

arts/entertainment

Mexico's trend-setting auditorium

Scene of triumphant Beethoven's Ninth

By Louis Snyder

Mexico City

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Nezahualcoyotl Hall has risen within the past year in stark, lonely splendor on a rocky, volcanic plain which is part of the University of Mexico's 800-acre campus, a half-hour ride

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(traffic permitting) from the center of Mexico City. Its nearest neighbor is a sprawling, circular, grass-encrusted pyramid, Cuicuilco, uncovered comparatively recently, and still something of an historical puzzle to archaeologists.

Farther down the highway remains the Olympic Village complex of monolithic high-rise apartments built as quarters for athletes who participated in the international games hosted by Mexico in 1968. In the distance, a lofty mountain range, often obscured by clouds and smog, includes the now-extinct volcano which once, long ago, covered this valley floor with depths of time-erasing lava.

In a wide-ranging 20-year-old program, planned for the 122,000-strong student body on its main campus, the University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico) has given the arts a high priority. The completed Sala de Conciertos is first of a complex of buildings including the National Library, traditional and experimental theaters, two cinemas, a chamber music hall, a museum, along with workshops and offices, which will form a university cultural center. However, since the university has a large music department and its own orchestra, the priority for performance space was obvious.

Thus the new hall, realized by a team of young UNAM faculty architects — Orso Nunez, Arcadio Artis, Manuel Medina Ortiz, Arturo Trevino, and Roberto Ruiz, in collaboration with American acoustician Christopher Jaffe and UNAM project director Francisco de Pablo — reflects not only forward-looking concepts in overall design, but a sociological objective very prevalent here of bringing artist and auditor into more intimate contact, through sight and sound, than has been possible in traditional structures.

The new Mexican facility, like Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Berlin's Philharmonie, among others, features a performing area backed by a bank of seats to be occupied by spectators or choruses, as the occasion demands, and flanked on either side by projecting balconies which extend from the main auditorium to embrace the stage, completing the "surround" concept.

Warm colors — terra cotta, blue, and brown for carpeting and upholstery of 2,500 seats on varied levels — blend graciously with unadorned, neutrally-shaded side walls and balcony facings of hard native woods, dark and light in texture, which also serve carefully researched acoustical needs.

For Nezahualcoyotl Hall, through Mr. Jaffe's participation, exemplifies the necessity for close collaboration between acoustician and architect to assure optimum results under varying concert conditions.

In addition to the choice of sound-reflecting materials for the hall's interior structure, the acoustician's influence on the total design is represented by concentric circles of vari-shaped acrylic acoustical "clouds" suspended above the playing area from a pyramidal concrete dome. Underlying the stage is a reverberatory moat which extends forward beneath the front rows of the auditorium to aid dispersal of sound. Numerous variables, such as the size of performing groups and audiences, interior temperature, presence of radio broadcasting or television equipment, even the weather-dictated clothing worn by spectators, have been taken into account by Mr. Jaffe in calculating a constant for proper tonal balance throughout the auditorium without resorting to electronic amplification.

Completed within year

Conceived as a \$1.5 million project, the hall was completed within a record time of 11 months at an inflationary figure of \$3.3 million. It opened on Dec. 31, 1976. The UNAM professional orchestra and numerous groups and soloists have performed there, but not until a recent visit of the Cleveland Orchestra to Mexico at the invitation of the National Institute of Fine Arts has Netzahualcoyotl Hall been "tested" by a performing organization of international proportions.

An all-Beethoven cycle which music director Lorin Maazel and the Clevelanders presented at Mexico City's classic Palace of Fine Arts and the cavernous National Auditorium in Chapultepec Park for a total of 10 concerts (Aug. 30-Sept. 11) offered an ideal opportunity for their appearance at the new UNAM hall in the first of three performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Four soloists — soprano Leona Mitchell, mezzo Oralia Dominguez, tenor Kenneth Riegel, and bass Robert Banuelas — joined the orchestra, and the combined choruses of Mexico's National Institute of Fine Arts, National Conservatory of Music, and the University of Vera Cruz for a large-scale exploration of Nezahualcoyotl Hall's physical and acoustical achievements.

The audience on Sept. 9 comprised university students, faculty personnel, and suburban residents. They filled the seats and choked the aisles. The electric atmosphere of anticipation

was shared by the UNAM architectural team, and especially by Mr. Jaffe, whose ear was admittedly primed half for Beethoven, half for the acoustics of the hall.

Inspiration felt

Perhaps the general enthusiasm that the new facility had evoked among the performers at a morning rehearsal, and the voluntary compliment paid by conductor Maazel ("A great hall . . . permits individuality of instrumental timbre . . . embracing warmth"), contributed to the brilliant performance that was heard that evening. In any case, it would be difficult to remember the Clevelanders playing better, an audience becoming more completely involved, or soloists and chorus retaining so equal an identity in a work which often gives the impression, particularly in the expansive finale, of being a grand but uncontained musical free-for-all.

With the first notes the hall responded by conveying clarity and brightness of tone, and as the symphony progressed the balance of sound left little to be desired from any vantage point. Beethoven's Ninth spans a wide dynamic range and left few acoustical bases untouched.

This time, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" aroused just that in performers and public alike. The audience showered performers with cheers, applause, and flowers. This was not a usual reception for one of America's extraordinary orchestras, or one of music's undisputed masterpieces. Netzahualcoyotl Hall, named for one of Mexico's legendary poets and musicians — a quotation from his works is engraved in stone at the hall's main entrance — shared it equally and spontaneously. From now on, when the great concert halls of the world are mentioned, authorities may stumble over the name — Netzahualcoyotl — but they cannot pass it by.

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Performing arts school classrooms to be ready

By **DIANNE APRILE**
Louisville Times Staff Writer

Despite delays in construction of part of Jefferson County's new Youth Performing Arts School, the show will go on when school starts in September.

A 900-seat formal theater planned as part of the \$5 million arts school, adjacent to Noe Middle and duPont Manual High schools, won't be finished before late October, according to Holbert Miller, county school associate superintendent for buildings, grounds and new construction.

But classrooms and other instruction areas are expected to be completed by September, Miller said at a press conference today.

"We hope to complete the academic wing by then," he said. "We hope we can have rehearsal rooms open by then."

Five members of the school's faculty were also announced today.

Pat Brannon, an orchestra teacher from Seneca High, and Bob Bischoff, band director from Waggener High, will teach instrumental music. Drama teachers Linda Hargreaves from Atherton and Gene Stickler from Seneca will teach theater production and drama. Frank Heller, chorus teacher from Ballard High, will be the vocal art teacher.

Bob West, acting director of the new school, said he is awaiting approval from the school board to hire a dance instructor and counselor.

In addition to their arts instruction, students will spend half of each day at Manual in regular academic courses.

Although the number of students auditioning for enrollment in the school was low earlier, West said "applications are picking up now."

He said he thought some parents and students were reluctant to apply without knowing who would be teaching at the school. About 143 students have signed up for auditions, which are being held every Wednesday and Saturday this month, West said. Students will be notified by June 1.

The total enrollment this fall is expected to be about 150, he said. He said he didn't have a "firm figure" for the maximum number of students the school can handle.

"We think it's appropriate to stay relatively small because . . . we're breaking new ground here," West said.

West said additional auditions and interviews may be held in July if necessary. Interested students can get more information by calling or writing the county's director of optional schools, Anne Crockett, at the Brown Education Center on the River City Mall.

The school's curriculum will include ballet, modern dance, dance interpretation, orchestra, stage and jazz band, keyboard and history of art courses.

Several local arts groups will use the new building after school hours for rehearsals and performances.

neighborhoods
business

metro

Monday, May 8, 1978

The Louisville Times

The Louisville Theatrical Association 1978-79: Making music



Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Sound of Music," one of the most popular of all American musicals, will open the Louisville Theatrical Association's Broadway Series next fall.

With Sally Ann Howes (left) in the role created by Mary Martin and made famous on the screen by Julie Andrews, it will play at the Macauley Theatre Oct. 19, 20, and 21.

Three other musicals will be included in the series. "The Wiz," (right) a mod version of the "Wizard of Oz," will arrive on Nov. 20, 21, and 22. "Side by Side by Sondheim," (bottom left) a revue featuring songs from hit Broadway musicals by Stephen Sondheim, plays Jan. 18, 19, and 20. "Your Arms Too Short to Box With God," (bottom right) a gospel musical conceived and directed by Vinnette Carroll, will play at the Macauley on Feb. 19, 20, and 21.

The one play in the Broadway Series next season is "The Passion of Dracula," with Jean Pierre Aumont in the title role. It was originally produced off Broadway, and is based on Bram Stoker's famous novel. Subscribers to the Broadway Series can buy tickets at substantial discounts for other theatrical attractions at the Macauley. Tentatively booked for next March, for instance, is a touring production of "Chicago," one of the most popular of recent Broadway musicals. For complete information, write the Macauley Theatre, 315 W. Broadway, Louisville, 40202.



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Lively Arts

The Louisville Theatrical Association 1977-78: Making money

By WILLIAM MOOTZ
Courier-Journal Critic

The Louisville Theatrical Association (LTA) recently closed the books on the most successful Broadway Series in its history. Sell-out crowds were finally the rule rather than the exception during its 1977-78 season at the Macauley. For the first time ever, each play of its five-play series made money.

"It was a pretty good year," LTA president William T. Beam II said in a recent interview. "And we're going to do even better next year."

Beam became chairman of LTA's board this month after serving as its president for two years. When he took over, the organization was flirting with bankruptcy.

"There was virtually no operating capital," Beam says. "Things were in such a state that, if the first show of my presidency had lost money, we would have had to borrow funds set aside for the future."

The first show of Beam's first year as LTA president, however, was "A Little Night Music," which made a little money. So Beam and the LTA heaved a sigh of relief and stayed in business.

From then on, things got steadily better. The association now has about \$40,000 in the bank, and it almost doubled its season subscribers during the past two seasons.

For this upsurge in prosperity, most observers close to LTA credit Beam.

"He really likes theater and was determined to make our operation work," says William Habich, LTA executive director. "And a remarkable thing about Bill (Beam), if he doesn't know something, he listens to people who do. That's been great for us. He deserves the credit for making us prosperous again."



Many credit William T. Beam with the recent improvement in the Louisville Theatrical Association's financial status.

ious local companies to underwrite touring productions. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. sponsored the world premiere of James Earl Jones in his one-man Paul Robeson show at the Macauley, and Gordon Foods helped foot the enormous costs of bringing "My Fair Lady" to Louisville. With such an expensive musical, underwriting of this kind makes the difference between a substantial loss and a modest profit.

Beam gets enthusiastic about such commerial underwriting of the arts even when he isn't involved as an entrepreneur.

"I had nothing to do with bringing Bolla Wines to the Hard Scuffle (steplechase), he points out. "But I wish I had. It was great for the Kentucky Opera."

Beam insists the future for the arts in Louisville lies in more such ties-in between commerial interests and the arts.

"The Courier-Journal showed the way years ago with its gala-performance grants," he says. "Those grants proved the arts are a good way for a company to upgrade its community participation."

Beam admits, however, that his ideas sometimes meet resistance, especially among artists. "They fear creeping commercialism. To a lot of people, using the arts as an advertising medium is foreign and distasteful."

Beam is doing his best to beat down such resistance. "Every time I watch public television," he says, "I hear that the program I'm enjoying is made possible by such and such a company. If it's O.K. for Masterpiece Theatre, why can't such announcements come to live theater and the concert hall?"

So long as acknowledgement of commercial support is done tastefully.



Theatrical Association

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Beam brushes aside such praise. "I think I may have been the only man left in Louisville who was willing to take over this job," he says. "I wasn't the first choice. I wasn't even the second or third. So at my first board meeting, I told them I didn't feel any responsibility to be a popular president."

Beam told his board instead, "The only responsibility I feel is to make the Louisville Theatrical Association a fiscal and artistic success."

Beam is an advertising executive, and brings his skills from that field into his work with the arts. He often proclaims "the arts are an incredibly effective public relations and advertising medium," and passionately be-



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lieves the arts and business can join hands to the benefit of both.

He likes to prove his point. It was Beam, for instance, who brought the Falls City Brewing Co. and the Louisville Orchestra together several years ago for the first season of Super Pops. At about the same time, he persuaded Gordon Foods to take part in the Louisville arts scene by endowing a season of the Kentucky Opera Association. More recently, he brought Glenmore Distilleries into the Super Pops fold, after Falls City decided to bow out.

To help put the LTA on a sounder fiscal footing during the past two years, Beam worked to persuade var-

ious local companies to underwrite touring productions. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. sponsored the world premiere of James Earl Jones in his one-man Paul Robeson show at the Macauley, and Gordon Foods helped foot the enormous costs of bringing "My Fair Lady" to Louisville. With such an expensive musical, underwriting of this kind makes the difference between a substantial loss and a modest profit.

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So long as acknowledgement of commercial support is done tastefully, Beam thinks people will accept it. "And I mean I think you could go before an audience at the Metropolitan Opera with such an announcement, if you did it right."

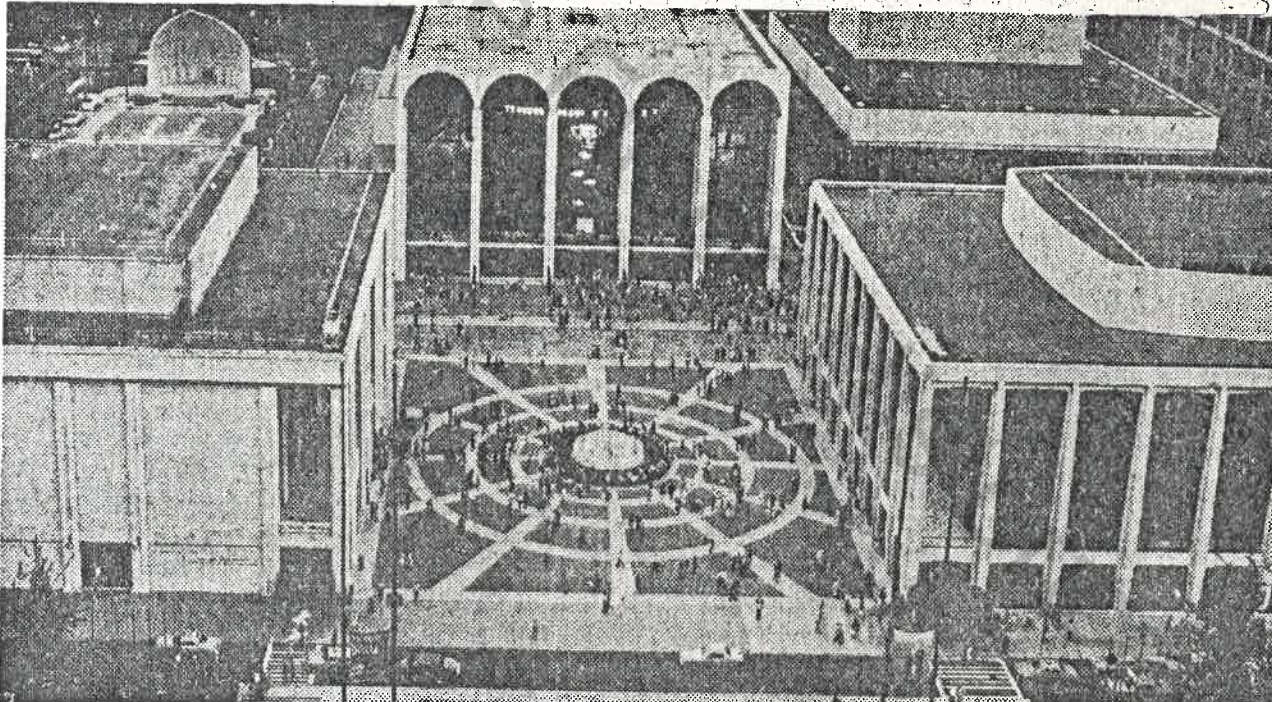
So Beam dreams of the day when the Kentucky Opera will have an annual production called "Opera of the Year" under a prominent commercial sponsorship. And the Louisville Orchestra will commission a symphony and name it after its commercial sponsorship. And Actors Theatre will produce a play festival made possible by a prominent local business.

"It's coming," Beam predicts. "Business and the arts need each other. And don't forget, the Super Pops was just a dream a few years ago."



Architecture: Lincoln Center and Changes Wrought by 20 Years

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, MAY 21, 1979



The New York Times/Paul Hosefros

Lincoln Center Plaza flanked by, from left, New York State Theater, Metropolitan Opera House and Avery Fisher Hall. Its buildings. . . seem now to be odd precursors of the current fashion for designing in classically inspired styles.

By PAUL GOLDBERGER

TONIGHT Lincoln Center Plaza will be filled by a gala party celebrating the 20 years since President Eisenhower broke ground for the huge cultural complex's first structure. It was the first step toward changing a slum neighborhood into a sea of travertine palaces.

If the 20 years since Lincoln Center's groundbreaking prove anything, it is not only that cities change fast but also that orthodoxy in architectural thinking can change even faster. The plans for Lincoln Center were attacked on virtually every ground imaginable when they were first announced. It is

An Appraisal going to be a sterile island cut off from the life of the city, argued Jane Jacobs and other planning critics. The buildings will be reactionary piles of marble, totally lacking in any new architectural ideas, said a number of design critics.

Now, with the center as familiar a part of the cityscape as the Chrysler Building, things could not look more different. Lincoln Center has turned out to have had a profound effect on the city around it, spawning everything from restaurants and boutiques to luxury apartment houses. And its buildings, far from looking backward, seem now to be odd precursors of the current fashion for designing in classically inspired styles.

'Packaged Culture'

Not that Lincoln Center, or the planning principles behind it, looks like a total success after two decades. Far from it: precursors or not, the buildings themselves are for the most part

mediocre, and the sense of "packaged culture" that their grouping together represents still leaves one with a feeling of uneasiness. Four large halls, a music school and a library did not end up in the same complex by virtue of the natural process of the marketplace that created a place like the diamond district or the financial district; they came together out of a deliberate desire to elevate culture and isolate it from the ongoing life of the city.

It is a wonderful irony that this objective never quite worked — for part of Lincoln Center's success comes from its failure to function as an Acropolis. In the 13 years since the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House, the third of the major buildings to be completed, the neighborhood around Lincoln Center has filled with stores, restaurants and housing; it has gone from being a slum to being one of the city's most fashionable residential quarters.

\$600 Million in New Building

Since 1959, 30 percent of the land on Manhattan's West Side between 59th and 72d Streets, the neighborhood that has Lincoln Center at its core, has been redeveloped with \$600 million worth of new construction, bringing the city a 400 percent increase in real-estate tax revenues, according to figures prepared by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Inc.

Without question much of this growth, although hardly all of it, can be attributed to Lincoln Center. Moreover, the center has generated a number of businesses directly related to the arts, exactly what Jane Jacobs, writing back in 1961, praised Carnegie Hall for doing on 57th Street and asserted would never be able to happen at Lincoln Center.

Still, there are serious urbanistic problems. The center has never managed to make itself physically meaningful to any but the middle- and upper-middle-class patrons of arts institutions. It turns its back on the public housing to its west across Amsterdam Avenue, thus symbolically separating itself from New York's less affluent citizens. And it has never even related all that well physically to the parts of the city to which it turns its front — the buildings sit flatly on their plaza, their arrangement paying little heed to the unusual shape of their site at Broadway and Columbus Avenue.

Architecturally Disastrous

Most of what has sprung up around Lincoln Center, while pleasing in its economic implications for the city, has been fairly disastrous architecturally. The vast 43-story apartment house directly across Broadway, completed in 1972 to the designs of Philip Birnbaum, looms like a brown monster over Lincoln Center Plaza. To add insult to injury, this building pretentiously calls itself One Lincoln Plaza, making it clear that the center whose vistas it blocks is the very source of its prestige.

In the early 1960's there was talk of a mall on the site of One Lincoln Plaza, tying the Lincoln Center buildings into Central Park. It was a noble idea, far too idealistic for the dog-eat-dog world of New York real estate development, and it never happened. The one thing the City Planning Commission did end up doing was to declare a special Lincoln Center zoning district that requires that buildings near the front of the center have bases built out to the street containing stores and covered arcade-walkways, a rough attempt to echo Lincoln Center's scale and classical lines in surrounding structures.

It has worked to the extent that the special zoning provisions make One Lincoln Plaza and its new Birnbaum-designed mate, now nearing completion, 30 Lincoln Plaza, somewhat more respectful of their surroundings than they would otherwise have been. But there has been one disaster — the dreadful apartment tower at Columbus Avenue and 66th Street in which the city agreed to let the architects, Schuman, Lichtenstein & Claman, omit the columns on the arcade, leaving a building that is neither handsome in itself nor related in any way to Lincoln Center.

With all of the cheap buildings surrounding it, Lincoln Center's own structures look almost impressive by comparison. But there are no really first-rate buildings here — the three main structures, Avery Fisher Hall by Max Abramovitz, the New York State Theater by Philip Johnson and the Metropolitan Opera House by Wallace K. Harrison, all have dreary, travertine-covered facades of columns, classical less out of any belief in the values of classicism than out of a fear on the part of the architects that they could not get away with doing anything else.

When the buildings were new, they appeared brazenly reactionary, but today, with a changing intellectual climate far more hospitable to buildings that allude to historical styles, this is no longer the case. But that does not make the buildings good, for their problem was never that they were classical, but that they were so badly classical. The three main buildings are prissy and overdetailed both inside and out, with a heavy-handedness of form and a vulgarity of detail that looked poor in the 1960's and look no less so now.

The three "modern" buildings of the center, the Vivian Beaumont Theater by Eero Saarinen, the Library & Museum of the Performing Arts by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and the Juilliard School by Pietro Belluschi with Eduardo Catalano and Westermann & Miller, all of which managed to break in one way or another from the classical shackles that bound the three larger structures, continue to look better than their neighbors. But after more than a decade, it seems increasingly clear that the praise these buildings deserve is by default alone. None of them is particularly distinguished or innovative; they are merely less tiresome than the others on the plaza.

Immense Cultural Benefits

Of course, none of these physical problems can offset the immense cultural benefits Lincoln Center has brought to the city. It can surely be argued that by grouping institutions together, the creators of Lincoln Center have achieved a certain artistic mass that strengthens the city overall.

And of course the central plaza itself, with a fountain as its focus, is a joy on a spring or summer evening — one of New York's few true urban squares, and a further answer to those who would say that Lincoln Center has no redeeming value urbanistically. It is a splendid place, as is its more intimate neighbor, the reflecting pool in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theater containing Henry Moore's "Reclining Figure." But it is unfortunate that the pleasure they offer is diminished seriously by the massive hulk of One Lincoln Plaza bearing down from across Broadway. It is a sign to all that when it comes to planning and architecture in New York, culture may be important, but commerce ranks higher.

\$25 Tix Tabs Get Midwest Stares But Top Names Still Pack 'Em In

By BOB REES

Minneapolis, June 5.

Inflation's effect on boxoffice ticket prices for legit and concerts has never been as drastic as it is currently with a \$25 top for many events becoming a fact of life. And while there's lotsa buyer resistance to the \$25 tab, promoters are generally finding plenty of customers even at that stiff price.

Case in point was a weekend last month here when three attractions were getting a top admish of more than \$20. Metropolitan Opera educats were going at \$24 apiece, up \$2 from a year ago, and were difficult to obtain. Vladimir Horowitz fans paid \$25 top to see the famed pianist at Orchestra Hall. At the same time the most expensive Saturday night seats for roadshow "Man of La Mancha" at the Orpheum Theatre cost \$25 a copy.

Example may be slightly skewed in that all ticket sales were not current, but it demonstrates willingness of Midwest customers to fork out \$25 for shows and artists in demand. Not so long ago Midwesterners thought comparable Broadway rates were outrageous.

Horowitz concert was originally scheduled last October but was postponed because of the musician's surgery. Tickets were purchased last fall and, in most cases,

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Minn. Ticket Protest

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held, producing an SRO performance grossing \$48,975, a house record. Orchestra Hall sold 140 stage seats for the concert.

Similarly, most tix for the Met's weeklong stand here were sold via mail order in March. Six of the seven Met performances were sold out. Met grossed \$490,000 during its week here, about 2% below a year ago. Slippage was due to "Dialogue of the Carmelites" which wasn't very popular with patrons.

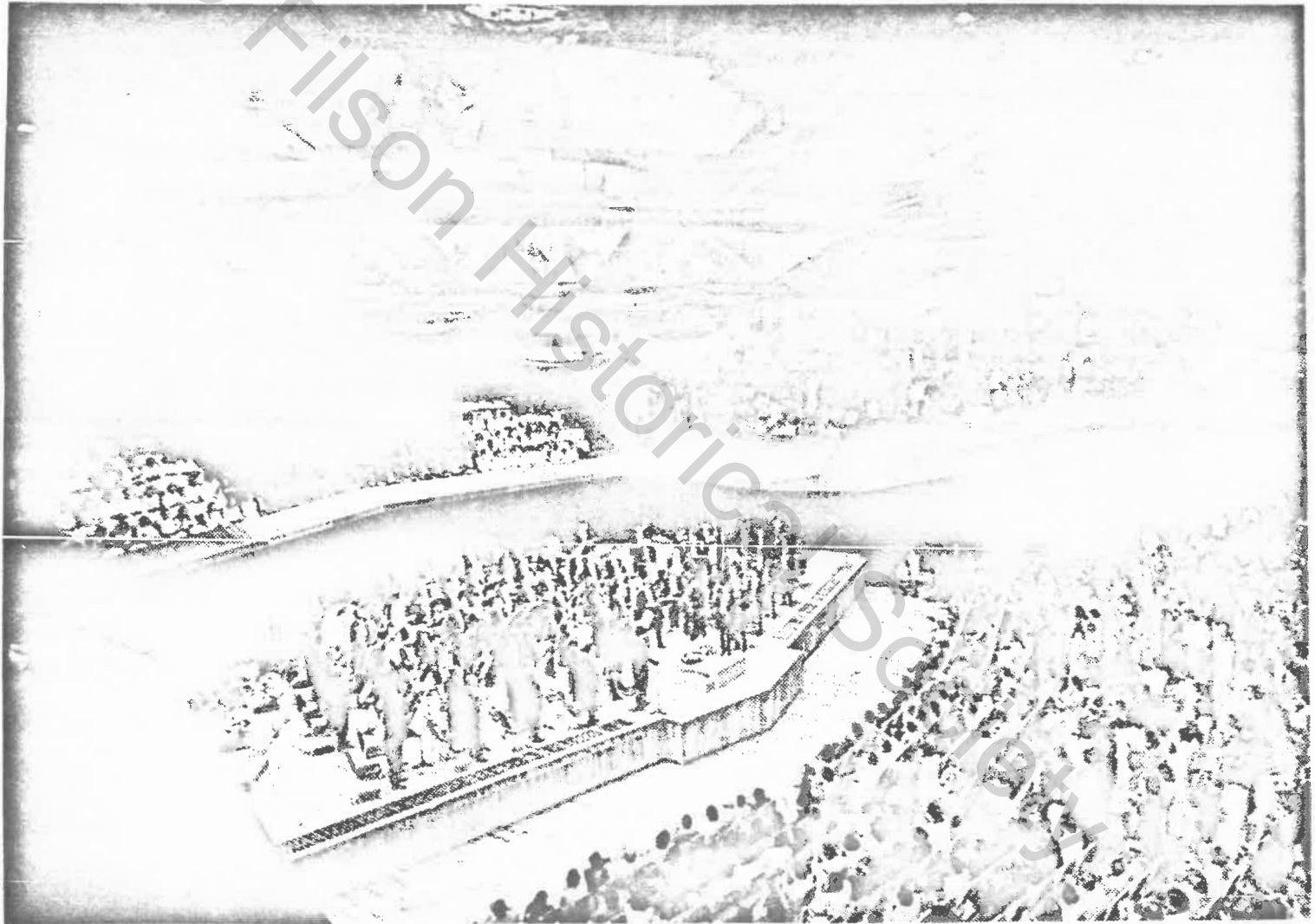
"La Mancha" grossed an okay \$172,610 against a \$269,195 potential in its first of four weeks at the Orpheum and \$173,980 the second frame. The \$25 ceiling was assessed only Saturday night. Top was \$20 weeknights and \$22.50 for Friday night and Sunday matinee with other seats scaled down to a \$5 minimum. By comparison, top for "Chorus Line," due in for three weeks in July, will be \$19.50 here. Guthrie Theatre's top price this season is \$10.45, up 50¢.

"La Mancha" company manager Charles Eisler told *Variety* the boxoffice was encountering some resistance to the \$25 lid but emphasized that rising production costs are making such tabs essential. Show was hurt, company officials feel, by local newspaper stories stressing the \$25 top without indicating most seats were priced considerably below that figure.

Orchestra Hall ticket manager Dick Carter also noted customer resistance to top dollar tickets. When the Los Angeles Philharmonic played Orchestra Hall May 10, auditorium was scaled at \$15, \$10, \$7.50 and \$4.50. "The \$10 and \$7.50 tickets were sold quickly, but it was slow going selling the \$15 tickets," Carter reports. Only tickets left for the concert were the \$15 ones.

VARIETY

June 6, 1979



Maazel conducts Cleveland Orchestra with crystal clarity at new 2,500-seat Nezahualcoyotl Hall