

Architecture

Adding Up the Score

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

WITH the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center's four theaters and major open spaces are substantially complete. It is time to ask the \$165.4-million question. What hath money, hopes, dreams and talent wrought?

Although architecture and design must be broken in, like new shoes, until they have settled normally into the city's pattern of use, some assessments can be made. It may seem churlish to make them at all, in view of the fact that on any busy evening Lincoln Center is an agreeable place, full of light and movement and the tangible promise of varied entertainments.

What we have, architecturally, are four buildings designed to accommodate opera, drama, dance, musical theater, concerts and film festivals—no small cultural package. Three played it safe: Philharmonic Hall, the State Theater and the Metropolitan Opera are lushly decorated, conservative structures that the public finds pleasing and most professionals consider a failure of nerve, imagination and talent.

Lost Chance

With a totally new esthetic and technology, the 20th century is making dramatic contributions to the history of the art of building. But not here. The only place one senses the possibilities is standing in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theater, a design of strong, structural good looks that offers, with its fronting pool and Henry Moore sculpture, the only honestly contemporary vista in the place. This is the sole moment that lifts the spirit of those to whom the 20th century is a very exciting time to be alive, and for whom the fleeting sensuality of lighting effects and matching travertine is not enough. Even the Beaumont Theater formula was done better by Mies at Barcelona in 1929.

By contrast, however, the



The New York Times (by Patrick A. Burns)

Lincoln Center: "What hath money, hopes, dreams and talent wrought?"

retardataire fussiness and esthetic indecision of the rest becomes painfully clear: a gift wrap job of travertine trim and passepartout colonnades applied to basic boxes, in a spatial composition new with the Renaissance and reworked six decades ago by the Beaux Arts. In the most depressing sense, the Lincoln Center complex has defaulted as contemporary architecture and design.

Fortunately, the scale and relationship of the plazas is good, and they can be enjoyed as pedestrian open spaces, a value that may well increase with use and age. This, and the massive amounts of entertainment that will be provided, are its major successes.

There are other successful features. In real estate terms, it's a smash. Values of Lincoln Center and adjoining land have risen dramatically, and will continue to increase. According to certain renewal standards that have wide currency in metropolitan cir-

cles, a lot of nice, shiny new buildings are replacing a lot of shabby, substandard old buildings, and that, in simplistic terms, looks good.

But there is serious question as to whether this is successful urban renewal. A bulldozer operation cleared the way for the cultural center and the new private office buildings, motels and luxury apartments that it has sparked. The most serious accusation leveled at Federally-aided renewal, that it has failed to replace the stock of low and middle income housing that it destroys, holds true here.

Culture as Tool

Some renewal specialists and planners offer the alternative of scattered cultural facilities combined with new housing and urban services for the necessary social and physical rehabilitation of neighborhoods, rather than the creation of bloodless, but profitable commercial-cultural complexes. The idea that

the cultural facility is a tool, rather than an end in itself, deserves thoughtful attention, even if it offers less immediate monumental gratification of the current cultural megalomania gripping most communities.

Traffic Island

In further terms of urban planning, Lincoln Center has been created on a traffic island of converging avenues and the situation worsens constantly as new buildings open. The underground parking that repeats the tangle above ground is neither the corrective nor the supporting circulation design that should have been part of the original scheme. Murmurs by the city of remedial traffic measures have thus far failed to make any substantial improvement.

There is, finally, the question of culture, around which the whole complex revolves. If we define culture as average to expertly executed, established and familiar fare,

available to many people in maximum comfort, Lincoln Center is providing an impressive amount of it.

But there is no culture without creativity, and there is no meaningful culture of any period without that vital spark of fresh ideas and new forms that, fanned into brilliance by the greater epochs, becomes the enduring expression of an age. This is art, and culture, whether it appears in a cellar, a slum, or the back room of a bar. It has not appeared in Lincoln Center.

It is, after all, by the standards of art that all art must be judged. As entertainment, Lincoln Center promises to be an operational success. By creative measurement, much of its product and most of its plant are an artistic failure. And that is why its expensively suave, extravagantly commonplace presence is making a great many people in the fine and performing arts profoundly uneasy.