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Perlman Pleads for Arts Funds

By Ruth Dean
Washington Star Staff Writer

A surprise appearance by concert violinist Itzhak Perlman yesterday enlivened a House appropriations hearing considering the administration's 50 percent cut of the National Endowment for the Arts 1982 budget.

Perlman, whose metal hand-crutches are as familiar a sight to concertgoers and public television viewers as his violin, explained he was appearing "both as a musician and a handicapped person."

He told Rep. Sidney Yates, D-Ill., chairman of the Interior subcommittee that writes the appropriations bills for the arts and humanities, he was distressed that a program for "special constituencies" like his was eliminated when the NEA had to cut its original \$175 million 1982 budget request down to the \$88 million requested by the Reagan administration. The NEA special constituencies program urged compliance with regulations concerning access for the handicapped in arts facilities all over the nation.

The Israeli-born artist, whose witty off-stage interviews have charmed television viewers, told the committee: "As you all know, I play the violin, and in my free time, I have become almost an expert amateur architect." Whenever he hears a concert hall is being built or renovated, Perlman said he

talks to the architects and "we discuss what they're doing" about backstage and lavatory facilities.

"I've had more ramps and elevators named after me," he said, adding, "There are a lot of concert halls I don't play in because I don't want to put on two competing performances. Just imagine me going up the steps to the stage, and the audience thinking, 'Is he going to make it? Oops, he almost missed that one.' It distracts from my main performance."

The hearing was a love feast of praise for Livingston L. Biddle Jr.'s four-year term as NEA chairman, which expires in November. In fact, the confrontational aspect of former years seemed almost to be replaced by a friendly conspiracy.

The committee registered such dissatisfaction with the severity of the administration's cuts for the arts and humanities and its rationale for them, that Biddle's lame effort to give at least the appearance of defending the curtailed budget trailed off into a confession that he and the arts council had done so under protest. The committee also asked Biddle to submit sample budgets showing lesser budget reductions of 5, 10, 15 and 20 percent which it will ask the endowment to defend today.

Nor was chairman Yates impressed with the White House's announcement earlier this week of a task force on the arts and humanities, particularly since it contains no representation from Congress. "I would have thought they might have asked a senator and a member of the House to be on it," he said.

Yates suggested the task force "could be a mini-White House conference on the arts and humanities." He noted the "similarity of language" in the statement of goals for the task force in this week's White House announcement and a bill former Rep. John Brademas introduced two years ago to set up a White House conference on the arts. The Illinois Democrat thought it "strange" there was "no mention of funding for the task force" in view of the fact the original White House conference proposal carried a \$5 million price tag.

He said he was heartened by President Reagan's expression of concern that "our cultural institutions are an essential national resource, (that) must be kept strong." Added Yates, "I would hope President Reagan is as deeply devoted to the arts as his predecessor in office."