

INSIDE ACORN SHRINKS VS. SCIENCE JUDE LAW'S 'HAMLET'

OCTOBER 12, 2009

Newsweek®

AFTER IRAN GETS THE BOMB

IT WON'T BE THE END OF THE WORLD ...

BY FAREED ZAKARIA

... UNLESS IT IS
BY JON MEACHAM

PLUS
THE VIEW FROM ISRAEL BY LALLY WEYMOUTH



BY CATHLEEN MCGUIGAN

WHEN PRESIDENT EISENHOWER stuck a silver shovel in the dirt at the groundbreaking for Lincoln Center in 1959, he talked about America's desire to share "the good things of life with all our citizens." The architects of the arts complex apparently didn't get the message. Built on an urban-renewal site—*West Side Story* was filmed there just before the bulldozers arrived to tear down the tenements—Lincoln Center turned its back on the neighborhood. Its travertine, colonnaded buildings were set high on a podium with fortress-like walls, creating an Acropolis of the arts that might as well have posted a NO LOITERING sign for any Sharks or Jets still hanging in the 'hood. Patrons of opera or ballet could drive into its vast garage underneath the various performance spaces and never set foot on the surrounding mean streets.

Lincoln Center is still the country's premier cultural complex, but it's getting competition from an ambitious project in—are you ready for it, New Yorkers?—Dallas. This month the Dallas center for the performing arts is unveiling a new 2,200-seat opera house designed by Foster + Partners and an innovative theater by Rem Koolhaas and Joshua Prince-Ramus, the culmination of an ambitious plan that already includes three museums, a concert hall, and an arts high school. Dallas has

DALLAS ARTS CENTER

Deep in the Art of Texas

managed to avoid the grandiose errors of its New York forebear with a pedestrian-friendly layout, generous public spaces, and architecture that begs for your attention. You get a sense of that openness in the new Winspear Opera House, with its gigantic drum covered in blood-red glass

With its new arts complex, Big D lives up to its name.

panels that encloses the house and backstage. Around it is a glassed-in lobby and café that will open onto a park, shaded by a four-acre solar canopy, designed to lure people out of the Texas sun and into the opera house. "We were very keen to break down the barriers between inside and outside," says the project architect, Spencer de Grey. "We wanted this not to be a temple to high culture but to invite everyone in."

No one would deny what a stunning addition the new theater and opera house are to the cultural landscape. The Wyly Theatre is a radical design that stacks the technical necessities above and below the performance area, rather

than around it. The flexible ground-floor performing space is turned into a fishbowl, walled on three sides in soundproof glass that can open to the outdoors. But the new performing complex, which cost \$354 million, is about more than art for art's sake. When the entire arts district was mapped out in a Dallas city plan in the 1980s, the site was

a sea of parking lots wedged between a freeway and the business district. De Grey, a Londoner, recalls one of his first trips to Dallas, when he emerged from "a downtown restaurant at 9 o'clock and there wasn't a soul on the street." More recently, downtown has become home to young urbanites lured by gentrification; the expanded arts center has surely helped spark the trend and is expected to attract more development. "On a Saturday morning you can go downtown and everyone is out on the street, walking their dog,

going to the gym," says Lawrence Speck, former dean of the University of Texas architecture school. "It's miraculous." But that miracle raises some questions: Can culture really do double duty as an urban-renaissance project? And should that be central to the mission of arts companies?

Certainly it can be—in some places. The most startling example is Bilbao, the gritty Spanish city that became the cultural equivalent of Lourdes when Frank Gehry and his shiny Guggenheim museum came to town. Two years ago the Seattle Art Museum opened the waterfront Olympic Sculpture Park; in Chicago, Renzo Piano's design for a new wing of the Art Institute included a pedestrian bridge to link it to Millennium Park. Even Lincoln Center has seen the error of its original plans. The dark, mean lobby of Alice Tully Hall has been transformed into a soaring, glassed-in space with a public bar and café that's become a hot neighborhood hangout. Elsewhere, some of the center's entrances and plazas are being remodeled. "All the gestures have to do with making good on the 'publicness' of public spaces," says Liz Diller of Diller Scofidio + Ren-

The Wily
Theatre.

fro, the architects overseeing the renovation. Of course, Chicago, Seattle, and New York already had a vibrant street life; opening arts buildings to the city is as much an effort to address the mistakes of the past as to alter the future. Dallas audiences will certainly explore the new complex and the surrounding public space. But weaving it all together to create a dense and urbane neighborhood requires more than dramatic buildings by famous architects. Ask the people in another car-centric city: Los Angeles, where the vaunted Disney Concert Hall (also by Gehry) has had almost no effect on creating a street life downtown, even though Gehry proposed a plan, never instigated, to help do just that. "It's almost impossible to design a city," Piano, architect of the Nasher Sculpture Center in the Dallas arts district, once said. "What makes a city beautiful is that it's not designed. Time makes cities beautiful."

What about the heart of the matter—the art? Clearly, the people running Lincoln Center, the Dallas center, and other cultural complexes are trying to entice audiences away from their iPods, plasma screens, and laptops. Arts institutions can't afford to be lonely islands of high culture, which is why we now have *Madama Butterfly* simulcast in movie theaters, and late date nights at museums. But it's debatable whether the arts themselves profit, other than at the box office. Sure, Dallas has created a destination for culture vultures, especially those who want to look at pretty buildings. But what about what's going on inside? All those millions could buy a lot of topflight performing talent and galleries full of art. But we've come to expect ultracool design in our temples of culture, even if we no longer put them on a pedestal.

