

ART OF PUPPETS AND MARIONETTES

Peter and the Wolf

Art Form: Theatre
Style: Contemporary
Culture: Russian/American

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:

Peter and the Wolf is a 45-minute rod puppet production performed on a proscenium stage in a "curtain of light" format. Based on Prokofiev's famous musical work, Jim Gamble's production features a variety of three dimensional rod puppets portraying people, animals and animated instruments. The puppets appear at table height in clear view from all areas of the auditorium. The puppeteer, dressed in black, completely disappears behind the light curtain. This innovative style of puppet performance has rarely been seen in this country, making it an educational as well as entertaining experience for the students.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (1891-1953), was the leading Soviet composer of his time. His symphonic fairy tale, *Peter and the Wolf* ranks among the most popular compositions of the 1900s.

Peter and the Wolf is a work written specifically for children whose purpose was to introduce children to musical instruments. Prokofiev wanted a work whose contrasts would be easily understood by a child: a wolf - a bird, good - evil, something big - something small. Each character was to have its own "leitmotif," a recognizable tune associated with a character or idea in the story.

In composing the piece, Prokofiev used the usual string section - first and second violins, violas, violincellos and double basses. The wind instruments are a flute, an oboe, a clarinet and a bassoon. The horns are a trumpet, three French horns and a trombone. Two percussionists play all the instruments Prokofiev calls for; one plays the kettle drums, triangle, tambourine and cymbals; the second, the castanets, snare drum and bass drum. Prokofiev was writing for a small theatre orchestra, and also, by using a small orchestra, allowing his child listeners to hear the individual instruments.

Particular instruments play the leitmotifs associated with each character. Peter has a theme played by the string section. The bird is represented by the flute and the duck by the oboe. Prokofiev uses the bassoon to represent Peter's grumbling grandfather. Peter's cat is represented by a clarinet, played staccato in its lower register. The wolf is represented by three horns playing chords in unison. The hunters are represented by the bass drum and kettle drums, part of the percussion section of the orchestra. When you listen to *Peter and the Wolf*, you will hear how Prokofiev used these instruments to make the story come alive to the delight of audiences, young and old alike.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What puppet used in the performance was your favorite? Why?
- Had you ever seen a puppet play that used the "curtain of light" format?
- Which musical instrument featured in the performance did you like the best?
- Could you "hear" the story in Prokofiev's music and distinguish the characters' various "leitmotifs"?
- Do you think it required a great deal of skill for one puppeteer to manipulate so many puppets?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

A puppet is an inanimate object given life through imaginative movement and sound. Derived from the Latin word "pupa" meaning girl or doll, puppets have long existed both as an art form and as a vehicle for creative expression.

Have students create puppets based on the main characters of a favorite book. For example, a fourth grade student could choose *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White and make Wilbur the pig and Charlotte the spider. The puppets can be any style:

bandanna puppet
finger puppet
rod puppet
paper bag puppet
sock puppet
glove puppet

A variety of materials can be used: fabric, felt, paper bags, socks, buttons, glitter, etc. Construct a simple puppet stage or platform in the front of your classroom. When the puppet characters are completed, have students write a puppet script, bringing a scene from the book to life through dialogue and movement.

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

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

⇒ Review pictures and listen to recordings of the various musical instruments used in *Peter and the Wolf*. Evaluate how well suited each instrument is to portray the various characters in the symphonic fairy tale. Describe the instruments' pitch and tone color, as well as the melody and rhythm of each "leitmotif."

❖ A hand puppet is easy to make. To begin, put a bandanna or cloth over your hand. Let your first and middle fingers be the "head," and put a rubber band around them for the neck. Your thumb and little finger are the arms. Put rubber bands around them in order to hold the cloth in place. Imagine that your hand is the actor. Make your "puppet" clap its hands, shake its head, and fall down.



Bandanna Puppet

❖ Explore ways your puppet can express feelings as you manipulate it. Try to find ways of showing that your puppet feels:

happy	angry
sad	curious
shy	scared
tired	hungry

▶ Have students select an historical figure to depict as a puppet character. A two-dimensional rod puppet can be made out of cardboard, then painted and mounted on a stick. Students should write a one-minute monologue based on the figure's biographical information and contributions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Buetter, Barbara MacDonald. *Simple Puppets from Everyday Materials*. Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., New York, NY, 1998.

Randel, Don Michael (Ed.) *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 1986.