

Too Solid Concrete

Shakespeare has become a beloved institution in Central Park; a full moon above the Belvedere is perfect for the Bard. But the proposal to build a 2,500-seat concrete replacement of intransigent permanence for the present Delacorte Theater has been greeted with justifiable protest. Would that this all too solid concrete would melt.

The Parks Department is willing to commit a reasonable amount to repairs of the current structure. But \$1 million for renovation, as the figure has been escalated by producer Joseph Papp, or \$3 million for a new structure is an irresponsibly disproportionate way of allotting the \$4.5-million total year's budget for the park. Even if the money were privately raised, the priorities are out of whack. Central Park is desperately in need of simple restoration, from erosion and drainage to horticultural first-aid. The point that is generally overlooked is that the park itself is the basic amenity, and that no "improvements" should destroy or diminish that amenity in any way. The first priority is to save the park.

The last priority is a concrete stadium. In the promised reconstruction of the Wollman rink, the thinking is toward de-concreting it and restoring the original pond. When and if the theater is rebuilt, it should be much more topographically sensitive, not less. If that means fewer professional back-up facilities for performances than the producer considers desirable, let the full-dress presentations be at the Beaumont in Lincoln Center or at the Public Theater downtown, where they belong. A balance must be struck in the interest of the park's natural state and primary purpose—in nature's favor.

Theater in the park is properly an embellishment, not a usurpation. What Central Park needs is less concrete and more grass.