Young Concert Artist Event Brings Extraordinary Talent to Ames Every Year

As the audience settled into their seats at MacKay Auditorium for the Young Concert Artist (YCA) program on Nov. 8, 1974, none of them could have known they were about to hear a man who would become one of the greatest pianists of the 21st century: Emanuel Ax, then just 25 and in the early stages of his remarkable career.

Tickets were free for Iowa State University (ISU) students, $1 for youth 18 and under, and $2 for adults. (There is no official record of how many leisure suits were worn, but one can be sure it was too many.)

Dr. William David, assistant chair of the ISU music department and an ISU piano professor, had been at ISU just two years in 1974 and helped host the young Ax. “He had just won the Rubenstein Competition in Israel,” David says. “He was barely older than I and equally immature. I don’t remember what he played, but I do remember him calling his teacher immediately after the concert to tell him how it went.”

In the years since, Ax has gone on to win seven Grammy® Awards for chamber music (often collaborating with cellist Yo-Yo Ma) and instrumental soloist performances. He appeared at Stephens Auditorium with Yo-Yo Ma on April 26, 1996.

Now on the faculty at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, Ax credits the Young Concert Artists organization for helping to launch his concert career.

“Young Concert Artists is the most wonderful start to any musician’s life,” he said. “The young musician needs concert experience and must be able to ‘practice’ this constantly. This is something that YCA provides in abundance.”

The YCA series was originally sponsored in central Iowa by the ISU Music Council. Since 1999, YCA concerts have been presented by the Performing Arts Series at Stephens Auditorium as part of the Martha-Ellen Tye Performing Arts Institute, supported by an endowment established by a long-time Marshalltown resident (see page 14 for more information).

Each fall, we bring a YCA artist to Ames for a week. In addition to performing in a concert venue, typically the Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall on the ISU campus, the artist spends time with community groups, works with students in area schools and may offer master classes for advanced students.

“We really enjoy working with the young artists and facilitating their involvement in the Ames community while they are here,” says Sara Compton, Outreach Coordinator for the Iowa State Center. “It’s such a great opportunity for schoolchildren who may be just starting to learn an instrument—they can interact with an amazing young musician.”

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The artists are chosen through a rigorous international audition process, and YCA encompasses a variety of instruments and voice and chamber groups. There is no specified limit to the number of winners. The only criteria are extraordinary talent, technique, and impact upon the listener.

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YCA audition winners are provided the opportunity to perform in concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Winners are also provided with an artistic manager who helps to promote the artist through booking concert engagements in the United States and abroad, and by providing publicity materials, promotion, and career development. In short, Young Concert Artists does everything possible to open the doors to the international concert world, all at no cost to the artists.

This fall, the Iowa State Center hosted Chinese pianist Chu-Fang Huang as the 2010 Young Concert Artist in residence. She burst onto the concert scene in 2005 as a finalist in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and a winner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition. In 2006, Ms. Huang was named a Winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions and was awarded the Mortimer Levitt Piano Chair of YCA.

Be sure to keep an eye out for next year’s Young Concert Artist at the Iowa State Center. You may never have a better opportunity to catch a rising star at the start of an extraordinary career in the performing arts!

**More artists you may have heard first in Ames...**

- Christopher O’Riley, pianist
- Ani Kavafian, violinist
- Ida Kavafian, violinist
- Ursula Oppens, pianist
- Beverly Hoch, soprano
- Chantal Julliet, violinist
- Catrin Finch, harpist
- Daniel Phillips, violinist