

## HISTORY OF THE DOCENT PROGRAM

In 1970, as budget cuts began to eliminate teaching positions and programs in the arts in schools, the Junior League of Chicago began a Music Docent Project (docent, from the Greek meaning "guide"). This project was designed to train volunteers to visit classrooms and prepare school children for the experience of attending the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Youth Concerts, focusing especially on the development of listening skills. The volunteers usually have a teaching and/or music background. The Docent Program was created in cooperation with pianist and music educator Emma Endres Kountz, who led the training for the first five years. In 1974 the Junior League turned the project over to The Women's Association.

Initially, docent training consisted of a 12-week course, during which Mrs. Kountz gave lectures in music fundamentals as well as specific preparation for the Youth Concerts. The docent course has evolved through the years into its current format of a lecture series for the training of docents. There are usually two lectures per Youth Concert. One lecture is devoted to each of the Youth Concert Programs, to familiarize the docents with the music being performed at the concert and to give the docent a choice of material to present in the classroom. The second session focuses on teaching techniques. This session has traditionally included demonstrations by experienced docents. Both of these lectures are led by noted musicologists and educators from outstanding universities and colleges in the Chicago area. The docent demonstrations are a very important aspect of the training process for new docents, because prior to serving a school, every new docent must give a ten-minute demonstration for a committee which includes the docent chairman, selected experienced docents, and an Education Department staff member.

The Docent lectures examine the Youth Concert programs in some depth. Lecturers relay fairly sophisticated musical material to the docents, thereby enhancing the docents' listening skills and musical knowledge. The docents in turn are expected to distill what they have learned, and incorporate appropriate learning tools in order to most effectively convey the material to the school audiences. Resources such as Youth Concert program notes, cassette tapes, and photographs of Orchestra Hall are available for the docents to use in the schools.

Docents are assigned to schools who have requested assistance with concert preparation. They visit their assigned schools shortly before the schools' concert date. Docents are normally assigned to two schools and speak to from 60 to 100 children per school. Presentations are about 45 minutes in length and are given in a classroom to approximately 25-30 children at a time. On the morning that the school which a docent has visited attends the Youth Concert, the docent meets the children at Orchestra Hall and sits with them during the concert. Many docents have commented that through teaching children to listen better, their own listening skills and musical enjoyment have increased tremendously. Docents tend to return year after year to the same schools, thereby developing a relationship with both the teachers and children. Today there are

over sixty volunteer docents who annually visit almost 200 schools, serving over 10,000 children.

Youth Concerts are currently entering their 74th year. Two series of Youth Concerts are presented during the school year for students in grades 4-8. Each series consists of eight concerts; each concert lasts about 45 minutes. Selections for the concerts usually are shorter works or excerpts from longer works. Narration from the stage, either by the conductor or from an additional person, is employed to more fully engage the students in the concert experience. Concerts tend to be based around a particular theme, such as Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, or Musical Style. Young soloists frequently perform on Youth Concert programs; often these young performers are winners of previous season's Illinois Young Performers Competition. Orchestra Hall seats 2,590 and is typically sold out for all Education Concerts. Children come from all over Chicago and the surrounding metropolitan area, and some from as far away as Wisconsin and Indiana. Each year there is a long waiting list for schools who would like to attend these concerts.

Henry Mazer conducted the Youth Concerts from 1970 - 1986. Through the 1991 - 1992 season, Chicago Symphony Orchestra Associate Conductor Kenneth Jean and Assistant Conductor Michael Morgan were the Youth Concert and Very Special Promenades Concert Conductors. They are both very dedicated to the musical education of young people, and their dedication and interest have helped to make Youth Concerts the tremendous success they are today.

In 1987, the Docent Program was expanded to include the Very Special Promenades (VSP) Concerts, designed for students in Grades Kindergarten through three, with special provisions for students with disabilities. The concerts usually combine a visual element such as dance or mime with the Orchestra; VSP concerts serve as an introduction to music for primary-age students. Docent training for VSP concerts is modeled after Youth Concert Docent training, with modifications for the younger age of the children and the less technical focus of the concerts.

[Note: This "history" is from the original Docent Manual. An updated version is in process.]