

Learning Places Fall 2016

Chin/Swift

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## **FINAL REPORT**



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### ***DESCRIPTION***

The purpose of this assignment is to investigate, describe, analyze, and theorize the relationships between the architecture of public places and performance. In this course, we define “performance” broadly: any act (movement, transaction, repetition, ritual) by a person, object, or technological phenomenon that attracts and engages an audience. Through the assignment, questions such as the following will be asked: How does the organization and

design of the public space shape, restrict, influence, and/or inspire the choreography of a performance? How do theatrical acts modify, inform, highlight and/or obscure designed spaces and architectures? These aspects will be analyzed as these relationships serve as the basis for conclusions about the community and social relationships regarding a public space. In other words, the research assignment in hand is meant to describe the relationships between public performance space, and the urban fabric of our city from the perspective of a specified research question.

## **Introduction**

*How do the architecture and rituals of opera going reflect the opera-culture, and how is this seen in the Metropolitan Opera at The Lincoln Center?* The purpose of this research is to inform our classmates about the history of the Metropolitan Opera Theater. This will be discussed in relation to how the architecture influences the social environment and if the rituals of the opera are still preserved.

## **Process**

Andrea Cano

My process was very pleasant since I obtain interesting books whit important information about the general history of the Metropolitan and its architectural aspects. I found these books in different in Ursula C. Schwerin Library, New York Library fro the Performing Arts and some information comes from the archives of the Metropolitan Opera. I am grateful with John Pennino who made this experience much more enjoyable. He gave us a tour of the back of the theater,

where Ana and Andrea could observe how they set the stage for that night's performance of *Aida*. Therefore, Andrea found enough information and I will use it in this paper and presentation. Unfortunately, the time is too short to explain the beautiful knowledge about the Metropolitan Opera.

Ana Franco

The process of research on ritual, is composed of library books relevant to the matter,—noted in the bibliography—such as *The Miracle of the Met*, scholarly articles, and a private archive visit to the archives located in the [Library for the Performing Arts](#) at the Lincoln Center. The question for this part of the research question emerged as a complement of two pillars that would reflect, describe, and explain opera-culture; one being architecture, and the other the ritual of attending the opera. Several sources beyond the ones used were explored, however only those that were found profoundly helpful were utilized as they are noted in bibliography, and satisfied this part of the research question.

## **Discoveries**

Andrea Cano

When, where, and how did the opera begin? According to opera.net and some books that are cited in references, I will say that the opera was a fruit of the Renaissance, and it was approximately at the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century. A group of Renaissance intellectuals gathered in Florence under the protection of the powerful Medici family. This group, called *Camerata Fiorentina*, discovered that the ancient Greek tragedies were sung in a single voice, not in the

traditional singing of ancient time that was Polyphony. Polyphony is a style of musical composition employing two or more simultaneous but relatively independent melodic lines (Merriam 2016).

The *Camerata Fiorentina* decided to rely on a Greek drama to write an opera in music. Then, Ottavio Rinuccini wrote the text of *Euridice*. It was the first opera that were played for a Medici daughter's wedding. Therefore, 1600 was the the time of the first opera. After them, Claudio Monteverdi is considered to be the father of the opera in 1607. The patriarch of the Gonzaga family who ruled in the city of Mantua, on the occasion of his son's wedding, delivered the first performance of the Opera "L'Orfeo." The libretto was by Alessandro Striggio and was based in the Greek legend of Orpheus. Monteverdi created the first note or symphony overture "Orpheus" in order to call the public's attention and to have them listen with respect because at that time people did not pay attention as they do nowadays. Mazzocchi saw the opportunity to make money by creating a theater and charging the public in order to watch the opera play. Therefore, in 1637, Mazzochi created the first public theater in an abandoned castle called Teatro di San Cassiano. From this point, Venice became the city of the opera with public theaters where wealthy people bought balcony seats or boxes. In this way, we can observe how the architecture or theater design was based on the demands of wealthy people who wanted to have their own boxes. The rest of the people stood up in front of the stage. Having a little knowledge of the origins of the opera, let's move to New York foundation of the Metropolitan Opera.

The Metropolitan Opera emerged from a series of social and cultural pressures in the late 1870 and early 1880s (Eisler, P. 1984). Families such as the Vanderbilt, Astor, Coopers and Lows, had common cultural interests. Therefore, all of them contributed to the founding of the Metropolitan Opera. The board of the Metropolitan Opera found the first land at 48<sup>th</sup> St, and they

started the entire project based on this land, but after the government revision unfortunately the land did not have permission for a commercial building. The members of the Metropolitan Opera

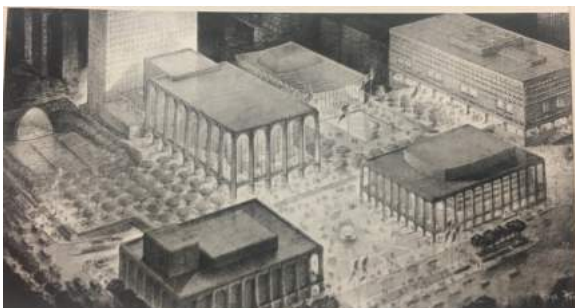
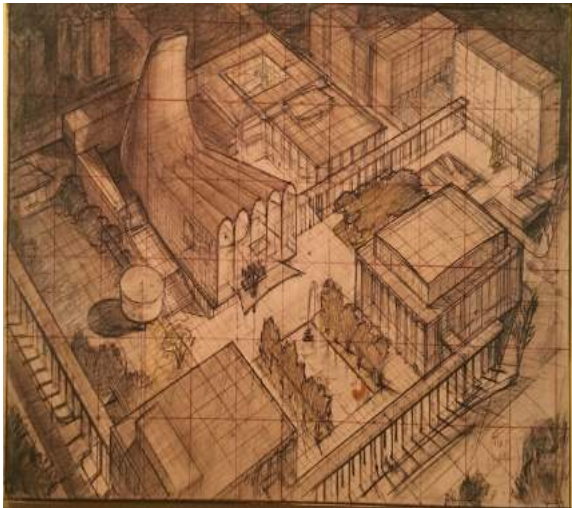


had to look for other land, and they found land at 39<sup>th</sup> St and Broadway. The first opera theater was founded in New York City, thanks to the collaboration of wealthy people who wanted their own theater. The theater had seventy-three boxes belonging to those who contributed money, but the space was not enough for all members of the society. The seating capacity was described as over 3,000, including the boxes. Thereafter, the theater was a remodeled in order to have more space for performances and the public. However, the space was not enough to receive big operas, and the capacity for the public was insufficient for the demand.



The new house decision “was a culmination of years of dissatisfaction and years of unsuccessful searching for a new home” (Young, E. p 13, 1980). However in 1951, the Metropolitan Opera began negotiations with Robert Moses who was a city planner, also known as master builder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moses told the Metropolitan members that “ there were 120,000 square feet (approximately three acres) available at \$ 8 per square foot under “write down procedures” of urban renewal. Moses told them to raise about \$1.5 million to cover not only the land cost, but also the preliminary planning, relocation of tenants, and clearance of the site” (Young, E., 1980). However, The philharmonic was notified that the lease would not be renewed after its expiration in 1959; in other words they were forced to relocate. Arthur

Houghton, Jr. the board chairman of the Philharmonic contacted the architect Harrison to help them. From this point, Wallace Harrison was the catalyst who brought together the Philharmonic and the Metropolitan opera members. As a result, the idea to build a temple of music began. To put the plan together, Moses offered the four-acre plot but it was increased to 1.75 million. In summer of 1955, the Metropolitan Opera and Philharmonic agreed to raise the money and have their new house at Lincoln Center Square. They thought that Lincoln Center would bring life to the city of New York. In addition to its performances, Lincoln Center has brought jobs, tourism, and has stood as a symbol of the performing arts on a worldwide scale.



The architecture of the Metropolitan Opera was to be not only the largest, but also the dominant feature of Lincoln Square Center. The first design of the opera house was the roofline behind the proscenium, which became a huge curving surface, enclosing the higher levels of the stage house and swooping upward to become the eastern face of an office-building tower. It was a controversial design. Unsatisfied with his design, Harrison developed another one. He was enclosing the five front arches in a level roofline that would be carried back into the horizontal surface to cover both the auditorium and the stage house. The arch treatment of the façade was carried around both sides. The office tower was

designed as a simple high-rise structure that would accommodate the opera shops, rehearsal space, and the central cooling tower. However, this design greatly increased the budget and was not approved by the building committee. Harrison, worried about the budget asked for help. He contacted Belluschi, Bunshaft and Donald Oenslager. They decided to avoid the officer tower and cut 1/3 of cubage. Therefore, Harrison had to make many changes. The stage elevators were changed from electric to hydraulic, the rear stage was eliminated, and the backstage was reduced in order to have more space in the dressing rooms. 1964 was the year of structural steel erection for the stage and backstage, the configuration of the stage gradually took place” (Young, E., 1980). There is an interesting fact that caught my attention; the new proscenium and the visible stage are almost the same size as the old theater. The stairs is another masterpiece from my point of view; people are surrounding the stairs to observe each other. The entrance is like a catwalk where as soon as you enter, you are observed and being observed by many people. This aspect of the design has a slightly voyeuristic ambience.

Acoustics were a subject that worried Harrison and the building committee. According John Pennino from the archives of the Metropolitan Opera, the wood used in the theater came from a tree called a “rosewood tree.” The trunk was cut and acoustically treated and it yielded the result that Harrison wanted. Therefore, it was used inside of the theater. The acoustical consultants were Vilhelm Jordan and Cyril Harris, and their work was excellent until today’s day. The auditorium combines 3,790 seats. Suspended from its dome are crystal chandeliers that slowly ascend to the ceiling when the performance starts. These chandeliers were a gift of the Australian government. The predominant colors in the Metropolitan are red and gold.

Ana Franco

*How is the ritual of “Opera-going” is reflective of the Opera culture?*



Does going to the opera make you feel sophisticated and classy? Rather, do you feel intimidated by those who frequent the opera as a co-culture? Whether the answers were yes or no, there is something about frequenting the opera, –and thus the ritual involved in the act of going to the opera,– that inspired the answers to these questions. In the prospect of shedding light to why the opera culture invokes a certain cultural air, we may deconstruct the ritual of frequent opera goers. By deconstructing the ritual of going to the opera, the characteristics that together define opera-culture as a whole may be brought to clear light as an explanation. Lastly, as “New Yorkers” living among one of the most famous operas in the world, the Metropolitan Opera at the Lincoln Center may serve as an example of how this culture –partly defined by its ritual– stands in current day.





First things first. (As mentioned previously when describing architecture's role in the opera culture) The opera began in the 1600's (17th century,) and the first opera events initially carried out the opera jointly with a court wedding. Although the idea of commercialized opera existed before its initiation, –and further planning occurred in the years prior to launching, – it was by 1630's that the opera had become a

commercial enterprise separate from court activity. It is important to realize that from initial stages it is evident that the opera was not solely an artistic experience; instead, it was a social experience in unison. In like manner, by means of creation, once the opera was commercialized, it was forthwith self-defined by the circles that originally attended it, thereby inaugurating the identity of what the opera would represent as a whole.



In light of commercialized opera emerging as a new “going-out” routine, the public began to dress specifically for the opera. Given that theaters were lit throughout the audience and stage alike, “opera-goers” dressed to resemble performing characters of the show.

Seventeenth-century (1600's) costumes were luxurious, extravagant, and covered with jewels, ribbons, and exotic fabrics; they reflected contemporary fashion. Dressing to resemble such costumes displayed a sense of extravagance, which further defined the image of the opera culture.



The opera environment made a moderate yet deeper-into-itself turn in the early 19th century (1800's,) when the men in the audience no longer dressed to show off in the same assorted way women could. In accordance to new "sumptuary regulations," men had to withdraw into tuxedoed uniformity. Women were thus at the opera to be seen, and men to see, reinforcing the idea of "male gaze," a multi-culturally traditional attitude that encouraged conservatism. In this stance, the opera house deliberately supported an air of elitism in opera-culture through its support of conservatism. The encouragement of elitism was a passive-aggressive statement of the house. By sponsoring the "male gaze," commands and propagates traditional behavior in the generations of audience to come. And by requiring expensive attire that only the wealthy afford, it filters and invites the privileged apart from other socioeconomic classes.



Keeping in mind its native audience, and the spirit taken by the establishment of the opera towards itself, The Opera Ball was often the most elite ball in a city's annual social calendar.

In due time, evolving technologies influenced the evolution of the opera, along with its ritual. Once electricity arrived, the lighting of the stage and darkening of the audience were

possible. Consequently, "seeing and being seen" at the opera were relegated to arrival, intermission, and departure; and it has prevailed to current day. With this intention, opera boxes had adjoining anterooms for eating, playing cards, visiting friends; and pursuing love affairs, courtships, diplomatic meetings, and business deals—additionally to enjoying an opera. As illustration, The Metropolitan Opera at the Lincoln Center has 3 such designated spaces, The Patron Lounge for patrons, The Belmont Room for board members and patrons, and The Guild Standing Room for Members of the Metropolitan Opera. As can be seen, although dress-codes/tendencies and public access have changed, there are still conditions to be permitted into



such spaces, —referred to as “special access” by the Met house itself on their website. In essence, regardless of attire, technology, and geographic conversions into a “Western-Revolutionized World, “conditional “special access” stands as

evidence of the intentional conservation of the principles in which the opera-culture was founded up to present time.

Leslie Fuller



HyPar Pavilion was built in 2010, the building is mainly a restaurant, bar, lounge and grass roof where people can hang out and review all the sites of Lincoln Center. The building is 10804 square feet and it is open for the public and accessible for all people. It is surrounded by the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Ballet, the New York Philharmonic, and the Juilliard School. It is located on West 65<sup>th</sup> Street. The HyPar Pavilion received the 2011 Design Award from the AIA New York Chapter and the 2011 Innovation Design in Engineering and Architecture with Structural Steel awards program. People can come and play their own music and do other shows. There is Italian cuisine at that place. We are endeavoring to create a feeling, to engender a mood, which provides sense of drama and the beauty of what goes on in our halls. We want attract pass by, but we also want to surprise West Siders.

The architect also designed the content for the 24-hour blade trying them informative, visually arresting and at times whimsical. The point is to make these screens much more atmospheric and gestural and impressionistic than more posters Ms. Diller said. There are 37 blade templates video sequences of 20 to 90 seconds with different themes. They use both Lincoln Center performance and outside actors.

A few more projects still remains, they build a new Hypar Pavilion next to other performing arts center buildings. Hypar Pavilion is used for social events, eating and relaxation and musicians perform their tones. It is connected to the Juilliard School at across 65th street. At that pavilion, you can watch the graduation performance from the Juilliard school of music. Milstein Plaza was demolished and replacement is Hypar Pavilion where Milstein Plaza where it is used to be. The reason why they build Hypar Pavilion, they want to people to see performance outdoors. They were very creative by keeping the grass green in the winter without going like other grasses in other location. People in the restaurant can order their food and bring it up to the lawn enjoy looking at the performance and pool fountain below.

## **Conclusions**

Through this research, one can see how the Metropolitan Opera architecture is important for several reasons. First, is how architecture is imposing the beauty of art. The second invites people to elegance and culture. The third is to preserve the tradition of the opera genre. In addition, in this research one can see the evolution that the opera has had over the years. Nowadays, one can see how the Metropolitan has provided the New Yorkers and many visitors the best productions of opera with a wide range of repertoire, including the greatest stars in opera and music directors. The Metropolitan Opera has an incredible and modern technology that

allows having more than 300 artists on stage. It is amazing to think that on May 7, 2017 the Metropolitan Opera will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Met at Lincoln Center. During these 50 years the Metropolitan Opera has demonstrated worldwide how to maintain the ritual of the opera despite the modernity of the century.

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