

# 17 Willowbrook residents entertain at Albany concert

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN  
Advance Staff Writer

ALBANY — Shaking tambourines and clapping hands, a chorus of 17 residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center put on a rousing concert here yesterday for an audience that included Mrs. Ethel Kennedy and her sister-in-law, Jean Kennedy.

"These kids love to perform," said David Bienstock, the chorus director, when the group finished its act at the Very Special Arts Festival held in the Empire State Plaza Concourse next to Capitol Building.

The Kennedys applauded vigorously as the chorus members, mostly in their mid-to-late-20s, sang a medley of numbers from "Fiddler on the Roof" and ended with a foot-stomping rendition of the show tune "Black Is White."

"It was wonderful, I enjoyed it more than anything I've seen today," Mrs. Ethel Kennedy told the Willowbrook members as they left the small concert stage.

The festival was sponsored by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, the state Education Department and a variety of other agencies and organizations. The Willowbrook residents were among several thousand handicapped "students" who sang, danced and gave demonstrations in theater, art and film.

As a part of the program, Gov. Carey issued an order establishing the Office of Advocate for the Disabled to coordinate state programs and policies for the disabled and the handicapped. He said he would set up a toll-free telephone service for those seeking information about

the programs available to the handicapped.

The order also established a State Advisory Council on the Disabled to work with the office. Carey said the council "would help the state to eliminate obstacles to dignity and achievement that the disabled may face as a result of a government and a society unaware of their needs."

Carey later played host to more than 200 of the Festival participants in the Executive Mansion.

The Willowbrook show also featured an uncannily accurate imitation of the Archie Bunker Show theme song, "Those Were the Days," by Joe Calamia, 30, and Mildred Dominguez, 23, both of whom are blind. "I know who Archie Bunker is," Calamia said later. "And I like him."

In another number, Amy Soto, who also is blind, played the piano while the other chorus members sang "Wish on a Rainbow." According to Bienstock, Amy learned the song herself and taught

it to the rest of the group.

"She has incredible musical talent," Bienstock said. "Once she hears a song, she can sit right down and play it. She has instant recall of all the parts to the music and the lyrics."

Amy's ability is all the more remarkable, Bienstock said, because three years ago she was considered to be an autistic, beyond communication. "If you touched her, she'd cringe and shy away," he explained. "The music helped to bring her out socially. Now she's growing every day."

At the end of the show, the chorus members stood up and introduced themselves. Asked who he was, Vito Balsano at first responded: "Frank Sinatra."

Another member said, "My name is Jan Maggio and I'm the best tambourine player in the world."