

ART OF PUPPETS AND MARIONETTES

Carnival of the Animals

Art Form: Theatre

Style: Contemporary/Classical

Culture: North American/Western European

MEET THE ARTIST:

Jim Gamble, founding director of the **Art of Puppets and Marionettes**, is an internationally respected puppet designer and performer known for his appealing productions and beautifully crafted puppets. His dynamic company, founded in 1972 and composed of accomplished puppeteers and puppet makers, has an eclectic repertoire that includes *Peter and the Wolf*, *Carnival of the Animals*, *The Nutcracker*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Tales of the Ashanti* and *Myths of the Aztecs*. Each production features familiar classical music or an original score. Strongly committed to education, the company performs in hundreds of California schools annually and in theatres and festivals throughout the U.S., Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In 2001, Jim Gamble was the only American to perform at the Obratsov Puppet Theatre in Moscow in celebration of 100 Years of Russian Puppetry. National appearances include the Children's Theatre Series in Hawaii and the International Children's Festival in San Diego. Among the company's many awards are the *Parents Choice* and *Golden Apple* awards for their video series, and the *President's Award* from the *Puppeteers of America*.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Camille Saint-Saëns' zoological fantasy, the *Carnival of the Animals*, comes to life on the puppet stage with Jim Gamble's spectacular puppet creations. This innovative puppet presentation highlights both the art of puppetry and the work of France's beloved 19th century classical composer. The performance, a whimsical study in transformation, uses the articles found in a child's room or objects seen through his window to create fanciful animals that relate to the individual thematic pieces of Saint-Saëns' music. *The Carnival of the Animals* (Le Carnaval des Animaux) is both a heart-warming and humorous blend of classical music and puppet theatre, and a reminder for students that art is made from the materials both in and of our lives.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Camille Saint-Saëns was born in Paris in 1835. Musically precocious, he began his long and extraordinary career at the age of 7 with the study of piano and harmony. His first compositions soon followed. By the time Saint-Saëns was 23, he had established himself as a composer and began a tenure of twenty years as organist for the Church of the Madeleine. Highly respected and prolific, his music ranged from amusing satire to symphonic poems, from opera to chamber music. Saint-Saëns, beloved for his musical productivity and exuberance for life, died at the age of 86.

Puppets have been part of many cultures throughout the world, though puppet theatre as we know it has its early roots in 17th century Italy. At that time, troupes of traveling actors used standard characters in their performances; those characters evolved into standard puppet characters. The most popular was Punchinello, a bragging, comic fellow who always made the audience laugh because of his clumsiness and foolishness. He became the Punch of Punch and Judy in the English puppet tradition, Guignol in the French, Kasperle to the Germans, and Karagoz in the Middle East, as well as the forerunner of the modern circus clown.

Although inanimate, puppets come to life through imaginative movement and sound. Derived from the Latin word "pupa," meaning girl or doll, puppets have long existed as an art form and vehicle for creative expression. There are many types of puppets and their names indicate the ways in which they operate. Hand puppets are manipulated by the puppeteer's hands, rod puppets are worked with rods, and shadow puppets work with the use of light and its projected shadow. The marionette, unique because it portrays the figure from head to toe, and moves very freely, was first used in Nativity Plays of the Middle Ages and is manipulated by a combination of strings or wires attached to a hand-held control above the figure.

Art of Puppets puppeteer Keith Wassmuth with Saint-Saëns!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite part in the Carnival of the Animals? Why?
- What kinds of feelings did you have as you watched the performance? Did the music help you to understand anything unusual or unique about the nature of the different animals?
- Were there selections of the music that seemed better suited to particular puppets? Why?
- Were there certain musical "themes" that occurred more than once or were repeated throughout the Carnival of the Animals?
- Could you make a puppet from objects that you have in your own room?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - VISUAL ARTS:

There are many different kinds of puppets. Some can be complex and hang from strings, while others can be fastened to sticks called rods. Some can be more simply made from socks, bandanas, gloves or paper bags, and all can include decorative materials such as scraps of cloth, paint, ribbons, yarn or buttons.

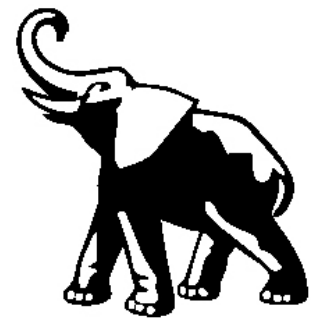
Using these or other puppet types, have students create a puppet that is an image of her or himself. Have a classroom puppet-making session and allow students the freedom to use any materials or puppet styles they want for their self-portraits. When their puppets are complete, ask students to introduce their self-portraits in a puppet show-and-tell. Students can also use their puppets in creating improvisations or scenes, or they can work independently to tell a story from their personal or family history. Students can work in groups to act out situations based on common experiences or on imaginative scenarios. Often puppet self-portraits become a tool for self-expression, enabling students to portray, reveal, or express what they might not ordinarily communicate. Puppets can also provide students with the opportunity to enact situations from their lives gaining insight into their own behavior.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Hold a storytelling hour with your class using some of their favorite folk tales, fairy tales, or contemporary literature. Ask students to select a character from one of the stories to make as a puppet. On a simple puppet stage or platform in the front of your class, have students use their puppets to pantomime the action of the story as you read along. Or, have students take on the voices of the puppet characters and bring the story to life in a puppet play.
- ▶ Camille Saints-Saëns composed the Carnival of the Animals for his family in 1886, but began composing as early as 1853. Research the music of this time period. Who were some other classical composers working during this same period? Was early classical music primarily a European genre? What are some of the other kinds of music that were developing or existed at this time?
- ⇒ Bring in recordings of musical selections from different genres of music. As you play each one, ask your students to freely move a puppet to the music. How do the differences in the rhythms, melodies and moods of the musical selections affect the movement of the puppets?
- 🌀 Play a recording of the Carnival of the Animals (length: 27 minutes) and have your students match the various animals to their musical themes. Select 2-3 selections to work with at one sitting.
Carnival of the Animals - Thematic Structure:
Introduction and Royal March of the Lion
Hens and Roosters
Wild Donkeys
Turtles and Tortoises
The Elephant
Kangaroos
The Aquarium
The Jackass
The Cuckoo
Birds; Pianists
Fossils
The Swan
The Finale



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- January, Brendan. *Amazing Mythology – A Book of Answers for Kids*. New York: Songstone Press, 2000.
- Stein, R. Conrad. *The Aztec Empire*. New York: Benchmark Books, 1996.
- Wood, Tim. *The Aztecs*. New York: Penguin Books. 1992.