

**VIVIAN BEAUMONT THEATER /
LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF THE PERFORMING ARTS:**

American Repertory Theater

One of the problems confronting the board of Lincoln Center, Inc. in the selection of a drama constituent was the lack of an existing organization that had an organizational infrastructure equivalent to a Metropolitan Opera Association or a Philharmonic-Symphony Society. Thus, in spite of expressed interest from such critically-acclaimed institutions such as the American National Theater Association (ANTA) and the Actors' Studio, the board bypassed these organizations in favor of seeking a more financially stable constituent. Although an Advisory Council on Drama was formed in April 1958, a constituent was not named until nearly two years later. There was, however, progress in terms of finding a potential donor when the head of the American National Theater Association's New York Chapter suggested Vivian Beaumont Allen. After John D. Rockefeller, III, assured Allen that her theater would share equal prominence with the State Theater in terms of its location and importance, she consented to its funding at the same time the center's Advisory Council on Drama was formed. In addition, her approval was requested and obtained when Harrison and the council's consultant, Robert Whitehead, proposed Eero Saarinen for the theater's architect.

Given the absence of an existing dramatic organization to satisfy the constituent requirements of Lincoln Center's board of directors, the Advisory Council on Drama initiated their own entity in the early part of 1960. Incorporated as "The Repertory Theater Association, Inc.," the organization joined the Lincoln Center constituency on February 15th.¹ Consisting of three departments that included board members, theater professionals and fund-raisers, the Repertory Theater Association endeavored to create an acting company of thirty-five performers who would present both classical and contemporary works during the regular fall, winter and spring seasons, while hosting world theater companies during the summer seasons. To house this full year of programming, the association urged Eero Saarinen to devise a multi-functional

mid-size theater as well as a smaller, experimental theater. Spearheading this ambitious agenda, George D. Woods, a corporate chairman and trustee of several non-profit foundations, was elected president of the Repertory Association, while renowned theater and film director, Elia Kazan was named co-producing director.

The Library and Museum of the Performing Arts

At the same time it was proposing a theater dedicated to drama, the Lincoln Center board had also been championing a library building to serve as a joint reference and research facility for the performing arts. On March 11, 1957, the board mandated the erection of a library-museum “to serve as a tool for education and as a creative stimulus for new performance.”² The obvious choice for a constituent was the performing arts division of the New York Public Library which was then housed in the central research branch at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. In addition to providing a dedicated space for the Public Library’s vast performing arts collection, the selection of the renowned institution as its constituent would fulfill a major component of its educational mission. Furthermore, because of the library’s public-private organizational structure, the board of Lincoln Center would have added assurance of its constituent’s ability to be self-sustaining.

A product of joint philanthropy, the New York Public Library had been formed in 1895 through the consolidation of libraries established by John Jacob Astor and James Lenox, and through a trust established by Samuel H. Tilden.³ Committed to the idea of providing a central library whereby the general public could read books free of charge on a range of subjects, the founders combined their efforts to construct a model institution on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, which opened to the public in 1911. This arrangement between a private non-profit institution and the city proved to be mutually beneficial as both philanthropist and government could serve the public more efficiently through partnership rather than through isolation.

On June 10, 1959, the New York Public Library's board of trustees voted to become a part of Lincoln Center on the provision that the library organization could secure the necessary capital funds from the city to build and operate its facility.⁴ After representatives from the library had conducted numerous feasibility studies on the relocation and consolidation of the performing arts division, the library trustees accepted Lincoln Center's invitation to become its library constituent on February 13, 1961.⁵ Although financial issues had still not been resolved by the time of this agreement, both the board members of Lincoln Center and representatives from the New York Public Library were confident that the city would fulfill its commitment—which it eventually did, thereby enabling the eventual transfer of the performing arts division to the Lincoln Center campus.

Eero Saarinen-Gordon Bunshaft Collaboration

The creation of the Vivian Beaumont Theater and the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts was the result of an unusual collaboration between Eero Saarinen and Gordon Bunshaft. Fully cognizant of the northwestern site's limitations to house both a theater and a library-museum, the center's architects had unanimously campaigned to assign either the theater or the library-museum to the campus' southwestern quadrant. However, confronted with Robert Moses's refusal to compromise his park plan, Saarinen and Bunshaft were forced to work within the confines of the previously allocated area.

In spite of their colleagues' reservations about their collaboration, Saarinen and Bunshaft agreed that they could more effectively achieve their programmatic goals by working together on their buildings' envelopes rather than separately. Said Saarinen at the outset of their joint effort, "This is the least likely marriage I have envisioned. But it might be very interesting. We can at least call it an affair."⁶ Bunshaft and Saarinen's collaboration on the two buildings was never more apparent than in their configuration of the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts. Consisting of two entrances, one at the north court and one at Amsterdam Avenue, the architects

were able to satisfy the enormous spatial requirements of the Vivian Beaumont Theater and make a cohesive library facility out of the vacant areas. Tomas Rossant, an architect assigned to the 1998-2001 renovation of the library-museum put it succinctly: “The Beaumont had its very important relationship with the plaza outside, and the library got leftover space.”⁷ True as that assertion may be, it does not credit the ingenuity that went into Bunshaft’s design of this “leftover space.”

In addition to establishing a coherent entrance positioned between the Beaumont and the proposed Metropolitan Opera House, the two architects essentially wrapped the library around the Beaumont theater’s fly space and made it one of the most prominent, though invisible, stylistic elements of the theater’s facade. The resulting design of placing archival research facilities in the area in front and behind this fly space not only solved the particular demands of the library, but also informed the modern aesthetic so dominant in the theater’s façade; namely the massive travertine-covered truss which defines Saarinen’s magnificent building.

While maximizing the square footage of the site had been the prevailing goal of Saarinen and Bunshaft in their collaboration, satisfying their individual building’s functional requirements was their task apart from one another. Thus, once they had made the space accommodations necessary to make both buildings work, they could concentrate on individual floor plans. Years after the work had been completed, Bunshaft reflected that this arrangement turned out to be “a very happy relationship all the way through”⁸ in spite of minor compromises each architect had to make to satisfy the other.

Vivian Beaumont Theater

Unlike many architects who specialize in one building type, Eero Saarinen’s career was defined by a multitude of buildings in a variety of areas. Having had an equal amount of experience as a planner as he had as an architect, Saarinen was an ideal candidate to deal with the complex spatial and programmatic requirements of the Vivian Beaumont Theater. Although

he was not a theater designer, he did have the capacity to solve universal problems of function. On this particular project, he was aided by Jo Mielziner, who had been highly acclaimed for his work, both as a set designer and a theater technician on Broadway and in regional theaters across the country. In addition, Saarinen's ability to create an envelope that expressed his building's use within its particular context gave further credence to his suitability to this particular project.

Son of famed architect, Eliel Saarinen, Eero Saarinen was born in Kirkkonummi, Finland in 1910 and immigrated with his family to the United States in 1923.⁹ Settling in Michigan beginning in 1924, Saarinen later moved to France in 1929 to study sculpture at the Académie de la Grand Chaumière Paris. Returning to America, he attended Yale's architecture school whereupon he earned his B.F.A. in 1934. Between 1936 and 1941, Saarinen worked in his father's office where he collaborated on several concert halls, including the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, Massachusetts and the Kleinhaus Music Hall in Buffalo, New York. After becoming a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1940, Eero Saarinen became a partner in his father's firm: first, at Saarinen-Swanson-Saarinen (with J. Robert Swanson) (1941-47) and later, at Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates (1947-50). During this earlier period, the architect worked in the Washington, D.C. branch of his father's office while also being appointed Chief of the Special Exhibits Section in the Office of Strategic Studies (1942-45). It was also during this time that the architect and his OSS colleague, Oliver Lundquist, won first prize in the "Designs for Postwar Living" competition sponsored by *California Arts and Architecture*. Their entry, entitled the "PAC system," or Pre-assembled Component, entailed a system of industrially-produced modular facades that could be reconfigured in a variety of ways to build housing.

Notwithstanding this notable achievement and his association with his father's architectural firm, Eero Saarinen's other major recognition came from his collaboration with Charles Eames on their *Molded Plywood Chair*, garnering the two designers first place in the Museum of Modern Art's "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" competition. Years later, he

reached equal prominence with his “womb chair” design which became a best-seller of its time. Throughout the 1940s, Saarinen worked intermittently with his father and his business partner as an architect and planner on a range of projects that encompassed town and campus plans: Oberlin College, Ohio (1941); Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (1942); New Castle, Indiana (1944); Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa (1946-47); and residential and institutional building designs: Willow Run Housing Units, Michigan (1942); Parliament Building, Quito, Ecuador (1943-44); Edmundson Memorial Museum, Des Moines Art Center, Iowa (1944-48); and Christ Church, Cincinnati, Ohio (1946-48).

In 1948, after having been awarded the commission to design the General Motors Technical Center—a commission that was delayed over a three-year period—Saarinen won the renowned competition for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial arch in St. Louis, Missouri. By the time the General Motors project had been revived, it had been relocated to a sprawling nine-hundred-acre lot in Warren, Michigan and the architect’s conception of the campus had significantly changed. Heavily influenced by Mies van der Rohe and the International Style, Saarinen insisted on using a standard module design comprised of new thin-skin technology based on car-manufacturing techniques. His innovations included the use of neoprene gaskets for window panel installations, and a thin, sandwich panel faced with porcelain on both the buildings’ exteriors and interiors.

After his father’s death in 1950, Eero Saarinen formed his own firm—Saarinen & Associates—which became known for its ability to find the appropriate “Style for the Job.”¹⁰ In contrast to strict adherents of the International Style, Saarinen instead advocated an exploration of diverse styles that incorporated the latest construction technology without sacrificing the essence of the building, as defined by its use and location. Consequently, his firm’s work ranged from the very reductionist and abstract IBM Building in Rochester, Minnesota (1956-59), to the soaring and sculptural Trans World Airlines Terminal at Idlewild Airport (now, John F. Kennedy Airport) in Queens, New York (1956-62). Similarly, Saarinen’s Women’s Dormitories at the

University of Pennsylvania (1957-61) presented a contextual allusion to its red-brick Philadelphia neighbors, while his Columbia Broadcasting System Headquarters in New York City (1960-64) used masonry cladding instead of the requisite International-Style glass-curtain-wall to reference its traditional surroundings. Other significant works before the architect's untimely death in 1961 include his cylindrical brick chapel for MIT (1953-55), Bell Telephone Corporation Research Laboratories, New Jersey (1957-62), Yale University's David S. Ingalls Hockey Rink (1958) and the Dulles International Airport Terminal Building, Chantilly, Virginia (1958-63).

Saarinen's exterior design for the Vivian Beaumont Theater dramatically diverged from the designs of Philharmonic Hall and the State Theater with its purely modern aesthetic which was further emphasized by its panoramic scale. Instead of employing a vertically-oriented, colonnade inspired by classical models, the architect chose a horizontal orientation that featured an expansive bronze and glass curtain wall topped by an unadorned, coffered, concrete attic story faced with travertine. Supporting this massive 150-foot truss at the façade's corners were two square columns of exposed-aggregate finish that connected to the truss with inverted bronze, pyramid-shaped pins. Inside, the architect created a sunken lobby which was consistent with his minimalist exterior design; this was characterized by a notable absence of art in favor of large red hangings, more travertine, white silk-paneled walls, bronze balcony and stair railings, and red carpeting. Inside the Beaumont auditorium, the designer continued the red color motif with red-upholstered seats and aisle carpeting.

After lengthy discussions with set designer, Jo Mielziner, theatrical producer, Robert Whitehead, and acclaimed theater and film director, Elia Kazan, regarding the theater's needs, it was apparent that Saarinen's design would attempt to break with traditional Broadway theater models to create a performance space that was simultaneously versatile, intimate and technologically advanced. Because both theaters were to be designed for a repertory company of actors, it was essential for the architect to make theatrical operations as economical as possible—

whether that entailed transforming the house configuration from a proscenium arch into an open-apron stage, or implementing stage machinery to accommodate the demands of a particular show's scenery and actors.

The Vivian Beaumont was capable of seating a maximum of 1,140 patrons in its orchestra and loge sections combined, while maintaining an intimate ambience by placing no spectator more than sixty-five feet from its stage. Jo Mielziner, detailing his research with Saarinen, said, "We found out the all important things on stage happen in a flat triangle facing the audience about 10 feet deep in the center and we put this into the thrust, thus doubling the area where important scenes can be played."¹¹ A marvel of theater size and machinery, the 10,000 square-foot stage of the Beaumont consisted of two enormous concentric turntables which could operate in both directions at varying speeds, together or individually. Several stage wagons were capable of gliding onto the turntables to facilitate quick scene changes; an intricate lighting panel enabled automated lighting cues; and electronic floating steel and aluminum panels could determine the size of the stage arch according to a particular production's specifications. Regarding the front of the stage, the apron could either be supplemented with a thrust stage or mechanically submerged to allow for additional seating and/or an orchestra. When asked how they arrived at their design, Mielziner replied, "We went back to the classical ideas of the Greeks and added marvels of the electronic age."¹² In fact, Saarinen and Mielziner were so committed to perfecting their design that they built a full-scale mock-up of their plan within an abandoned movie house in Pontiac Michigan to test its viability. There, in their experimental laboratory, the two designers plotted 300 stage designs to gauge their theater's flexibility.

For the 299-seat Forum Theater, the designers literally created a black box—sans stage machinery—to serve as a rehearsal space for the resident acting company, and as an experimental theater for visiting companies. Located below the Beaumont, the Forum was

directly accessible via the underground parking garage. On November 5, 1973, it was renamed the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater, after the wife of its donor, Samuel I. Newhouse.¹³

Vivian Beaumont Theater Opening and Critical Response

The Vivian Beaumont Theater officially opened on October 14, 1965 with a production of George Buechner's *Danton's Death*, starring James Earl Jones and with the newly-formed Repertory Association. Initial notices about the \$10.3 million theater were enthusiastic. C. Ray Smith, writing for *Progressive Architecture*, beamed, "It is the most serene and most uncompromisingly modern gem at Lincoln Center."¹⁴ Film director Otto Preminger called it "the most beautiful theater" and playwright-lyricist Alan J. Lerner said it was "marvelous and effective."¹⁵

Smith also had praise for the theater's design and technology. Calling the Beaumont and the library-museum, "the finest designs at Lincoln Center," the critic noted that the former was "one of the most innovational theater facilities in this country"¹⁶ Elaborating on his appraisal, Smith wrote:

What is innovational about this stage is both the ingenious lift-turn-table solution, and, above all, the possible use of the open stage in combination with a full proscenium stage behind it. This is the first time, in professional theater in this country, that this new combination has been achieved.¹⁷

Moreover, Smith maintained that "the available options for both pageantry and intimacy in a single production should prove this combination to be a major contribution to the development of theater forms."¹⁸ Similarly, a critic for *Fortune* wrote superlatives about the Forum theater, writing that it was "a prize trinket," "a beautiful little experimental theatre... that is one of those rare rooms with a sense of expectancy," and "a model of what could be done to provide a relatively inexpensive jewel for almost any community."¹⁹

Beyond the Beaumont's technological innovations, Smith also praised the fact that despite the theater's flexible capabilities, it had a look of permanence that was not disruptive to

the theater-going experience. Thus, in contrast to Johnson's aim to make the act of theater-going part of the entertainment, Saarinen succeeded in creating an "effect of anonymity...focusing all attention on the stage and on the performers."²⁰ This, he claimed, was further achieved by the theater interior's non-reflective cordovan-brown wood battens which, with their directional ribs, oriented patrons' eyes toward the stage. Similarly, aisle lights, which were recessed in the sides of the end seats, caused no distraction. Smith also called the backstage facilities "exemplary" with their 75% occupancy of the theater area.²¹ On the other hand, theater critic, Clive Barnes, thought the Vivian Beaumont "fell short of excellence," complaining about inadequate sight lines and "a strange compromise between the thrust stage and the arena stage, while still clinging to a nostalgia for the proscenium arch."²²

With regard to the exterior, Ada Louise Huxtable, advocating a new aesthetic inherent in 20th-century building technology, wrote, "The only place one senses the possibilities is standing in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theater, a design of strong, structural good looks."²³ In his glowing review a couple years later, *Harper's Magazine* critic, Robert Kotlowitz, called the Beaumont, "an architectural winner," describing it as "serene, cool, symmetrical, clean, elegant, and easily one of the most beautiful structures in New York City."²⁴ One month after its opening, the Concrete Industry Board of New York named the Vivian Beaumont Theater "the best concrete structure erected in New York" for 1965.²⁵

Alterations to the Vivian Beaumont and Mitzi E. Newhouse Theaters

In 1990, Lincoln Center Theater's executive producer, Bernard Gersten, detailed the various alterations that were taking place within the building.²⁶ Among them were the replacement of the red-upholstered auditorium seats with a burgundy fabric, and the removal of aisle carpeting to expose the concrete underneath. In addition, countering past claims that the Beaumont theater was not a true thrust stage, Gersten responded, "We have built it out 25 feet. There is no question of its being a proscenium stage. We are totally committed to natural

thrust.”²⁷ Other changes included the removal of the lobby’s red hangings and the installation of hand rails on the steeper aisles of the auditorium. Later, in 1996, the Vivian Beaumont Theater and the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater were subjected to \$8 million worth of renovations which made them wheelchair accessible, improved their acoustics, and upgraded their heating and cooling systems, and infrastructure.²⁸ Over the years, other visible changes that have taken place include the installation of neon signage in the windows, and free-standing, metal-and-glass poster cases in the area directly in front of the theater.

The Library and Museum of the Performing Arts

As a forerunner in modern, corporate architectural design, Gordon Bunshaft was a fitting choice to work within the boundaries prescribed for the library-museum by the planners of Lincoln Center. Born in Buffalo, New York, in 1909, Bunshaft obtained both his Bachelors and Masters degrees in architecture from M.I.T. (1933/1935).²⁹ Like Wallace K. Harrison, Bunshaft was also the recipient of the Rotch Traveling Fellowship, and upon his return from Europe and Africa in 1937, joined the one-year-old firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Between 1942 and 1946, the architect took a leave of absence to serve in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Before and after his military duty, Bunshaft had a long association with S.O.M., helping it to achieve international prominence in the field of corporate design, first as chief designer (1937-1942/1946-1949), and later as partner (1949-1983). Among its many accomplishments, S.O.M. has been recognized for having pioneered the concept of integrating architecture and engineering into one company.

Perhaps more than any other architect of the Lincoln Center complex, Bunshaft embraced the tenets of the International Style as proposed by Mies van der Rohe. In contrast to Johnson and Saarinen, who adapted a more liberal approach to design that eventually broke away from Mies’ glass box, Bunshaft adhered to International-Style dictums which not only stressed functionality through the use of modern materials, but also rejected any applied ornamentation or

sentiment conveyed through design. Thoroughly pragmatic in his design approach, Bunshaft earned distinction in his profession by pioneering the use of modern building technology to produce expansive and efficient floor plates, thereupon redefining the American office building and industrial complex. This prototype, though imitated and manifested through the use of mass-produced materials, nonetheless became a signature style unto itself of corporate America.

Bunshaft's most notable achievement was his design of New York City's Lever House Corporation Headquarters in 1952. Allowing for pedestrian pathways to cross through the ground level, Bunshaft's building engaged the general public, while at the same time, maximized office space for his corporate client above ground through huge concrete floor plates facilitated by a glass-and-steel curtain wall. One scholar, commenting on Bunshaft's innovation, wrote that the Lever House "affirmed the role of open space and efficient geometric enclosure as a theme for housing large office organizations."³⁰ Thus, in his economical use of modern building materials to maximize space, Bunshaft's design became the model for corporate buildings nationwide. This was later reinterpreted in the highly-stylized Seagram's Building, which retained Bunshaft's sleek upper level design—albeit in more refined and luxurious materials—while diminishing pedestrian interaction at street level.

In 1954, Bunshaft produced the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Bank, Branch Headquarters, also in New York City, which applied the glass curtain wall concept to a commercial bank, thereby flying in the face of traditional bank designs that were predicated on secrecy and impermeability. One of the most controversial aspects of Bunshaft's design was his placement of the bank safe in the ground-floor window, symbolic of a corporate wealth that was tangible yet elusive to the general public.

Throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Bunshaft worked on a range of urban and suburban corporate office buildings that included H.J. Heinz Company Vinegar Plant in Pittsburgh (1952); Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Office Building in Bloomfield (1957); Reynolds Metals Company Building in Richmond (1958); Pepsi-Cola Building in New York City (1960);

First National City Bank in Houston (1961); Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City (1961); Union Carbide Corporation Building in New York City (1961); H.J. Heinz and Company, Headquarters and Research Buildings in Hayes Park, Middlesex (with Matthews, Ryan and Simpson) (1965); Marine Midland Building in New York City (1967); American Can Company Suburban Corporate Headquarters in Greenwich (1970); W.R. Grace Building in New York City (1973); Philip Morris Cigarette Manufacturing Plant in Richmond (1974).

Supplementing his work in the field of corporate architecture, Bunshaft has also produced a range of institutional and cultural buildings such as the United States Consulate in Düsseldorf (1954); Albright-Knox Art Gallery addition in Buffalo (1962); Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven (1963); University of Texas' Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Sid W. Richardson Hall in Austin (1971); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. (1974).

Over the years, Bunshaft received many awards and honors, including the Brunner Award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1955); Medal of Honor, New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (1961); Gold Medal, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1984); Pritzker Architecture Prize (with Oscar Niemeyer) (1988); Academician, National Academy of Design; Fellow, American Institute of Architects and American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The primary goal of the representatives of the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts was to have the architect provide for a range of uses pertaining to the library's music, dance and drama collections. Since the current division was housed in the library's main branch, it did not have the allocation of dedicated space nor technology to accommodate its diverse needs. Consequently, when the library's director, Edward Freehafer, conferred with Gordon Bunshaft on the design, he specifically detailed every use, which not only included the obligatory rows of bookshelves, and reading, reference and circulation desks, but also auditoriums, galleries and audio stations. Although these were exceptional demands imposed on a city-subsidized facility,

Bunshaft approached the task as he would with any office commission, characteristically saying, “I don’t think there’s any great mystery to doing a library, or anything else...It is a series of rooms for function—nice, neat, business-like spaces for flexibility.”³¹ Despite the architect’s modesty, his design for the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts was a complex model of efficiency and maximized space that was unprecedented in the area of modern library design.

Deemed “the most comprehensive facility in existence” by the *Saturday Review*, the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts remained exemplary for its highly-specialized facility and holdings.³² Bunshaft’s glass-curtain-wall design was unassuming at Plaza North level yet cohesively integrated with the Vivian Beaumont Theater, containing an intricate series of spaces within. On its ground floor, which could be entered from Amsterdam Avenue, the architect allotted space for the Vincent Astor Gallery and a 200-seat lecture hall (renamed the “Bruno Walter Auditorium” after the famed conductor in 1978). In the center of the space, abutting the Vivian Beaumont Theater stage wall, Bunshaft placed the elevator banks and restrooms. The plaza level contained more exhibition spaces, a circulating library with bookshelves and reading desks, as well as a long circulation desk and listening stations. The second floor, or mezzanine, was comprised of the Heckscher Oval, a small children’s theater within the children’s library on the south side, and a series of additional listening stations within an exhibition area on the west end. Above, on the third floor, was the bulk of archival holdings pertaining to the music, dance and drama collections which contained both self-service and restricted access areas for books. The third floor also contained two piano rooms and more listening stations.

For interior finishes, the architect generally used travertine for the walls and the circulation desks, white-enameled metal for the bookcases and white oak for the desks. Regarding the third floor, C. Ray Smith, writing for *Progressive Architecture*, noted that it demonstrated “the relatively reveal-less, spacer-less joints of the latest SOM style: clean, unarticulated white plaster envelopes dominate, with glass and aluminum partitions and lighting

troffers punctuating them.”³³ Furniture for the reading areas was comprised of light-orange vinyl chairs placed on raspberry-red wool carpeting. Exhibition areas featured both oak-and-glass and black metal-and-glass display cases with low, armrest-free, black-vinyl-upholstered chairs surrounding English oak-cased turntables resting on beige carpeting. Flooring for most of the areas were finished in pale terrazzo.

The Library and Museum of the Performing Arts Critical Response

The \$8 million Library and Museum of the Performing Arts opened on November 30, 1965 to generally favorable reviews. C. Ray Smith wrote that the library-museum, “a forcefully simple exterior concept with a contrastingly complex interior arrangement—is a classic example of the values of early decisions.”³⁴ Then, praising its holdings, Smith stated that “they are the most important of their kind in the country, second only to those at the Library of Congress.”³⁵ Allen Hughes of *The New York Times* similarly enthused, “There is no place else like it in the world,” adding, “Remarkable as it is in regard to all the performing arts (including the circus), it is probably most extraordinary in the materials, services and facilities it makes available to musicians, music scholars or just plain music-lovers...”³⁶ *Harper’s Magazine* critic, Robert Kotlowitz, acknowledging that the library-museum had “no architectural identity of its own,” nevertheless praised it as “the hidden jewel of Lincoln Center.”³⁷

Regarding the interior, a critic for *The New Yorker* observed, “The walls and floors of the library are off-white, its furnishings have a hint of the Bauhaus about them, and its lighting is ample while giving the impression of being subdued.”³⁸ Smith countered other critics’ objections to Bunshaft’s color scheme, reasoning, “for scholars used to the previously cramped and gloomy quarters of the music and theater collections, the new surroundings seem a dreamlike coral tower.”³⁹ He then added:

Measured in terms of the interiors SOM has produced in the past this project is not a milestone; measured in terms of exterior architecture—and the architecture of Lincoln Center—the Library-Museum is a winner...More importantly, the calm and generous,

clean and unsqualid atmosphere of this civic building, and its concept of making the background of the performing arts more readily available, can be received only with gratitude and acclaim by all the citizens of New York.⁴⁰

As both Smith and Hughes noted, one of the most significant aspects about the library-museum was its accessibility to the general public. Whereas all of the other constituents of Lincoln Center required money for their performances, the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts provided free access for its many attractions.

Thus, any person could come in and see an exhibit, read a book, listen to a musical performance or a spoken recording, research a topic or attend a lecture. If an individual wanted to check out written or recorded materials, then all that was required was a valid library card. Moreover, given the library-museum's vast holdings consisting of over 100,000 musical scores and books; 26,000 volumes of data devoted to dance; thousands of manuscripts and memorabilia pertaining to the theater; and over 100,000 sound recordings, there was no other local research or lending library which could rival its magnitude in performing arts materials.

Alterations to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Before 1998, the library-museum, which had since changed its name to the "New York Public Library for the Performing Arts," had undergone relatively minor changes. In 1998, through major funding from the New York Public Library and partial funding from private donors, a major overhaul of its interior spaces was undertaken. Overseen by Polshek Partnership Architects—a firm notable for its sensitivity in creating additions to historic buildings—the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, as it is now called, has been redesigned to employ 21st-century technology and finishes. Costing approximately \$38 million dollars, the renovation took three years, with a sizable portion of the funds applied to the latest computer, audio and video equipment. In addition to 163 new computer terminals, 56 new audiovisual playback stations and 14 new audio listening stations, the library offers 120 plug-in connections among its 450 public seats to access the World Wide Web.

With regard to its holdings, the library-museum has more than doubled its original inventory. The Rodgers & Hammerstein Archive of Recorded Sound, previously numbering 100,000 recordings now numbers 500,000. A recent acquisition of 60,000 scores and recordings from the American Music Center has increased the music collection to 160,000, and circulating collections currently number 350,000, while research collections now number nine million items. New York Public Library President Paul LeClerc recently declared it to be “the largest performing arts collection on the planet free and accessible to the public.”⁴¹

Changes include consolidating gallery spaces from three rooms to two while simultaneously increasing floor-to-ceiling heights, and introducing video monitors and interactive play stations into the exhibits. Although Polshek Partnership made significant alterations to the finishes, especially with the introduction of a modern color scheme of black, cherry red and chalk blue, they left many of the ceiling fixtures as they were. Architect, Thomas Rossant, said, “That ceiling is the original Bunshaft, part of the brazen austerity of the building and something we did not want to compete with...It’s like ‘2001: A Space Odyssey.’”⁴² LeClerc, summing up the improvements, proclaimed the new library-museum, “the cerebellum of the performing arts industry in New York... the cerebellum with power behind it.”⁴³

¹ www.lincolncenter.org/aboutLC/archive_history.

² Young, “Development of the Institution,” p.61.

³ For a history of the New York Public Library, see Robert Sink, “New York Public Library,” in Jackson, ed., pp.840-842.

⁴ Young, “The Growing Federation:1959-1962,” p.122-123.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.123.

⁶ Quoted in “The Collaborators,” *Time*, October 29, 1965, v.86, p.60.

⁷ Quoted in Mel Gussow, “Curtain Going Up at Renovated Performing Arts Library,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2001, p.E6.

⁸ Quoted in Carol Hersell Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings, Merrill*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988) p.150.

⁹ For Eero Saarinen, see Nathan Silver, “Saarinen, Eero,” in Muriel Emanuel, ed., pp.826-827, and Peter C. Papademetriou, “Saarinen, Eero,” in Turner, ed., v.27, pp.474-478.

¹⁰ Papademetriou, “Saarinen, Eero,” in Turner, ed., p.477.

¹¹ Quoted in Milton Esterow, “Beaumont Theater Opens at Lincoln Center,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 1965, p.38.

¹² *ibid.*, p.1.

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