

Creative Living

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DIA helps youngsters appreciate art

By Jeff Hoolan
special writer

EACH YEAR, hundreds of area school children head downtown on field trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Yet for every class that makes the trek, there are many more who can't due to lack of time, money or the distance involved. For many area teachers, the answer is simple: have the museum come to the school.

For 25 years, Art to the Schools has provided just such a service.

A volunteer committee of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Art to the Schools supplies area classrooms with free art appreciation talks based on the collections of the DIA.

Last year, 64 volunteers gave 1,129 talks to 35,745 students.

"Their function is to go out to schools all over the tri-county area and give art talks to fourth, fifth and sixth graders," said Jennie Williams, who works in the DIA Education Department and is staff liaison/adviser to Art to the Schools. "We've zeroed in on that age group as being the most receptive to our kind of talk."

EACH TALK lasts about an hour and is illustrated with slides and reproductions of works at the museum.

"They take what we call 'touchables' if they want to," Williams said. "We have art reproductions and some art materials like brushes that they can take in addition to their slides."

Some volunteers, like Philip Kanat, one of only two men currently active as speakers, prefer to keep things simple. "The only props I use are slides and my blackboard," the Southfield resident said.

"Slides are really the best way of getting a look at an art reproduction," Williams said. "The image is large and the volunteers work with a few well-chosen pieces that they like and that they feel comfortable with."

"But the real heart of the program is what we call the 'inquiry method,' not necessarily just talking 'at' kids about the slides and about art, but asking questions and drawing the information out of the kids, getting the kids to respond and really look at a work of art, maybe for the first time."

KANAT, at 75, often gives 2-3 talks a week. "The children have reacted the way I've wanted them to react. I've been able to get them to participate."

Art to the Schools offers such art subjects as American, African, Asian, Native American and, new this year, European.

Other topics include "The Ancient World," "Introduction to the Museum," "Art of our Time" (modern art) and "People of the World," a talk developed in response to the needs of social studies teachers.

"Throughout the year, American Art is our most popular talk because teachers see that it fits right into their curriculum," Williams said. "It goes right along with what they've been studying in American history, and gives them a chance to illustrate it with works of art."

Any teacher can request a talk, though most are art instructors, media specialists (librarians) and regular classroom teachers whose students are studying topics such as history, social studies and even language arts.

"Quite often, the volunteers will bring a list of terms or write art terms on the board so that the kids are learning new words that can key in with their study of language arts," Williams said.

ART TO the Schools was formed in the early 1960s by the Junior League of Detroit. By 1965-66, the Junior League joined with the DIA's Founder's Society. The Founder's Society took full responsibility the next year.

What sets Art to the Schools apart from similar programs is the amount of training each volunteer must complete to begin visiting classrooms.

"The volunteers train together with the docents who give the tours in the building," Williams said. "They have the same training, which is art historical. It's like an art history course from cave art to contemporary art. It lasts one school year, September through May."

The class, open to the public, is taught at the DIA one morning a week for two hours. The volunteers must pay tuition, refunded upon successful completion of the course.

The volunteers have access to something that the public does not have access to, Williams said. "It's a special class, just for the trainees, where they'll go around to the galleries and actually look at examples of things they've been seeing in slides — some behind-the-scenes tours."

"They'll also get very special training on how to talk to kids — how to get across this information to kids — techniques of touring and speaking about art."



Art to the Schools volunteer Cynthia Synder (center) of West Bloomfield shows students at St. John Lutheran School in Rochester an example of Native American beadwork.

THE PROGRAM challenges volunteers with training. Williams feels is on par with college-level courses.

"I would urge people to volunteer for the program. It would certainly be a great help to the community and the museum and it is a marvelous learning experience," Kanat said.

Elaine Redmond, a former school teacher who has been with program for six years, agrees. "This program is so nice because you get back so much from it," the Birmingham resident said. "You give your time and you have to train for a year at the museum. It's a big commitment, but at the same time, you're learning so much and because you're down at the museum, you're right there in the heart of things."

In addition to their love of art, another trait that all the volunteers share is a fondness for the kids in the classrooms. "I've been able to provoke them enough to develop their interest in the museum. And of course, I see my role as simply to stimulate them," Kanat said. "They're good kids. They're kids who are 10, 11 and 12

years old, and they're marvelous to work with at that stage."

"I TRY and relate the objects I show the children to their lives," Redmond said. "They're so used to seeing images on television and in books and magazines, yet they never get to see the real thing."

"Many schools have a regular program of bringing their students down to the museum. But there are hundreds and hundreds of schools, where for whatever reason, the children do not get a chance to come to the museum. Those are the kids I want to reach."

Past and present Art to the Schools volunteers will reunite at the Roosterfest in Detroit in June for a special celebration. Yet as the program prepares to celebrate its 25th year, many are concerned, state budget cuts now under consideration may bring an end to the program.

"We really have no idea what's going to happen if we have a cut-back," Williams said. "If we lose all of our state funding, which provides half of our budget, we would have to close down. I don't know what that would mean for the (Art to the

Schools) program."

"There are only two staff members who work with Art to the Schools, yet by using volunteer labor, we're able to reach 35,000 children annually. Teachers will say over and over again, 'The kids wouldn't have any other exposure like this to the arts if it weren't for your program.'"

"It's been wonderful for the kids to come down to the museum and see everything for free," Redmond

said. "But now when I go in the schools, I tell them to hurry down and see because it may turn into this huge warehouse for art and the public may not be able to go in."

"If this is taken away, it's going to be heartbreaking."

To become a volunteer with Art to the Schools, call Jennie Williams in the DIA's Department of Education at 833-7977 or program assistant Dana Lee at 833-7883.

Volunteers play key part

The week of April 21-27 is National Volunteer Week. But the volunteers at the Detroit Institute of Arts are recognized as special every day.

For more than 28 years, this group of volunteers has played an integral role in museum operations. Numbering 500 men and women, they give more than 58,000 hours of service each year in a number of ways.

They work with children in their schools and at the museum, helping

increase their involvement and interest in art.

They serve visitors by giving tours, answering questions in the galleries and by furnishing general information at information desks.

They also handle sales in the museum shop, decorate the public spaces, assist office staff and extend museum services into the community.

To join the volunteer committee of the DIA, call the auxiliary services department: 833-0247.

Under the stars

DSO, Meadow Brook team up for 15 concerts

The 28th annual Meadow Brook Music Festival, with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in residence, begins Friday, June 14, and continues through Aug. 11.

New this year for the seven-week, 15-concert series will be the presentation of two distinct DSO programs on each of two nights during the seven weeks.

Each week the two programs will be altered slightly to include either different works or guest soloists. Conductors for the two weekly programs will remain the same.

There will be a special July 4 celebration with concert and fireworks. DSO music director Neeme Jarvi will conduct two weeks of concerts. Special guest conductors include James DePreist, Leslie B. Dunner, Jahja Ling, Bobby McFerrin (conductor and vocalist), Mitch Miller and Yuri Temirkanov.

Jarvi will be on the podium the first two weeks. Civil War historian and Abraham Lincoln scholar Shelby Foote, will narrate Copland's "Lincoln Portrait" on Friday and Sunday, June 14-16. Both concerts will include works by Ives, Schumann, Dvorak and Sibelius.

THE SECOND week of concerts with Jarvi will have a strong local as well as American focus.

On Thursday, June 20, there will be a world premiere of a violin concerto by Stanley Hollingsworth of the Oakland University faculty with DSO concertmaster Emmanuelle Boissvert as soloist.

Pianist Louis Lort will make his debut with the DSO on Saturday, June 22, performing the Grieg Piano Concerto on a program that includes



Neeme Jarvi
DSO conductor

works by Khachaturian and Mendelssohn.

McFerrin, a Grammy-award-winning crossover artist, will conduct on Thursday, July 18, and Saturday, July 20. In the first, he will conduct Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 and then vocally perform the solo violin part of the Bach Concerto for Violin I in minor.

In the second concert, in addition to the Beethoven Symphony, McFerrin will perform one of the solo parts to the Vivaldi Concerto for Two Mandolins with a DSO violinist.

McFerrin, known as one of the greatest jazz singers since Ella Fitzgerald, made his conducting debut with the Boston Pope Orchestra and, with the aid and coaching of renowned conducting teacher Gustav Meier, now dedicates four to six weeks each year to leading major

symphony orchestras.

WHEN CLEVELAND Orchestra resident conductor Jahja Linga conducts on Friday, July 26, the soloist will be 13-year-old violin virtuoso Leila Josefowicz, performing the Saint-Saens Violin Concerto No. 3.

Pianist Ivan Moravec, performing the Ravel Piano Concerto in G Major will be the guest when Linga conducts on Sunday, July 28.

Stars of the New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre will be the guest artists for the final concert of the season conducted by Leslie B. Dunner on Friday, Aug. 9, and Sunday, Aug. 11. Both evenings will conclude with fireworks.

Other special guests will be James

Tocco, pianist, performing works by Leonard Bernstein on Thursday, June 27, and Florence Quivar, mezzo-soprano, performing Bernstein works on Saturday, June 29, with DePreist conducting both concerts.

Nikolai Petrov, pianist will be the soloist on Saturday, July 6. Viktor Tretyakov, violinist, will be featured on Sunday, July 7, when Temirkanov conducts two all-Russian programs.

For a copy of the Meadow Brook brochure and order form, call 377-2010 or write Meadow Brook Music Festival Box Office, Oakland University, Rochester, 48309-4401. Single tickets go on sale at Ticket-Master outlets beginning May 17 and at the Meadow Brook box office on June 1.

Apprentice auditions set

The Michigan Opera Theatre has scheduled vocal auditions for the 1991-92 Young Artist Apprentice Program on Thursday and Friday, May 9-10.

Two apprenticeships will be awarded, each lasting 8-12 weeks. Winners will be considered for programs beginning in September and April 1992.

The apprentice program offers a wide range of performance opportunities throughout the mainstage season. Apprentices perform complementary (secondary) roles, cover major roles and participate in the chorus of mainstage productions.

When not rehearsing or performing, apprentices are individually coached by the resident music

staff. They also participate in master classes under the tutelage of internationally acclaimed singers, directors and conductors from the current Michigan Opera Theatre season.

Interested applicants must submit a cover letter, resume, an 8-by-10-inch black and white glossy photo and two letters of recommendation from professional sources by May 1 to Dee Dorsey, Production and Audition Coordinator, 6519 Second Avenue, Detroit 48202.

Applicants for production apprenticeships will also be considered at this time. For more information on either program, call 874-7850.

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