ART LESSONS

LEARNING FROM THE RISE AND FALL OF PUBLIC ARTS FUNDING

ALICE GOLDFARB MARQUIS

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SEVENTY-SIX TROMBONES

Ya got Trouble,—my friend, right here, I say Trouble, right here in River City.

—THE MUSIC MAN

WHEN PROFESSOR HAROLD HILL first rapped out these lines on the stage of New York's Majestic Theater, critics cheered *The Music Man*'s nostalgic portrait of an Iowa town besotted by promises of cultural amenities. "A warm and genial cartoon of American life," said Brooks Atkinson's review in the next day's *New York Times*. While "mulcting the customers," the fast-talking professor had also "transform[ed] a dull town into a singing and dancing community." Since that first performance on December 19, 1957, Meredith Willson's charming musical has been staged thousands of times, currently averaging more than two hundred productions each year. A movie version in 1962 reprised the artless tale of how the "professor" bamboozles the naive folk of River City into parting with thousands of dollars for uniforms, instruments, and music lessons for their children. "Trouble . . . with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for Pool," the seductive scamp rants. "Friends, the idle brain is the Devil's playground. . . . Gotta figger out a way t'keep the young ones moral after schoooool."[1]

Though it travels modestly as an evening's light entertainment, *The Music Man* poignantly enfolds Americans' deep and long-standing yearning for cultural improvement. The musical is set in 1912, but its sunny outlook reflects the national mood near the end of the 1950s, when it was first produced. Not only had the United States gloriously triumphed in the Second World War, but its wealth had also helped to rebuild the ruined economies of its European allies, not to mention those of its erstwhile ene-

mies Germany and Japan. Americans who could easily recall the threadbare existence of the Depression now were reveling in unprecedented prosperity. The cars and houses and kitchen appliances that for years were only a ghostly promise in wartime magazine advertisements had materialized in profusion; for the first time in American history, that sweet, scrubbed, idealized family depicted in those same advertisements had also come alive, in such numbers that many believed that the entire population would soon enjoy at least a middle-class standard of life. But as John Kenneth Galbraith so cogently argued in a landmark work of 1958, *The Affluent Society*, "when man has satisfied his physical needs, the psychologically grounded desires take over."[2]

Like the wide-eyed Iowans of River City who invested so eagerly in Professor Hill's extravagant promises, many Americans in the 1960s expected to collect a special dividend of psychic income from the arts. An editorial in the 1960 year-end issue of *Life* magazine called for "a second revolution . . . [a] new role for culture." Democratically dispersed throughout the population, "the arts by their very nature are equipped to impose form and meaning on the increasing complexities of human experience," *Life* argued. In deference to the missionary origins of its publisher Henry Luce, the magazine conceded that art could not replace religion, but the editorial asserted that "art is the only other human activity which speaks directly to the emotions. . . . The refinement must be public and general if our civilization is to be democratic as well as great."[3]

This fervent endorsement of the arts in America's most widely circulated weekly magazine reinforced the immaculate union forged over several generations between two widely recommended antidotes to American materialism: Again and again, the arts were linked with religion. According to this creed, God marched hand in hand with the Muses, a celestial parade conjured so seductively by Professor Harold Hill. To partake of the arts, therefore, was not just a pleasant diversion but also a moral duty; the benefits went far beyond spending a few enjoyable hours in an ethereal, spiritual realm. The sermons in behalf of the arts then preached (and which continue to be preached) laid a heavy moral burden on an experience that elsewhere was considered simply sophisticated entertainment. During the 1950s, the era that is the starting point of this book, when America was still unsteady in its role as world leader, much public agonizing over the nation's status dwelled on the inferior state of its culture. Adlai Stevenson, the white hope of intellectuals who was defeated for the presidency in 1952 and again in 1956 by Dwight D. Eisenhower, called for "a

reorientation of our ideals and tastes, the strenuous stretching of mental and artistic talent." The respected political scientist Clinton Rossiter, unconsciously paraphrasing Professor Hill's musical remarks about River City, detected "a crisis in American culture." Rossiter was sure that "no great nation can be said to be worth respecting or imitating if it has not achieved a high level of culture, and it is at least an arguable question whether this nation will ever achieve it."[4]

The rhetoric pressing Americans to attend live performances of classical music, dance, and theater often took on the urgency of a crusade. In a propaganda paper advocating construction of a national cultural center in Washington, D.C., the New York Public Library's music specialist asserted that visiting such a center would galvanize "the onlooker . . . [with] the vitalizing and magnetic current that emanates from the living actor, musician, dancer or poet."[5] The museum visit also was seen as salutary for the soul; it provided a "reverential experience," wrote one Berkeley anthropologist, "that is solitary, contemplative, a rest from the cares of the world, uplifting of spirit."[6] Even the introduction to a book titled *Marketing the Arts* extolled the "incomparable opportunities" offered by the arts "to experience the sublime and divine."[7]

Within the Western world's discourse about culture, Americans seem peculiarly addicted to religious metaphor. In Europe, such associations between art and the Divine were common during the nineteenth century when the cult of "art for art's sake" took on many of the trappings previously devoted to religious worship. The rush to build magnificent opera houses, museums, concert halls, and theaters recalled an earlier time's fervor to construct cathedrals. Those who practiced their art within these temples were not shy about claiming divine inspiration and the audiences thrilled to the mystery at the core of their performances, a mystery that could be studied but ultimately required a leap into passionate spiritual engagement. Marcel Proust, for example, described his profound emotion at a performance by Berma, an actress modeled on Sarah Bernhardt. Berma's fusion of noble words and "perfection in the dramatic art" as she performed a scene from Racine's *Phèdre* charged Proust "like a battery that accumulates and stores up electricity. . . . Even if I had believed that I should die of it, I should still have been compelled to go and hear Berma."[8]

In America, the cult focused on arts and artists of European origin. The few who could afford it traveled to Europe, while those of the middle class—still a minority—enjoyed European performers who toured around the country. Well into the twentieth century, American orchestras sought

European conductors. When the Los Angeles Philharmonic hired Alfred Wallenstein in 1944, he was the first American-born musician to serve as music director of a major American orchestra; New Yorkers had to wait for the advent of Leonard Bernstein in 1969. Despite their New World cousins' devotion to Old World culture, Europeans found little to admire and much to mock in American barbarism. When Aldous Huxley first visited Los Angeles in 1927, he reported that for Americans "existence on the lower animal levels is perfectly satisfactory."[9]

Many Americans were uneasy about the elitist aura surrounding a culture developed by and for foreigners. Walt Whitman complained in 1871 that "America has yet morally and artistically originated nothing."[10] But while the newly rich of the northeastern cities resolutely packed their steamer trunks for grand tours of the Continent, successful entrepreneurs in cities and towns elsewhere in America tried to reconcile European culture's aristocratic origins and *haut bourgeois* patronage with the democratic ideals of American society. Out of their dilemma grew a profusion of organizations, movements, and programs devoted to exposing the masses to the arts religion. With missionary zeal, the Chautauqua movement and others sent out educational speakers and performers to small-town America. Like tent-revivalists, the "better people" herded the public into high school auditoriums for uplifting lectures; they formed book clubs and music societies; they constructed networks of adult education and opened thousands of public libraries.

While the upper reaches of American culture offered but a pale colonial reflection of its European ideal, the broader culture in the nineteenth century promiscuously mingled poetry and doggerel, operatic arias and popular song, minstrel shows and Shakespeare—a panorama as garish as Professor Harold Hill's checkered costume. As the historian Lawrence W. Levine has argued so forcefully, only as the twentieth century dawned did America's cultural leadership manage to impose a hierarchy upon the arts, resulting in what he calls "the sacralization of culture." In the world of music and visual art, the most powerful instrument for constructing this artificial barrier between high and low art was the nonprofit corporation.[11]

This means for organizing high culture was invented in Boston near the end of the nineteenth century and quickly spread across the country. No account of this development can ignore the sociologist Paul DiMaggio's perceptive studies of how financial and social elites defined and captured the high cultural ground by pasting an altruistic, morally chaste veneer over basically self-serving activities. The nonprofit corporations that

Boston Brahmins devised to control the city's cultural life relied on wealthy trustees to finance and manage such amenities as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston Symphony. By contributing directly and soliciting donations from others, these trustees seized the taste-making functions previously diffused among impresarios, politicians, performers, women's clubs, and educators. The charters of Boston's nonprofit organizations proclaimed service to the entire community, but in practice, as DiMaggio wrote, the trustees promoted "a view and vision of art" that made it less and less accessible to the wider public. These organizations claimed to benefit all citizens even as they widened the distance between the performer and the public, "to permit the mystification necessary to define a body of artistic work as sacred."[12]

While distancing themselves from commercial culture and refining a jargon and an etiquette that estranged most of the public from their activities, the nonprofit "high" arts organizations that were proliferating around the United States also insisted that they were engaged in civilizing the masses and contributing to general civic well-being. This was the justification for allowing their patrons to make contributions free of federal, state, and local taxes, and for the substantial gifts of land, buildings, and money that municipalities lavished on arts organizations.

The Depression amplified the dissonance between what cultural Brahmins preached and what they practiced. As many old fortunes crumbled, public respect for plutocrats turned to contempt. In the light of that great crusade for democracy, the Second World War, the social distinctions underlying the elite's cultural monopoly also came to be questioned. But the severest threat to the religion of high culture came from popular and commercial art. Magazines, movies, radio, and, eventually, television offered the public a dizzying variety of cheap entertainment. Many years later, critics and scholars discovered a good deal of gold in what originally had been dismissed as contemptible dung. The Saturday radio broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera eventually ignited a nationwide fever for opera; Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* continues to attract fresh analysis; Leonard Bernstein's televised "joy of music" performances enthralled young listeners. But when such works were first presented, few intellectual or cultural leaders could find much to admire. Instead, they frequently fulminated against an omnipresent carnival of tawdry entertainment.

"Good art competes with kitsch, serious ideas compete with commercialized formulae," lamented the critic Dwight Macdonald. Mass culture, he warned, "threatens High Culture by its sheer pervasiveness, its brutal,

overwhelming *quantity.*" He even deplored any effort to explain or popularize high culture as encouraging "a tepid, flaccid Middlebrow Culture that threatens to engulf everything in its spreading ooze." Robert M. Hutchins, who had reinvented higher education at the University of Chicago, believed that liberal intellectuals' bitterness toward mass media stemmed from "disappointment at what the man on the assembly line has done with the free time that they have helped him to obtain. . . . New methods of wasting [time] and new objects to waste it upon are being invented every day."[13]

Perhaps there was a moment when a fairly acute observer could have drawn a sharp line between high art and low art in America, but if so it was in the distant past. Yet many of those responsible for funding the arts purport to know where this line exists. At the extremes, such a division appears simple: A performance of *King Lear* by the Royal Shakespeare Company is definitely "high"; mud-wrestling in a neighborhood bar is clearly "low." However, the closer one moves to the center of the spectrum, the trickier the distinctions become. What to make of tap dancing or flamenco? Of a popular commercial film such as *The Remains of the Day*? Of the operetta *The Merry Widow*? How to classify Luciano Pavarotti lip-synching an aria? Is it high art when a symphony orchestra accompanies a silent movie or plays Tchaikovsky's *1812* Overture accompanied by fireworks? How to regard a snippet of a Mozart flute concerto in a Pepsi commercial? Clearly, American culture boisterously, maddeningly, perpetually blends high and low.

In the same pattern, the careers of this country's finest artists have shifted seamlessly between commerce and art. The beloved soprano Beverly Sills starred in a radio commercial for Rinso White soap powder during the 1950s.[14] Leonard Bernstein, much to the distress of the prissy gatekeepers at St. Culture, achieved fame as a composer of musical theater, not to mention his labors in that purported graveyard of talent, Hollywood. In the world of dance, few observers care to classify as high or low the work of Jerome Robbins and Agnes De Mille, of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. The artist most representative of this peculiarly American mingling of the ethereal and the vulgar is, of course, Andy Warhol. "I wish I could invent something like blue jeans," he once said. "Something to be remembered for. Something mass." Much to the chagrin of those still seeking to defend high art against the taint of vulgarity, Andy Warhol's works and memorabilia are now lavishly remembered in a $12-million museum in Pittsburgh, the largest museum in America devoted to a single artist.[15]

The American propensity for such shameless intercourse between trea-

sure and trash has made life difficult for those striving to convert the wider public to the high art religion. Yet this missionary endeavor forms the primary rationale for spending public money on the arts. But which arts? This seemingly simple three-word question has echoed and re-echoed through recent decades, in academic departments, among artists and the managers of arts institutions, and most acrimoniously in congressional debates over the uses of tax money for subsidizing the arts. "Were art the unqualified good the consensus of the sixties implied, one would think that those who spend the bulk of their time with art should be the best and happiest of people," wrote the philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto in 1993. He found the truth to be quite different: "Art people have terrifying egos, and are filled with intolerance and condescension, and spend their time in fierce bickers about what is art and what is not." Danto located one explanation for such unseemly acrimony in the linkage of art and theology, "for religion is the locus of dissent and heresy and imposed orthodoxy and bitter strife and deep and total intolerance."[16]

The arts religion casts its pall over too many programs claiming to attract new audiences for high art. Factual information about the works to be performed and the artists on stage often sinks into a morass of high-minded gush. Docents and other educators hand down the list of masterpieces as though it were engraved upon marble tablets; no further discussion seems possible without betraying one's gross ignorance or base insensitivity. To confess that one dislikes an item on the sanctified list is heresy. In contrast to the intense, lively, and sometimes raucous nexus between audience and performer of times gone by, we are corseted by a stern etiquette of Victorian rigidity. It dictates precisely when audiences may applaud and forbids the slightest murmur of disapproval.

Within this stifling environment, the verb *to celebrate* has spread the mantle of its religious meaning (to celebrate a mass) over any number of arts-related activities. We "celebrate" folk art, which means we no longer have to learn anything about it or its practitioners but simply nibble at a thin, lo-cal wafer of sentiment. To "celebrate" Duke Ellington or Mozart, a sacramental sip without savor or understanding will do. Such empty ritual gestures obscure the real artist in a saccharine mist. We render the arts and artists no honor by prostrating ourselves before them in blind devotion.

As emblems of our civilization, the arts are too important, too interesting, and too enjoyable to be shrouded in idolatry, no matter how well meaning. This book assumes that if we want to help the arts, we must look carefully at the kinds of aid they obtain and how it affects the recipients.

Therefore, it tries to avoid the condescension implicit in vapid gush. Rather, what follows seeks to supply the reader with a historical framework for assessing the condition of the arts and of artists, with some sense of their infinite, gaudy variety.

The following chapters are loosely chronological in telling the story of public arts funding from the end of the Second World War up to the present. Each chapter also focuses on the development of one key element of the cultural world during the entire period. The goal is to arrive at an overview of how public funding has affected the arts not only financially but also stylistically. Despite all disclaimers, the evidence suggests that paying the piper profoundly affects the tune, and to claim otherwise misleads the public. The evidence also appears overwhelming that politics cannot be excluded when public money supports, or fails to support, cultural activities. Above all, this book strives to engage the reader in the lively, fascinating, and intense debate over who, if anyone, should decide what is art.

2

WEST SIDE STORY

COMPARED WITH THE grandiose temples for the arts that would later be built, New York's City Center was absurdly modest. It cost just over $60,000 and took less than a year to open. Unpretentious, too, were its goals. Really, there was only one goal: to offer New Yorkers a variety of cultural events at ticket prices that began at less than one dollar. When this very first performing arts center in the United States opened on December 11, 1943, its organizers hailed a bold populist step toward bringing culture to New York's masses. It marked the city's emergence from Depression stringency: a down payment on a limitless future that would transform New York into the cultural capital of the American Century.

The venue for this simple amenity was conspicuously ornate, a cavernous mock-Moorish hall on West 55th Street, between Broadway and Seventh Avenue. New York's Ancient and Accepted Order of the Mystic Shrine, which had built the hall in a fit of red-fezzed exuberance in 1924, had abandoned it to the city of New York for delinquent taxes some ten years later, during the Depression. Occasionally, a small number of the 2,684 seats in the Mecca Temple, as it was still called, were used for civil service exams or other mundane city activities. In the bleak wartime winter of 1942–43, the U.S. Treasury Department, at the behest of New York's strong musicians' union, sponsored a series of concerts, with admission by purchase of war stamps. After that, the hall had a date with the wrecking ball, whose mindless force would pulverize the mosaics, the elaborate Oriental bas-reliefs, the spacious stage, the balcony dripping with plaster

interlace, all that Levantine frivolity that New York's chapter of the American Institute of Architects now calls "delightfully absurd."[1] On the site, there would be a parking garage.

This prospect offended New York's feisty fireplug of a mayor, Fiorello La Guardia, who, the son of an army bandmaster, fancied himself an amateur opera buff. The final Treasury concert, featuring the pianist José Iturbi (who also conducted the New York Philharmonic), had attracted such a mob that the mayor himself, even with two burly policemen running interference, could hardly get through. La Guardia impulsively determined to turn the hall into City Center for the Performing Arts, to enshrine "the flame of art . . . and to hold until the younger generation lay down their arms and come back, the beautiful, spiritual, and happy things in life."[2]

Following the concert, the mayor joined the City Council president Newbold Morris, the philanthropist Gerald Warburg, and other dignitaries at a supper party given by Jean Dalrymple, a Broadway publicist who had volunteered her services for the Treasury concerts. La Guardia kept talking about the millions of New Yorkers who would attend cultural events if only they could afford them, recalled Dalrymple in her memoirs. Morris, who had previously arranged a series of concerts sponsored by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) at Radio City's Center Theater, suggested using the Mecca Temple.[3]

Such were the quick old days that Morris obtained the $60,750 needed to start the center by calling together leaders of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Workmen's Circle, United Hebrew Trades, the Joint Board of Millinery Workers, and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Their membership was dominated by Jewish immigrants and their children, many longing for inexpensive cultural offerings. Anticipating work for its members, Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians pledged $10,000 toward the total. Morris also won support from the Broadway producer John Golden; the conductor Erich Leinsdorf; the philanthropists Edmond A. Guggenheim and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.; representatives from the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera; the Dramatists Guild; and such cultural stars as Lillian Gish, Paul Robeson, the *New York Times* music critic Deems Taylor, and the operatic baritone Lawrence Tibbett.[4]

On December 11, 1943, only nine months later, Artur Rodzinski conducted the New York Philharmonic in the freshly scrubbed hall, which *Time* magazine deemed "a masterpiece of Turkish-bath rococo." Tibbett, a

native of Bakersfield, California, who was a soloist that evening and the finale, George Gershwin's *An American in Paris,* signaled City Center's orientation to home-grown talent. The top ticket price, one dollar, indicated the center's populist philosophy. The first season sampled the cultural banquet the center would offer New Yorkers for the next two decades. It included Sidney Kingsley's play *The Patriots,* recitals by the modern dancer Paul Draper and the harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, and a revival of a recent Broadway production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (with the young Montgomery Clift in the juvenile lead). By February 21, 1944, the newly organized New York City Opera performed *Tosca,* and on the next night, *Martha,* and the night after that, *Carmen,* all to excellent reviews. The center's slogan, "the best in entertainment at the lowest possible prices," became a reality: Admission cost from eighty-five cents to $2.20.[5]

For more than twenty years, Jean Dalrymple would occupy an aisle seat in the last orchestra row as hundreds of productions came to life in that riotously caparisoned hall. As a producer and publicist, she served on the board of directors, and it became a tradition for its members to troop across the street to her apartment after their meetings. Morris, an intimate friend, would sip a dry martini, while the finance committee chair Morton Baum, one of the city's leading tax lawyers, relaxed with a light scotch and soda. As a woman in that all-male milieu, Dalrymple "could do anything [she] wanted by never taking credit." Almost half a century later she recalled, "If I took credit, it would lead to a big fight." Even when she proposed starting what became the New York City Opera under Laszlo Halasz, she "asked Newbold Morris to announce it."[6]

When City Center's incorporators held their first annual meeting in May 1944, Mayor La Guardia cheerfully announced a first-season profit of $844.77. Some 346,750 people had attended performances, including 47,000 admitted with 20 percent–off coupons sold to civic and labor organizations, and 30,000 schoolchildren who paid thirty cents for a play and fifty cents for an opera. The children's program had been organized by a volunteer, Ida Martus, an English teacher who soon obtained a cramped office at City Center and a salary from the New York Board of Education. In the twenty-five years following that first season, she arranged for some 1.5 million schoolchildren to attend City Center performances.[7]

In its second season, City Center attendance reached 750,000 for 357 performances, and it posted a profit of more than $63,000. Such wondrous results came about mainly through performers' enthusiastic contributions to a "people's culture." Iturbi, for example, donated his services as piano

soloist on the first anniversary, and a rush-hour throng pushed to get tickets at one dollar each, open seating. For *Little Women,* opening the following night, the Broadway cast agreed to work for the Equity minimum, $57.50 per week. To stage the holiday program, *A Children's Christmas Story,* the conductor Leopold Stokowski donated $10,000. And on Christmas Day, 1944, Paul Draper and Larry Adler entertained in return for a tiny percentage of the gross.[8]

The euphoria at the intersection of artistic and financial success lasted only a few years. Arts audiences, like those for other entertainment, are extremely picky. They bore easily, even when exhorted by the art religion's rhetoric that the dull event they are witnessing is spiritually uplifting. Once the novelty wore off, City Center found it increasingly difficult to lure bodies into its seats with any regularity. The problem was compounded by an agenda that went beyond the original slogan of high culture at low prices. Dalrymple possessed the contacts and persuasiveness to attract Broadway stars in revivals of Broadway hits. But Morton Baum mocked her "Broadway mentality. He didn't think Broadway was art or culture," Dalrymple recalled. To please him, she scheduled a star-less series showcasing American playwrights. "It was our first losing season," she said. Likewise, at the opera, the ideal of presenting new works by American composers was culturally worthy but worthless at the box office.[9]

The bright spot was the New York City Ballet, which City Center took in during the 1948–49 season. During the 1930s, the ballet company's impresario, Lincoln Kirstein, had drummed up a cult following for George Balanchine's troupe at various posh private venues, including the opulent Warburg family "cottage" in White Plains, New York. Young Edward M. M. Warburg had been a generous sponsor, although his brother, Gerald, sourly told the City Center board he had lost "a potful of money." Gerald also worried about Kirstein's overbearing temperament. If they gave the ballet company a permanent home, he warned the City Center trustees, "it won't be long before Lincoln will be trying to run the whole place." Nevertheless, after a successful two-week season in January 1949 and friendly reviews, as well as funding for new productions guaranteed from wealthy subscribers of the Ballet Society, the New York City Ballet became a brilliant centerpiece in the City Center's diadem of resident companies. Within three years, amid board dissension and financial troubles, Kirstein was appointed City Center manager. Gerald Warburg whispered to Newbold Morris: "I told you so."[10]

Kirstein regarded a profitable cultural institution as some kind of dis-

grace. So did Morton Baum, on whose fundraising skills City Center increasingly relied. "You're trying to make money," he would complain to Dalrymple. "Lincoln Kirstein insists we should lose money or else we can't get any grants."[11]

By 1952, the ballet was in enough financial distress to suit even Kirstein, although the top ticket price had been raised, amid much agonizing, from $3.50 to $3.75. By 1954, costly union contracts and more elaborate productions had also sent the opera into deep deficit mode. Kirstein was furious when the board canceled his plans for five new operas in the fall: Gian-Carlo Menotti's *The Saint of Bleecker Street,* Jules Massenet's *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame,* Vincenzo Bellini's *La Sonnambula,* Nicolai Lopatnikoff's *Danton,* and Igor Stravinsky's *The Nightingale.* Ernest S. Heller, who would become the City Center operating chair many years later, recalled, "We always knew that when he put on a contemporary opera, the sales would fall off dramatically."[12]

In a pattern that would be duplicated at many another performing arts center, the luster of City Center was fading fast. The operatic soprano Beverly Sills, who made her debut there in 1955, found it "an impossible house . . . the acoustics were terrible . . . it was like a big barn, dirty and dusty." By 1957, even Jean Dalrymple was disillusioned. City Center "was no longer regarded as a youthful dream and we could not expect pats on the back for good intentions. Somehow we had become part of the establishment." Thanks to the opera's American tours and the ballet's acclaimed European tours, "we were nationally and internationally famous." Still, the opera was losing money so fast that the drama season was threatened. By 1961, ticket prices broke through the four-dollar ceiling.[13]

But more than its shabby theater, more than the smugness of success, more than persistent deficits toppled the dream of a people's cultural center on West 55th Street. The people for whom this amenity had been created were moving outward into the suburbs, westward into the sunset, and upward into prosperity. At untold human cost, the war had accomplished what an array of enlightened social programs had been unable to do: It had launched the U.S. economy into decades of unprecedented affluence. No sooner were Americans certain that the Depression was safely beyond history's horizon than they proceeded to fulfill the fantasies they had formed through the hunger years and refined during the dislocations and dangers of war.

Whether the new car or the house came first, or whether they could