

The Metro Section

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Hottest Tickets Aren't for Pennant Race

By WINTER MILLER

Just after 7 a.m. yesterday, Wyatt Houston, a 9-year-old in a denim Winnie the Pooh jacket, was sprawled on a cushion on the pavement outside Avery Fisher Hall calculating math problems, waiting behind metal barricades with 2,000 other early risers.

At 8 a.m. the New York Philharmonic distributed free tickets to yesterday's rehearsal for last night's gala opening night concert with the cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Wyatt, however, who was there with his father and older brother to get a dose of culture, was not convinced that Mr. Ma was worth missing breakfast to see.

His place in line was a good 300 people behind Patricio Gallardo, who got there at midnight to claim the first spot, and like Wyatt, was doing math problems — albeit not at the third-grade level.

Mr. Gallardo, 24, who lives in Queens with his mother while preparing for graduate school, was boning up for the Graduate Record Examination, and has spent many predawn hours alone in the cool early morning air mastering math theorems.

The second spot in line was

claimed by Ronald Schvarzman, 29, an aspiring musician from Brooklyn, who arrived at 5:30 a.m. for the 9:45 a.m. performance.

Aside from a sprinkling of youthful faces and 40 children from a youth orchestra from South Korea, there was a somewhat predictable preponderance

The line formed at midnight, eight hours ahead of time.

of gray hair and balding heads for the Philharmonic's first offer of free tickets to a rehearsal.

The Metropolitan Opera started the trend with a free open house and dress rehearsal for "Madama Butterfly" last September and repeated the offer of free tickets for the final dress of "Lucia di Lammermoor" this year. The New York City Ballet followed suit in April, offering free tickets to the final dress rehearsal of "Romeo and Juliet."

Still, Zarin Mehta, the Philhar-

monic's president, pointed to a group of young people in line and said he was pleased with the turnout. "It's nonsense they're not interested in classical music if they don't come to the concerts," he said. "They have other things to do. Fact is, they are interested."

Although last night's event had been billed as sold out for nearly a week, some subscribers had returned tickets, and at midday there were two seats available, one for \$109 and the other for \$235, the highest price. Tickets to open rehearsals at the Philharmonic usually cost \$16.

Among those in line yesterday, including retirees visiting from Florida and those close enough to point to their apartment windows, there was general agreement that the main attraction luring them from their beds was the chance to see Mr. Ma.

Eunha Shim, 28, a postdoctoral student at Yale, rose at 3 a.m. to catch a train from New Haven because she could not afford a ticket but wanted to hear him perform. She said she listened to Mr. Ma. so frequently while writing her thesis, a topic she described



PATRICK ANDRADE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Yo-Yo Ma during a rehearsal yesterday for the New York Philharmonic's opening gala last night. Tickets to the rehearsal were free, drawing 2,000 people who began lining up hours early.

as "the epidemiology of rotavirus—well, basically, diarrhea," that she felt a close bond.

While many in line spoke of wanting to see firsthand Mr. Ma's passion, it was Mr. Gallardo who said it perhaps most poetically, "I

like to think that my wife is science and my lover is art. And I am here by my lover."

At intermission inside Avery Fisher Hall, after a standing ovation for Mr. Ma and the orchestra, Wyatt Houston was won over and

pronounced the concert "enjoyable."

While the crowds may have come for Mr. Ma, they stayed for the orchestra. As the program continued without him, most of the audience stayed put.