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Pride of New York City WPA: A 95-Man Symphony Orchestra



*WPA's pride: New York City Symphony
... conducted by Jean Paul Morel*

To the Federal Works Project Administration, New York City is a 49th "state," for, like each of the 48 states, it is a separate WPA unit, contributing 25 per cent of the funds spent in its area. And in this capacity it sponsors the most extensive musical organization ever assembled in one city: two symphony and eight dance orchestras, two bands, two choral groups and three ensembles employing some 500 musicians, not to mention 96 music centers with 188 teachers instructing 22,000 students.

But of all its music groups, the project's pride is the New York City Symphony Orchestra. Into its ranks go the 95 most proficient of the 500 musicians admitted, after stringent auditions, from the relief rolls. Paid the standard WPA musician pay of \$87.60 a month, many of them are old-timers with years of experience in symphonies here and abroad. Though the orchestra labors under the disadvantage of constant personnel changes (every eighteen months men in WPA jobs must quit for a month and look for regular work), capacity audiences turn out for the Sunday-night Carnegie Hall concerts at prices ranging from 28 cents to \$1.10.

These concerts are now in their second season. Last year major guest artists like Elisabeth Rethberg, Lauritz Melchior, and Albert Spalding were featured. This year the spotlight has been turned on the younger American artists—Susanne Fisher, soprano, Douglas Stanbury, baritone, and Edward Kilenyi, pianist, among others—and major conductors. (All guests receive identical payment—\$50 per concert.)

Last Sunday, Jean Paul Morel, former conductor of the Opéra-Comique and the Paris Symphony orchestra, led one of the season's outstanding programs that featured the Pittsburgh-born pianist Beveridge Webster as soloist. Morel's assignment to lead three New York City Symphony concerts was his first in this country, where he has taught conducting at Brooklyn College since 1939.

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