



# **They Told Me Not to Take that Job: Tumult, Betrayal, Heroics, and the Transformation of Lincoln Center**

*Reynold Levy*

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Reynold Levy joined Lincoln Center in 2002. When he did so America's leading arts venue was routinely described in terms like this:

“Behind the scenes, however, Lincoln Center is a community in deep distress, riven by conflict over a grandiose \$1 billion redevelopment plan... instead of uniting the Center's constituent arts organizations behind a common goal, the project has pitted them against one another in open warfare more reminiscent of the shoot-out at the OK Corral than of a night at the opera. ‘To say that it is a mess is putting it mildly,’ says Johanna Fiedler, the author and a former staff member at the Metropolitan Opera. ‘There is nobody running the show right now.’” (Leslie Bennetts, *New York Magazine*, February 4, 2002)

To choose to be President of Lincoln Center of one's own free will was regarded by Reynold Levy's friends and mentors as bordering on a self-destructive act. Rivalries abounded. Personalities clashed. Egos reigned. Reputations were badly damaged. And many of the tensions were dramatically played out in public and assiduously reported by a delighted press.

Levy had just spent six years traipsing through much of the Third World and many failed states as the President of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), one of the world's leading refugee assistance organizations. Having dealt with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Serbia, even Joe Volpe, the volcanic manager of the Metropolitan Opera seemed hardly daunting. Lincoln Center, its key figures with their bombast and betrayals was not South Sudan. So he set to, and during his presidency transformed Lincoln Center's entire 16-acre campus including the city block from Broadway to Amsterdam Avenue.

With the new Alice Tully Hall, the expansion of The Juilliard School, two new screening rooms and an education center for the Film Society, new dance studios for the School of American Ballet, came a beautifully designed, graceful welcome to Lincoln Center's main campus, one filled with light and life. There were new green spaces, new restaurants, a totally wifi'd campus that displayed 21st Century technology indoors and out. And a remodeled, utterly transformed, privately owned public space called the David Rubenstein Atrium, named after its principal donor, a new Lincoln Center Commons, opened free of charge to the public 365 days a year.

This book reveals the real story behind the 1.2 billion dollar reinvention of Lincoln Center, and all the trials and triumphs along the way. It contains unique lessons for leaders in all kinds of organizations, cautionary tales for employees, volunteers and donors, and inspiring clarity for anyone who wants to lead an institution they believe in so that it can become the best version of itself.

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