

MUSIC: YOUNG PERFORMERS HEAD EAST

Greeting the world with music

CONCERT ON THE LAWN

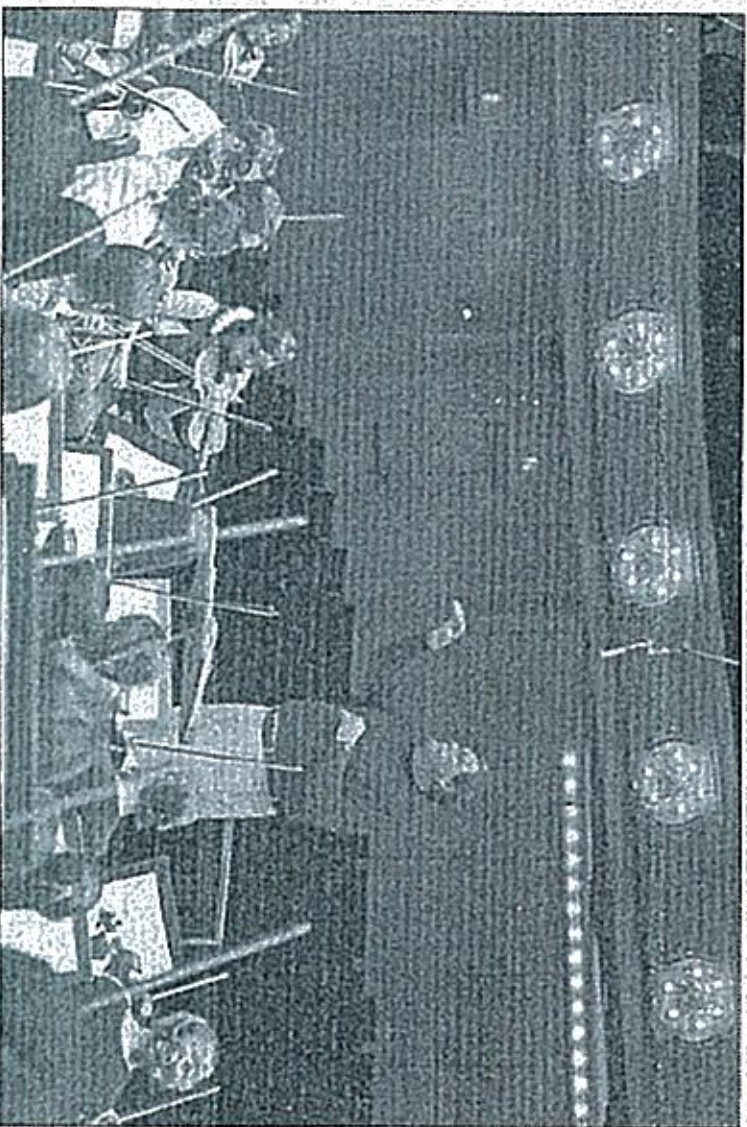
Midwest Young Artists Center in Ft. Sheridan, 878 Lyster Road, Highwood, 3 p.m., Sunday, July 22. Free. Lawn chairs, picnic baskets and blankets encouraged. Concessions available. (847) 926-9398. www.mya.org

By **AMY GAIL HANSEN** | *Contributor*

They claim love is the international language. But music is just as powerful at uniting cultures, say students of Midwest Young Artists, a youth ensemble music program in Highwood.

Once again, a group of these young musicians will travel abroad to share their talents with the world, setting off July 24 for a 19-day tour of China and Korea. "We take what we love to do, what our gifts are, and share them with other people in other cultures," explained Allan Dennis, MYA director and founder. "By doing that, we hope to bridge the issues our country faces."

The organization offers stu-



Allan Dennis, Midwest Young Artists director and founder, conducts one of many rehearsals he requires of his musicians.

dents from 2nd to 12th grade an opportunity to study music by participating in five youth

orchestras, more than 60 chamber music ensembles, three choral groups, an all-inclusive

jazz program, and classes in music theory and history. Dennis, who taught and conducted

for many years at the university level, created Midwest Young Artists in 1993 after local parents asked him to teach music to their children. Today, the 600 students involved in MYA are serious musicians.

Living music

Students are taught to value practice, to never cease trying to master their craft. Music is not just a hobby; it's a lifestyle. Many MYA students go on to study at Harvard, Yale and prestigious conservatories. Despite the prestige and talent of the group, there are no divas among them. "The whole atmosphere of the program is non-competitive. Even though these kids could be acting like they're hot shots, they aren't," notes Adam Kromelow, 18, of Wilmette. "We're just happy to be playing music together."

Sharing music with others is a component of the program. High school age students travel internationally every three years and within the United States. See **MUSIC**, page B7

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States in the years between. This year's "Silk Road" includes stops in six cities, with performances in venues like the Seoul Arts Center and Shanghai Concert Hall. "The purpose of the trip is musical, but it's also civic," said Dennis. "Other people see one-on-one with great students we

have and what a great country we are from, how we care about other countries," he explained. "They see that we are deeply interested in better understanding their cultures; we're not just ready to pull the trigger at any moment."

World vision

In past years, these international tours sent students to Portugal, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and

Sweden. This year's tour through a predominately Asian population will be more eye-opening, said Dennis, as students learn firsthand what it's like to be a minority.

The experience is sure to prepare them for college and adulthood. "These students with multi-varied experiences are better able to get along and find out what they need to do to fit into this society," Dennis explained.

As a jazz pianist, Kromelow

expects to benefit from the jaunt through China and Korea. A recent New Tier High School graduate, he's heading to the Manhattan School of Music in the fall, and is really excited about playing jazz outside of the U.S., particularly in Asia, where, he understands, the genre is very popular.

Before embarking on their journey, the MYA orchestra will perform a Ravioli-like "Concert on the Lawn" on Sunday

outside their Fort Sheridan center. The concert will feature the tour repertoire, including classical favorites, jazz standards and vocals from the MYA chorale.

The home concert is also about community, about celebrating a program that showcases the power of music. "Getting all the parents and friends, all the people involved in MYA together for this concert is really meaningful," said Kromelow. "It will be a nice send-off."