
American Airlines sponsored the American Youth Performs program

High school musicians participating in American Youth Performs staged fifty concerts throughout the United States and Canada. The program culminated in an annual concert at New York's Carnegie Hall. Local and national media publicized the program.

March 8, 1971

Increasingly, corporations are conducting youth programs and cultural activities; where the two can be combined, the result is usually economical and effective. An example of this is found at American Airlines (AA), New York City which has traditionally been active in the area of youth relations. In recent years it has been sponsor of a program—American Youth Performs (AYP)—which is involved with both youth and culture. AYP arranges participation by high school musicians and singers in community and regional concerts and its affiliated AYP Foundation gives scholarships to those who prove most deserving. After pilot testing and considerable refining, this has developed into a highly successful method of reaching young people and the publics associated with them, their families and teachers.

Each year's activities begin with concerts, combining instruments and voices, in fifty areas in the United States and Canada. Working through local musicians and/ or school organizations, talented high school youngsters are selected as participants. AYP provides a concert hall (e.g., Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles; Constitution Hall, Washington; Orchestra Hall, Chicago; Ford Auditorium, Detroit; Symphony Hall, Boston), a conductor, a professional soloist, orchestrations and choral parts, and administrative and publicity assistance.

The climax is a national concert, held in May in New York City's world-famous Carnegie Hall. Participants are chosen from among those who have performed in the regional concerts. Selections are made, by a panel of six professional musicians, upon the basis of taped performances by the would-be participants. (The recordings also help in selection of scholarship recipients.) About 30 percent of the members of the 120-piece orchestra and the 140-voice chorus are from the New York area; the rest are flown there by AA for more than a week of lengthy rehearsals and some sight-seeing. Food and lodging are provided (the latter mostly by the families of current and past New York participants and their friends). The conductor is always well known (e.g., Carmen Dragon, Morton Gould, Leopold Stokowski). Last year, there was a second performance, out-of-doors at lunchtime, at Rockefeller Center.

Every participant is given a stereo recording of the concert.

The AYP program provides AA with numerous opportunities for publicity, and media contacts are maintained continuously. Annual efforts begin with informing local media about the regional concerts and the identity of the participating schools. Next comes the selection of participating students. A third opportunity is offered by the regional

concert itself and a fourth, when local students win places in the New York City performance.

AA's local city manager or sales manager is responsible for publicity and arrangements. He serves as host and entertains local officials and business contacts at social functions preceding or following the concert. An attempt is made to identify the concert as the local seasonal highlight and AA and its employees are shown to be deeply interested and involved in the community and its affairs. In some cities, the AYP concert is a benefit performance in support of a local fund-raising effort (e.g., for the Scripps Clinic in San Diego, Calif.), further underscoring AA's concern. Additional exposure results from well-publicized drives to collect used musical instruments for needy students.

Another major publicity effort begins with announcement of the concert in Carnegie Hall. A "model" release is distributed by AA's top local representative to all schools from which a pupil will participate. Selection of an area youngster for the event becomes the basis for many coverage efforts: announcement of selection, presentation of airline ticket, departure for New York, the dress rehearsal, and the concert itself. Each such step is scrupulously reported to hometown media. Photographs of the young people (always shown with an AA representative) earn wide editorial acceptance.

Nationwide press coverage is also arranged. For example, the *New York Times* assigned its music critic to cover last year's performance; he described it as "excellent by any standard." Feature stories have appeared in *American Girl* and *Saturday Review* and one is scheduled for May in *Look* magazine. Tele-

casts of the concerts, offered as a public service, have been made in Detroit, Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Phoenix, St. Louis, and Boston, where the big department store, Jordan Marsh, and WBZ were co-sponsors.

School publications give detailed coverage.

Tickets for the concerts, distributed through AA's sales department, are made available to important customers, travel agents, traffic managers, local dignitaries and VIP's, members of the performers' families, school officials, and musical educators.

The two executives who guide the program, Cyrus S. Collins, Vice President- Public Affairs, and Sylvan M. Barnett, Jr., Vice President-PR, consider the PR benefits so substantial that they have asked for and won consistent increases in the budget for it. The annual appropriation now is \$175,000, 20 percent more than when sponsorship of AYP began.

AYP and AA have enjoyed consistently enthusiastic response from educators, parents, community leaders, and music critics. A state Governor has presented an AA regional vice president with a public service award. Some 5,000 young musicians have appeared before audiences totaling over 50,000. There has been highly favorable coverage in major and local papers throughout the country. It is estimated that upwards 8 million Americans have read about the program in print media and that annual TV exposure is as high as 25 million. And letters from appreciative listeners indicate that AA is achieving its desired recognition as an organization concerned about and contributing to both youth and culture.