

My

“Love

Affair”

with Young Audiences:



The Bonds of Friendship

By Anne Straus

Introduction

Anne Straus is a board member emeritus of Young Audiences, Inc. She has been associated with Young Audiences for many years, and worked with the founding board members and with all five of the organization's executive directors. From the 1960s, Anne was actively involved with the national office's fund raising efforts, conference planning and board expansion. She served on several board committees, was co-chair of the Network Policy committee and was secretary of Young Audiences national board of directors. She had the distinction of never having missed a national board meeting. Anne grew up in Montgomery, Alabama and studied at Sophie Newcombe College in New Orleans. Her husband, John W. Straus, was the trustee on many boards and was the former Vice President for the Arts at the State University of N.Y. at Purchase. For over fifty years they shared an involvement in the arts, education and academia. They raised three children and have several grandchildren.

Several months ago, David A. Dik, asked me to write a memoir about the beginning days of Young Audiences as I am the last living original board member. What you read below is a short narrative of my long involvement with Young Audiences that has lasted almost half a century.

My association with the organization began when my husband John and I were building our very unusual modern house in Pound Ridge, NY, that was surrounded by a 125-acre parcel of land that included a large lake. The house was designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes in 1949. The model of the house is on display in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Our neighbors, Sampson R. Field (who was the head of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts at the time) and Miriam Field lived nearby and they walked over one day, introduced themselves, and invited us over for dinner. This was the beginning of a long friendship. Miriam was an intellectual who loved painting and the fine arts and built an eclectic collection of art ranging from the 18th century to modern times. She frequently presented recitals in her home and was always invested in the arts. We connected over our shared interest of the arts and music. Soon after our friendship began, Miriam asked me to become a board member of Young Audiences. Sampson would later propose that I become a board member of the New York Philharmonic Symphony Society.

From the beginning, I was actively involved in board committees, specifically the public relations, chapter relations, finance and membership subcommittees. I faithfully attended all of the National Conferences until I resigned and became an Emeritus board member. I was very interested in the expansion and development of the network.

I participated in regional conferences and many chapters asked me to attend their board meetings and their benefits. I also attended other national



Martin Segal, Miriam Field, John W. Straus, Anne Straus

arts-in-education organizations' conferences and galas. Sometimes chapters holding regional and national meetings would ask me to come two or three days before the event to help them organize their benefits. I was the Chairman of the National Chapter Relations Committee for many years and reported on chapter affairs at National board meetings. My husband, John, went to meetings with me and we hosted many dinners for Chapter Chairmen and staff members at our apartment. I also cultivated prospective board members and invited them to see a Young Audiences program at a school. After the school visit, no one could ever leave without signing on, they were always impressed.

I have to mention my involvement in federal grants for educational programs and the one that best comes to mind is the National Endowment for the Arts. YA's executive director had applied for an NEA Challenge Grant to fund YA chapter programs. At that time, Nancy Hanks was the first chairman of the NEA (1969-1977) and Young Audiences received a very generous grant. The YA artists and schools involved let the parents know about the awards. When Nancy Hanks asked members of the board and I to attend the ceremony for the NEA grant awardees, we presented her with a grocery cart filled with dollar bills, and 450 checks ranging in size from \$2.50 to \$30,000 totaling \$220,240! The money was raised by YA chapters in only three weeks' time to match a \$161,000 grant being offered by the Endowment. These donations had been sent in by parents and schoolchildren across the country who had participated in Young Audiences programs in their schools. During that event, Nancy Hanks and I became sufficiently well acquainted that she always recognized me and John when we were invited to Washington, D.C. on behalf of many organizations.

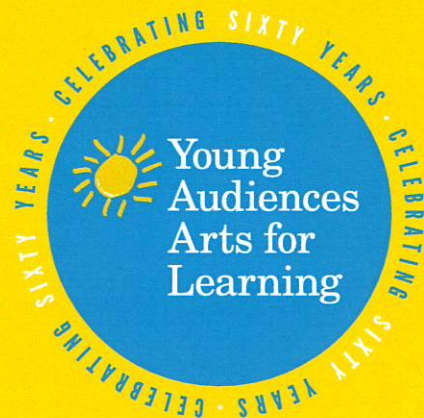


Nancy Hanks, Anne Straus, and Beatrice Duggan with shopping cart filled with donations.

I loved to call on prospective granters at their offices. I've been lucky because my husband had given me entree to many organizations but I only called on those I knew personally. I would talk about the merits of YN.s proposals. I enjoyed the give and take between the potential funder and the staff member who went with me, usually the executive director. And I always followed up with a hand written thank you letter. I liked the challenges of fund raising, you had to keep up the momentum because you win some, lose others.

I think Young Audiences means "friendships" to me! I can't "count the ways" as Emily Dickinson says. There were friendships with National and Chapter board members, national staff, and with many artists. I have gotten to know some of them very well. Among these, I would name Peter Serkin, Fred Sherry, Isaac Stern, Susan and Charles Wadsworth, Pierre Boulez, Richard Goode, Billy Taylor, Celeste Holm, and Wynton Marsalis.

"I think Young Audiences means "friendships" to me and I am so proud to be associated with so many talented and brilliant people."



My closest musician friend has been the clarinetist, Richard Stoltzman. For 50 years, he has stayed in my apartment whenever he comes to New York. I first met Richard when he was a Program Director on the national staff and was responsible for visiting YA's West Coast chapters. We see each other on our mutual birthdays, July 12th and telephone or correspond regularly. My living room became a haven for relaxed rehearsals. John would eavesdrop from the stairs or library, just as he had done as a young boy in his parent's home, reveling in the sounds of music being discussed, dissected, and perfected. The Guarneri, Amadeus, Tokyo Quartets, The Tashi ensemble, Richard Goode, Peter Serkin and many more took the stage at our Park Avenue apartment. On one delightful occasion, Richard Stoltzman, Peter Serkin, Fred Sherry, and Ida

Kafavian performed the "Quartet for the End of Time" by Messiaen. Richard Stoltzman played "Amazing Grace" at my husband John's memorial service. That is love and friendship. I am so happy that he performed at the Young Audiences' 60th Anniversary Gala on November 15.

Many years ago, I wrote a book titled *Wildflowers* that documented all the flowers growing in my garden. It was published by Doubleday. Each year, I write a memoir or a diary of some aspect of my life and share it with my family. I am proud to be associated with Young Audiences and I am so pleased to have been asked to write about my experiences and friendships, so that I can share them with the Young Audiences community.

The Young Audiences Arts for Learning National Board, Staff, and the entire YA Network thank Anne Straus for her years of hard work, commitment and most importantly for her friendship.

Anne Straus with Richard Stoltzman