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Young Audiences, Inc., celebrates 20 years

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Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Young Audiences, Inc., celebrates 20 years" (1971). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 25384.
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YOUNG AUDIENCES, INC.,
CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

Missoula--

Sunday marks the 20th anniversary of Young Audiences, Inc., and the beginning of the first National Young Audiences Week.

Young Audiences, Inc., was organized in 1951 to raise money for music education programs in elementary schools throughout the country. Today the organization's chapters reach nearly 3 million youngsters annually with specially developed dialogue techniques employing artists as teachers.

The Montana chapter, established in 1965, is headquartered at the University of Montana. At present three professional musical groups, the Montana String Quartet, the Montana Chamber Players and the Music Theater Quintet, belong to this chapter. Ensembles in Billings and Bozeman may also become members in the organization in the future.

According to Donald Carey, associate professor of music at UM and coordinator of the Montana chapter, the program reached more than 25,000 Montana children last year.

"The program is a teaching and learning experience, rather than an entertaining enterprise," Carey said.

In a letter to Young Audiences members, Leonard Bernstein, composer and former director of the New York Philharmonic, said, "For those of us who share the conviction that the arts are an essential part of education, the growing interest in the Young Audiences approach offers genuine encouragement for the future, especially at a time when the American school system is seeking ways to introduce the arts into existing curricula.

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Young Audiences programs are based on the idea that the best time to introduce children to serious music is while they are in grade school, according to John Lester, UM professor of music and director of the Music Theater Quintet. The Quintet, a vocal ensemble with a repertoire ranging from musical comedy to opera, performed 17 times for the Young Audiences program last year.

The musical groups encourage children to ask questions, make comments and participate actively in the programs.

Children are excited by music when introduced to it in such an informal atmosphere, Lester said.

"They don't know opera is boring," he said.

The national organization provided funds to begin the Montana chapter, which now receives support from the Montana Arts Council. Presently, Carey said, public schools are asked to match funds provided by the council, although the chapter intends to approach industry and private citizens for more support.

Nationally, the Young Audiences program has 40 affiliated chapters in 34 states.

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