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Pine Belt

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Program brings art of orchestra to local classrooms

By Greg Waxberg

American Correspondent

School met symphony Thursday as students from nine Mississippi schools had the opportunity to perform with the University of Southern Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jay Dean.

The two concerts were part of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute Communities LinkUP! Program, which fosters collaborations between orchestras and local school districts, specifically students in fourth through sixth grades.

"We work with each location to make sure that the way the program is implemented meets the local needs," said Hollis Headrick, director of

the Weill Music Institute.

Carnegie Hall's LinkUP!, in its 21st year, teaches musical concepts to students in the New York area, and this is the second year for the Communities program. The Mississippi Arts Commission helped make the opportunity possible, through its Whole Schools Initiative.

Whole Schools is a statewide arts education program.

"Its overall goal is to make the arts available to all students and to teach teachers to integrate the arts into the total curriculum, thus reaching and teaching the 'whole' child," said Judi Holifield, Whole Schools Initiative Director for the Mississippi Arts Commission.

The Whole Schools include

Sacred Heart in Hattiesburg, Nora Davis Magnet School in Laurel and Picayune Junior High. According to Headrick, almost 2,000 students in Mississippi are involved, out of 24,000 around the country.

"It's a fantastic way for students to have an experience on the university campus. It may be eye-opening," Headrick said. "For the campus itself, to have a community link with young people in their area is a really nice partnership."

Holifield wrote a proposal for Carnegie Hall to bring LinkUP! to Mississippi. The students have been learning about melody for 36 weeks, with help from teachers and textbooks, and each child received a soprano recorder.

"A music education benefits

children in ways that enable them to listen, question, create, perform and reflect. Thursday's concert will ... involve them in the experience of a lifetime, playing music with a symphony orchestra," Holifield said.

During the concert, the students sat in the audience and played along during many of the pieces, with an onstage leader. The program included Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture," most of Rossini's "William Tell Overture," the second movement of Dvorak's "New World" symphony and a recorder concerto written for the concert.

■ Greg Waxberg is music director of Mississippi Public Broadcasting Radio and a freelance writer covering the arts.



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Caroline McGinnis, left, and Ray Brown, from Poplar Springs Elementary School, play their flutes as part of the Communities LinkUP! program based on Carnegie Hall's program that tries to strengthen relationships between orchestras and their local schools and communities.