

Junior Philharmonic: Cultural Coup for the Cream of the Crop



—Staff Photo by C.E. Bennett

JUNIOR PHILHARMONIC AUDITION WINNERS (from left) nine-year student Jane Cerise, 12, who will dance to John Lanchberry's "In Nature's Garden"; six-year piano student Susie Kesler, 16, who will perform Mendelssohn's "Hunting Song" and Copland's "The Cat and the Mouse"; vocalist Karen Murphy, 17, who will sing among other selections Mozart's "Voi che sapete" (from "Le Nozze di Figaro"); 12-year piano

student Esther Luck, 18, whose repertoire will include Scarlati's "Sonata in A Major," and Mary Lynn Lobello, 17, an eight-year dance student and member of Crescent City Ballet who will dance to Mendelssohn's "On Wings of Song." Not pictured is pianist Gregory Grimaud of Alexandria who will perform a rondo from Spindler's "Sonatina" among other selections.

By SUZANNE STOUSE

When the Dixon Hall curtain rises at 10:45 next Saturday morning on the 135th performance of the Junior Philharmonic Society, New Orleans audiences might well be getting the chance to see young Margot Fonteyns, Vladimir Horowitzes or Beverly Sillses in the making.

For the list of illustrious local alumni of Junior Philharmonic — the late baritone-bass Norman Treigle and soprano Jo Ann Yockey for openers — is indeed impressive.

In fact, "It would be impossible to name all of the Junior Philharmonic successes — they are legion," says Margery (Mrs. William S.) Dean, long-time board member and corresponding secretary of the organization. "We have to acknowledge all the fine singers, dancers and instrumentalists who have gone forth far and wide, teaching, performing and dispersing musical happiness everywhere — because that's what Junior Philharmonic's all about."

A non-profit organization formed in the '30s even before the New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony was in existence, as an offshoot of the Philharmonic Society (then the only group in the city bringing professional music into New Orleans) and incorporated in 1948, the purposes of the Junior Philharmonic Society of New Orleans are "to afford talented students of music and dance the opportunity to perform in a professional atmosphere before representative audiences, and to teach music appreciation to the non-performer."

This season, for the first time in 27 years of concerts at the Newcomb College hall, the Junior Philharmonic will sponsor its three Saturday morning "Programs for Young People by Young People" (presented by performers through the age of 18, scheduled in addition to this Saturday on November 15 and January 31) and evening "Young Artists" (for performers 18-25 years old, set for next April 30) concert and award and scholarship program free to the public.

"We've realized that the big thing is to increase the audiences for the performances," says JP president Ruth (Mrs. Richard) Wartelle, "and through the generosity of our membership we've been able to do away with the children having to sell tickets. One of the most important aims of JP is that the performers have a large, responsive audience, and we think this way we can get more mothers to bring their children in."

The annual spring auditions for JP, judged by university

music and dance faculty members as well as outstanding local artists, are open "to any talented young person, who is usually sponsored by his music or dance teacher, although this is not a requirement," says Mrs. Wartelle. "There are no age limits—we've had them as young as 6 years — if the talent's there, the age doesn't matter. There are no geographic limitations either, although we usually receive auditioners from Louisiana and the surrounding states because of the students' proximity to us."

Enthusiasm runs high within the ranks of JP, which include a large number of teachers of music and dance, several of whom are past audition winners themselves. Indeed, "Some of our present board members have been dedicated for 20 years or more, so convinced of the value of the organization," says Mrs. Dean.

Relative "newcomer" (on the board three years) Grace (Mrs. Kenneth) Newburger, who serves as JP patron chairman, is particularly impressed with the fact that "it's such a feather in a child's cap to be able to say that he's won a competition that is so well respected. It makes him feel that those eight or however long years of practice have been worth it. In many cases, performing with the JP is only the beginning of their careers — there are of course the success stories like Treigle and Yockey and Ann Field Gardener, who danced with the American Ballet, and many have chosen to join the symphony here."

The best spokesmen of all for JP, however, are the audition winners themselves, among them 17-year-old Mary Lynn Lobello, an eight-year student of instructor Pat Leclercq who will dance on Saturday to Mendelssohn's "On Wings of Song": "Being chosen is quite an honor, when you consider that the judges don't have to choose anyone if they don't think we're good enough. To have the experience and exposure a competition like this provides is terrific."

Saturday morning's concert, for which the winners have been in preparation since the auditions last March, will spotlight the talents of those young musicians and dancers the judges have deemed the cream of the crop, and the program should indeed include something to suit the musical tastes of everybody — Copland, Mendelssohn, Bach, Mozart . . . And thrown in as lagniappe "to add a little spice," says Mrs. Wartelle, a guest performance by pianist Bill Langdon and banjo player Bruce O'Neil, who'll perform selections of "Riverboat Ragtime."