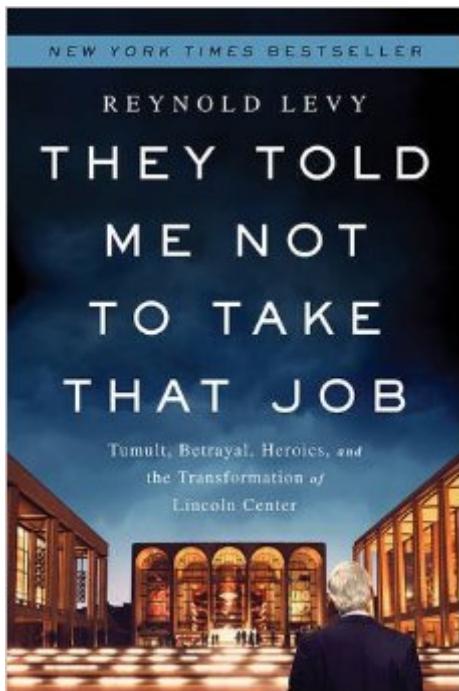


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# They Told Me Not To Take That Job: Tumult, Betrayal, Heroics, And The Transformation Of Lincoln Center



## Synopsis

When Reynold Levy became the new president of Lincoln Center in 2002, New York Magazine described the situation he walked in to as "a community in deep distress, riven by conflict." Ideas for the redevelopment of Lincoln Center's artistic facilities and public spaces required spending more than \$1.2 billion, but there was no clear pathway for how to raise that kind of unprecedented sum. The individual resident organizations that were the key constituents of Lincoln Center—the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Opera, the New York Philharmonic, the Juilliard School, and eight others—could not agree on a common capital plan or fundraising course of action. Instead, intramural rivalries and disputes filled the vacuum. Besides, some of those organizations had daunting problems of their own. Levy tells the inside story of the demise of the New York City Opera, the Metropolitan Opera's need to use as collateral its iconic Chagall tapestries in the face of mounting operating losses, and the New York Philharmonic's dalliance with Carnegie Hall. Yet despite these and other challenges, Levy and the extraordinary civic leaders at his side were able to shape a consensus for the physical modernization of the sixteen-acre campus and raise the money necessary to maintain Lincoln Center as the country's most vibrant performing arts destination. By the time he left, Lincoln Center had prepared itself fully for the next generation of artists and audiences. *They Told Me Not to Take That Job* is more than a memoir of life at the heart of one of the world's most prominent cultural institutions. It is also a case study of leadership and management in action. How Levy and his colleagues triumphantly steered Lincoln Center through perhaps the most tumultuous decade of its history to a startling transformation is fully captured in his riveting account.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wonderful view of life behind the scenes in the offices of Lincoln Center. I am a long-time Lincoln Center customer -- my first visit was on a field trip with my high school classmates (the year that Lincoln Center opened) and now I'm a Met subscriber sitting in the wheelchair seats with an octogenarian husband. It was at Lincoln Center that we celebrated all the milestones of our lives; at the Metropolitan Opera, ABT, Mostly Mozart Festival, the Philharmonic, New York City Opera, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, etc. I just loved this book. It was great fun to peek into the board rooms and learn more about the personalities that make this great institution click. Levy doesn't pull his punches criticizing administrative failures and self-inflicted wounds, especially the lamentable demise of the New York City Opera. Levy is a talented writer who makes the players real while also making the dry subjects of unions, budgets and fund-raising understandable and compelling. As an opera fan, his description of the fiscal situation at the Met gave me real concern and a much better understanding of the situation than media reports. For the sake of those of us who have relished the great art created in those walls I certainly hope this book is widely read by those with the power to make course corrections and save these organizations for our kids and grandkids.

Mr. Levy's new book, "They Told Me Not to Take That Job: Tumult, Betrayal, Heroics, and the Transformation of Lincoln Center" should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in non profit governance, leadership, philanthropy and the performing arts in New York City. "They Told Me Not to Take That Job" is an exceptional commentary on the need for institutions to reinvent themselves and remain relevant in order to survive and thrive in today's world. Levy takes us on an insightful, riveting and impassioned tour of the inner workings of one of the most prominent cultural institutions in the world in a post 9-11 environment. Levy exposes both the fragility of New York City at that time, and the fragility of non-profits in general. Through a compelling narrative, Levy gives an insiders account of the revitalization and renewal of Lincoln Center. At the same time, Levy argues that non-profits are big business requiring balanced budgets, strategic planning, and strong leadership - a seemingly obvious organizational state that we discover in Levy's book is not necessarily the norm even for the most well known or oldest institutions in the country. After reading Mr. Levy's account of the decade long transformation of Lincoln Center, one cannot help

but wonder how many non-profit institutions have failed because of poor governance and lack of accountability of their boards. And for those of us who work in the non-profit sector, one can only hope that the lessons learned at Lincoln Center constituencies are not only studied closely but taken to heart by non-profit leaders and management.

For anyone interested in the arts in New York or in the US this book is required reading. For me, who regularly attends events of Lincoln center, it was riveting. I bought the book for my Kindle as soon as it became available because what Mister Levy had done at Lincoln center I greatly admired and enjoyed, from sitting and reading are having supper in the new Grove by the reflecting pool, to climbing the main steps with a sense of expectation because of the new ever-changing fountain and in the electronic signs on the risers of the steps, to the 65th St. remake with the colorful signs, and above all the thrilling new entrances to Juilliard, the ballet studio is visible from the street and the superb new entrance to Tully Hall. I like to add to that the Rubenstein Atrium, one Street off campus, but a welcome amenity for snacks and particularly for reading and research work on laptops, and visiting with friends. In the book Mister Levy tells our he raised the money and in the cast of characters he doesn't shadowbox. Those people and institutions who feels are lingered and not fulfilling their roles in terms of fundraising and management. The sense the book is a must for trustees and arts administrators. New Yorkers and the US â “ as Lincoln center is a national institution â “ our debt to Mister Levy for his stewardship over seven years. This book will tell you why

"They Told Me Not To Take That Job" is that rarity of rarities, a highly literate page-turner that teaches while it entertains. Reynold Levy gives an insightful and unflinchingly candid account of the \$1.2 billion transformation of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts --- an against-all-odds project that dominated his almost 13 years as President. Richly seasoned with personal memoir, the book is a thought-provoking look at leadership through the prism of the Lincoln Center experience. Levy candidly assesses the leadership performances, successful and otherwise, of famous arts leaders and institutions. His account of the mismanagement leading to the death of the New York City Opera and the current fragility of the New York Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera are all the more powerful because of his careful documentation. -- Bruce Brackett

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