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New York is the cultural capital of America and the nearest that exists to a capital of the world. The performing arts are an essential part of the enriching and integrating forces of human culture. We must achieve a greater measure of cultural eminence if we are to maintain the political leadership which we now enjoy. A center for the performing arts costing 100 million dollars would be out of proportion neither to New York's position nor to the magnitude of other phases of New York life.

The situation of Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera House offer little choice in time of action, and the magnitude of auditorium needs sets a very large minimum below which the cost of a new center cannot be brought. Both houses might be occupied for a few more years, but the opera house is unsuitable because the stage cannot be seen from many of the seats. Carnegie Hall, while good acoustically, is obsolete, as is its 19th century contemporary the opera house, in this mid-twentieth century of air-conditioning and electronics. From the point of view of efficiency, both houses might well have been abandoned earlier. They cannot be occupied much longer without deterioration of audiences and performance. The decision of the Opera to move and of the owners of Carnegie Hall to sell have merely forced now plans which at best could not have been long postponed. To provide the barest minimum need for an opera house and a concert hall would probably cost twenty-five to thirty million dollars.

But a bare minimum is not enough. Quality performance requires acoustically superior halls. The audience will expect reasonable comfort. And a house for the performing arts cannot be as bare as a cow palace.

Beauty should be considered a functional requirement of all buildings since it is essential to the well-being of those who live, work, or play in or merely pass by the structure. But a center for the arts without beauty would be a misnomer and a disgrace. This does not mean that luxury or extravagance are required. Beauty has been combined before with functional efficiency and economical construction, for example, in the Tokyo International House. It is this combination which is to be sought at Lincoln Square.

There is then nothing visionary, extravagant, or unreasonable in the concept of a center for the performing arts costing many millions of dollars. Very substantial expenditure may be essential and, in the long run, even economical--the best way to achieve ends which are well worth the price. The important questions to be raised relate not to the very magnitude of the project but to the relation of the various parts of the plan to each other and to the achievement and maintenance of high quality performance and a living, stimulating relationship with the New York audience.