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Downtown needs a grand, artful facility

On Sept. 1, 45 competitors from nearly 20 countries arrived for the seventh quadrennial International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. Through the middle of September at venues around the city, these talented men and women will compete for one of the richest artistic prizes in the world.



**BRIAN
WILLIAMS**

Commentary

In a few short months, the American Pianists Association will undertake its biennial competition for the Cole Porter Jazz Fellowship. Again, a cadre of some of the instrument's most accomplished American performers will come here to compete for one of the most notable prizes in the genre.

The Indy Fringe Festival just completed a multi-day run of alternative theater. The Heartland Film Festival is preparing for its annual film extravaganza. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and the Indiana Repertory Theatre are preparing for their season-opening productions. And, on Sept. 7, the Arts Council of Indianapolis will host its annual "Start with Art" luncheon to celebrate the new arts season.

Against this backdrop of cultural activity, south of downtown rises the new performance center for the Indianapolis Colts. Unfortunately, recent news reports have noted that the city might not have sufficient tax revenue to support the annual operating expenses of the stadi-

um. Other reports have hinted that the nine-figure budget might not have enough cushion to cover all the construction costs.

Since we have already built or are building venues for the Colts, Pacers and Indians, perhaps Indianapolis should consider building a venue for the performing arts.

Peer cities have opened or will open architecturally invigorating performing arts centers that reflect their civic pride and cultural ambition. This year, five such venues will open in places such as Nashville, Tenn.; Toronto; Costa Mesa, Calif.; and Miami, which collectively cost around \$1 billion, or roughly the same as Lucas Oil Stadium. In the last few years, Los Angeles; Philadelphia; Fort Worth, Texas; North Bethesda, Md.; and even Omaha, Neb., have opened glorious performing arts facilities. These magnificent edifices are a reflection of a wide array of community hopes, including a fundamental belief that great civilizations are known for their culture.

Indianapolis is home to a robust performing arts community and vibrant cultural scene, but it lacks a focal point for this diverse and important group. A world-class concert hall and performing arts center designed by a renowned architect such as Cesar Pelli, Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava or other winners of the Pritzker Prize would enrich Indianapolis, bolster its arts community, and give our city a stage from which it could project the talents of its artisans and arts.

Where could such a needed arts center be built? A facility on the site of the former Market Square Arena would help

spur a revitalization of the near-east side. The facility should include the standard accoutrements, such as a spectacular restaurant, an eclectic lounge and, most important, space for educational programming. A bold and strikingly designed facility would help draw younger and more culturally diverse audience members, raise the profile of the groups that perform there, and increase the number of performances. A diverse set of patrons attending a greater number of performances would generate more business for downtown establishments, perhaps inspire more people to live downtown, and provide yet another catalyst to what has been a successful downtown revitalization.

Civic pride and cultural ambition inspired the creation of the Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission in 2002 to "support and encourage an environment where arts and culture flourish and to let the world know about the city's vibrant cultural scene." One of the group's goals is to build infrastructure to support culture.

An impressive downtown performing arts center would help let the world know about the city's vibrant cultural scene, enrich the community, and further Indianapolis' reputation as a sports and arts community.

Perhaps, if we are lucky, we might even find a few from the Colts organization willing to help pay for it. •

Williams is regional venture partner of Hopewell Ventures, a Midwest-focused private-equity firm. His column appears monthly. To comment on this column, go to IBJ Forum at www.ibj.com or send e-mail to bwilliams@ibj.com.