings.² Four years later, in 1966, a *Times* headline proclaimed “Lincoln Center Brings Changes,” and detailed both new development and preservation efforts which were resulting from the construction of the cultural complex.³ Another *Times* article in 1969 extolled, “the center’s gleaming facades and broad plazas continue to attract builders as well as strollers and devotees of the arts to the area while spurring property owners in the neighborhood to clean up, fix up and renovate.”⁴

Even Ada Louise Huxtable, who was highly critical in her reassessment of the center’s buildings, maintained that “in terms of real estate” the center was “a smash.”⁵ Paul Goldberger, observed that, contrary to Jane Jacobs’ dire predictions of urban alienation and isolation, “Lincoln Center has turned out to have had a profound effect on the city around it, spawning everything from restaurants and boutiques to luxury apartment houses.”⁶ Martin Bloom remarked that Lincoln Center had influenced its immediate surroundings, at least on its ‘front’ side, and much of the upper West Side, where property values have soared and redevelopment carried out from the center northward.⁷ Bloom asserted that the rejuvenated area had “a certain vitality,” characterized by “clusters of restaurants...music and bookshops relating to the performing arts ...and nine cinemas.”⁸

Throughout its forty-year history, Lincoln Center has continued to be a catalyst for upscale residential, retail and commercial development. Citing the enormous impact of the complex, Herbert Muschamp wrote:

The proliferation of restaurants and sidewalk cafes, renovated brownstones, new high-rises, movie theaters, health clubs: in the wake of Lincoln Center, the Upper West Side has become the spawning ground for a new upper-middle-class urban way of life.⁹

Four years after Muschamp's article, Brian G. Edwards, director of leasing at the Halstead Property Company, predicted the results from the Jazz-at-Lincoln Center facility within the Time-AOL Warner retail-condominium-hotel-office-production studio-concert hall at 4 Columbus Circle.¹⁰ Edwards, noting the preponderance of high-rise residential development in the center's neighborhood, said that many developers "that use Lincoln Center as an anchor will also ride the coattails of the redevelopment of the New York Coliseum at Columbus Circle."¹¹

In spite of the endless controversy surrounding Lincoln Center's design, even its detractors acknowledge its significance. Clive Barnes, whose 1968 assessment was indeed characterized by "bravos" and "barbs," stated:

From every respect, looking back, Lincoln Center can be seen as a historical necessity, and to question that necessity is to question the mood and cultural climate of America and New York City. The Center was a child of its time and not responsible for its parentage.¹²

Furthermore, Barnes reasoned that, had the ambitious enterprise not been so bold and sweeping, it may have never happened at all:

The Center was never envisaged as a group of local buildings. It was a dream, and a dream of grandeur. Had Lincoln Center not been made into this Pleiad of buildings, this constellation of culture, it would never have been financially practicable.¹³

Confessing that he loved "the three huge, expensive slabs of culture," in spite of their individual flaws, he pronounced them, "undeniably impressive" and "bastions of the American way of art."¹⁴ Beverly Sills, former Chairwoman of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. and

opera star with both constituent opera companies, called the entire ensemble, “an icon in the world.”¹⁵

Herbert Muschamp has also gleaned exceptional importance from the performing arts center in spite of championing its redevelopment. Making a case for its preservation, Muschamp wrote:

No part of Lincoln Center has been landmarked. Nonetheless, it is a historic site. For better or worse, it is the mother of all performing arts centers. It echoes with memories of great performances. And it represents a pivotal moment in the history of architectural taste, a time when the orthodoxies of modern architecture were beginning to crumble. In this sense, Lincoln Center stands at the threshold [sic] of the present state of the art. It ushered in an era of confusion that has since gone by many names: eclecticism, pluralism, postmodernism or the relativity of taste.¹⁶

Concerning its programming, Muschamp decried, “The arts complex itself is a grand artistic synthesis—an opera, or Gesamtkunstwerk, in Wagner’s term—of pre-electronic communications. Nightly, it stages a meta-performance by artists, audiences and the physical settings that allow contact between them in public space.”¹⁷ Noting its artistic attributes, Martin Bloom offered, “In spite of reservations about design, choice of materials and site planning, Lincoln Center is a living, breathing institution because it fosters what lives and breathes within it. By this measure, it is a success.”¹⁸

Contrasted with the plethora of critics who have been mixed in their reactions to Lincoln Center, many preservationists, historians, scholars and design professionals have been unanimous in their praise. Hailing Lincoln Center’s design, for example, Preservation League of New York President Scott P. Heyl described its buildings as “excellent examples of Modern architecture” that tell “a story of the change in architectural practices of the years.”¹⁹ Dr. Theodore H. M. Prudon, adjunct professor of Columbia University’s Historic Preservation Program, an architect and President of the United States chapter of DOCOMOMO, an organization devoted to the preservation of “buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern

movement,” said its buildings “represent the work of America’s most significant architects at the time,” whose “work is synonymous with the development of American architecture after the war.”²⁰

In addition to the preservation community, other scholars and historians have given their unmitigated endorsements. Robert A. M. Stern, Dean of Yale University’s School of Architecture and former Director of Columbia’s Historic Preservation Program, an architect and noted architectural historian, lauded the complex as “a textbook exemplar of mid-century Modernism with buildings designed by some of the leading architects of the day”²¹ Thomas Mellins, Stern’s associate and co-author of *New York 1960*, characterized the campus as “deeply expressive of its time, and timeless in its ability to communicate to new generations of culture seekers.”²²

Prudon also lauded the buildings’ interiors. Clarifying the architects’ original intentions, he observed:

The significance of the complex is not just limited to the exterior envelope but also includes the interior of the buildings. Because of the great transparency of the exterior wall some of these interiors become doubly important at night when each and everyone of them is visible and an integral part of the architecture as envisioned in the original architectural design intent.²³

In addition, advisors and historians have championed Lincoln Center’s artwork. Citing the commissions of Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall and Richard Lippold, among others, public art advisor, Nancy Rosen, called them “exemplary, truly ‘world-class’” and “pioneering example[s] of the marriage of art and site.”²⁴ Rosen also referred to the works within the New York State Theater as “exceptional,” concluding “Individually and collectively, the works of art for Lincoln Center’s public spaces established a standard of excellence and embody a vision that we continue to strive for today, as a City, as a State and as a Nation. This must be the definition of a treasure.”²⁵

Concurring with Rosen, Amy D. Newman, art historian and critic of 19th - and 20th- century art, and former Columbia professor and managing editor of *Artnews* magazine, made an analogy between the logo of the Metropolitan Opera and the Nadelman, Johns, Calder and Chagall works, as defining “the identity of the theaters and public spaces.”²⁶ Newman summarized her analysis by writing, “These—and so many others, like the Lee Bontecou relief in the State Theater and the Wilhelm Lehmbruck sculpture in the Metropolitan Opera House—are artworks of the highest quality by artists of the first rank, and have over the years become absolutely melded with their sites.”²⁷ Praising the site-specific success of the art within the State Theater, *Times* art critic, Roberta Smith, declared, “Of all the buildings at Lincoln Center, the New York State Theater is the only one where the art still conveys any of the artistic vitality of the moment that the building came into being, and the core of this vitality is the Johns.”²⁸

Assessing the center’s landscape design, Sarah Bradford Landau, former commissioner of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (1987-1996) and current Professor of Art History at New York University, called it “impressive.”²⁹ Ken Smith, landscape historian, architect and design critic at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, offered plaudits for Dan Kiley’s Damrosch Park and Lincoln Center Plaza North:

At Lincoln Center, Dan Kiley designed a landscape of tightly-spaced tree bosquets which gave a sense of unifying order and continuity to the complex as a whole. His use of strong, simple and well-proportioned planters and plantings created spatial containment and a balanced relationship between a series of open plazas and courts and shaded bosquet areas. ‘Quartets’ of Plane trees were planted in twenty-foot-square travertine marble planters, which were partially recessed to minimize their scale. Dan Kiley worked closely with the Lincoln Center architectural team and his landscape concepts and designs are highly integrated into the project as a whole.³⁰

Smith concluded that Kiley’s work at the complex is “among the most significant examples of mid-century modern landscape architecture produced in the United States.”³¹

Like its critics, proponents of Lincoln Center have offered consistent praise for its success as a catalyst for urban revitalization in the surrounding area. Thomas Mellins called it

“the jewel of a massive urban renewal effort that triggered the rebirth of an entire urban district. It helped return to the inner-city much of the vitality that, since the Second World War, had been drained off by the explosive growth of the suburbs and the increasing privatization of entertainment wrought by the advent of television.”³² Architect Rolf Ohlhausen wrote that “Since its creation in the nineteen sixties, Lincoln Center has been a catalyst for dynamic development of the surrounding community.”³³ Dierdre Stanforth, author of *Restored America* (Praeger, 1975) and *Romantic New Orleans* (Viking, 1977), both dealing with the historical appreciation of architecture, maintained that the center “played a pivotal role in the renaissance of the entire Upper West Side.”³⁴ Robert A. M. Stern similarly waxed, “It would almost be too difficult to overstate the importance Lincoln Center played in the growth and prosperity of the area around it and the whole Upper West Sides.”³⁵

Regarding Lincoln Center’s overall significance, the aforementioned professionals have been just as forthcoming. Scott P. Heyl not only acknowledged Lincoln Center as a catalyst for the preservation movement, but also deemed it, “architecturally, culturally and socially significant... Taken together, the entire complex is a cultural center that promotes art and theater unlike any other cultural arts center.”³⁶ Sarah Bradford Landau characterized the campus as, “nationally significant” and an “influential group of buildings.”³⁷ Deirdre Stanforth argued that “As the first American cultural center, it set an example that has inspired the building of arts centers across America and around the world, and has become a tourist attraction second only to Rockefeller Center.”³⁸

Theodore H. M. Prudon called the ensemble a “nationally and internationally significant complex created by architects of worldwide reputation.”³⁹ Robert A. M. Stern hailed Lincoln Center as “the most ambitious and successful attempt at traditional large-scale urban placemaking to have been realized since Rockefeller Center.”⁴⁰ Stern also stressed the complex’s role within the framework of postwar American history by writing, “It is an heroic testament to a time when New York and indeed the entire country, often derided as too focused

on the bottom line, was able to show the world that they could be serious players on the international cultural stage.”⁴¹ Thomas Mellins pronounced that “Lincoln Center is, by every conceivable measure, the lithic definition of a landmark,” attested by its “beautiful campus dedicated to high culture” that enabled the city to prove “itself a worthy heir to Europe’s cultural throne, as the Old World artistic hegemony gave way to a new world order.”⁴² Mellins concluded that “Lincoln Center fulfilled a noble program at a pivotal moment in the evolution of a great city, and became a model for cultural centers throughout the nation.”⁴³

¹ Herbert Kupferberg, “The Culture Monopoly at Lincoln Center,” *Harper’s Magazine*, October 1961, v.223, p.96.

² Glenn Fowler, “Lincoln Center Sparks Vast Renewal on the West Side,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 1962, VIII, p.1ff.

³ Glenn Fowler, “Lincoln Center Brings Changes,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 1962, p.45.

⁴ William Robbins, “Din of Construction Resounds in Lincoln Center Area,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1969, VIII, p.1.

⁵ Huxtable, “Adding Up the Score,” p.29.

⁶ Goldberger, “Architecture: Lincoln Center and Changes Wrought by 20 Years,” p.15.

⁷ Bloom, “Cultural Colossi: Lincoln Center at 19,” p.38.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Muschamp, “Lincoln Center’s Enduring Vision,” p.C25.

¹⁰ Rachele Garbarine, “Twin Towers in Lincoln Center Area,” *The New York Times*, March 31, 2000, Metro, p.B8.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.B8. In 1991, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. capitalized on both the value of its name and its real estate holdings. Responding to a demand for additional space, the organization negotiated a deal with the Stillman Group of Scarsdale, New York, that would both address these needs and generate additional income for the organization. Under the terms of the agreement, the Stillman Group paid the organization forty-eight-and-a-half million dollars to build a 60-story high-rise condominium on the site. Furthermore, in exchange for use of the Lincoln Center address, the developer constructed a 28-story mixed-use tower adjacent to the Juilliard School for the parent organization and its constituents’ use. Designed by Davis, Brody & Associates, the Lincoln Center facility, called the Samuel B. and David Rose Building, featured administrative offices, 9 dance studios, two theaters for the Film Society and Lincoln Center Institute, dormitories and rehearsal studios. For more information on the Samuel B. and David Rose Building and 3 Lincoln Center, see Paul Goldberger, “A Shot of Cultural Adrenaline At Lincoln Center,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 1991, II, p.29.

¹² Barnes, “Lincoln Center: Bravos and Barbs for America’s Number One Cultural Supermarket,” p.37.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁵ Daniel J. Wakin, “Modern Architecture Has a Midlife Crisis: Preservationists Help an Old Foe,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2000, p.B1.

¹⁶ Herbert Muschamp, “Lincoln Center’s Next Big Production: Itself,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2001, II, p.46.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁸ Bloom, “Cultural Colossi: Lincoln Center at 19,” p.39.

¹⁹ Scott P. Heyl, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, August 24, 2000.

²⁰ Theodore H.M. Prudon, Ph.D/AIA, letter to Katherine [sic] Howe, New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation office in favor of National Register nomination of Lincoln Center, June 20, 2000.

²¹ Robert A.M. Stern, FAIA, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, July 19, 2000.

²² Thomas Mellins, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, July 14, 2000.

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- ²³ Prudon, letter to Howe, June 20, 2000.
- ²⁴ Nancy Rosen, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, August 25, 2000.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*
- ²⁶ Amy Newman, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, October 2, 2000.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*
- ²⁸ Smith, "Art Worth More Than Money at Lincoln Center," p.8.
- ²⁹ Sarah Bradford Landau, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, August 8, 2000.
- ³⁰ Ken Smith, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of National Register nomination of Lincoln Center, July 10, 2000.
- ³¹ *ibid.*
- ³² Mellins, letter to Castro, July 14, 2000.
- ³³ Rolf Ohlhausen, FAIA, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of National Register nomination of Lincoln Center, June 30, 2000.
- ³⁴ Stanforth, letter to Castro, July 27, 2000.
- ³⁵ Stern, letter to Castro, July 19, 2000.
- ³⁶ Heyl, letter to Castro, August 24, 2000.
- ³⁷ Landau, letter to Castro, August 8, 2000.
- ³⁸ Dierdre Stanforth, letter to Bernadette Castro, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in favor of State and National Register nominations of Lincoln Center, July 27, 2000.
- ³⁹ Prudon, letter to Howe, June 20, 2000.
- ⁴⁰ Stern, letter to Castro, July 19, 2000.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*
- ⁴² Mellins, letter to Castro, July 14, 2000.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*