

Topic: Musical Memories

Oh No, Not *Peter and the Wolf* Again

Every spring the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra would perform *Peter and the Wolf* at the Purdue Music Hall, and most of the grades in our elementary school would attend the afternoon concert. *Peter and the Wolf* is a symphonic fairy tale written in 1936 by Russian composer and conductor, Sergei Prokofiev. It was commissioned by the Central Children's Theatre in Moscow to introduce children to the instruments in an orchestra.

In the weeks before the concert our music teacher, Mrs. Howenstein, would instruct us during our weekly music class about the story, the characters, and the musical instrument that represents each character. The tale is about Peter who lives with his grandfather in a house in a forest clearing. His grandfather forbids Peter to venture beyond their garden alone. One day the garden gate is left unlocked, and Peter wanders into the forest. He makes friends with a cat, a bird and a duck. When his grandfather finds Peter he scolds him and warns that wolves might get him. Peter declares he is not afraid of wolves. A short time later a wolf comes into the forest. To escape, the cat joins the bird high in a tree, but the duck is swallowed alive by the wolf. Peter sees this, grabs a rope, and scrambles over the garden wall. He climbs a tree near the wolf and tells the bird to fly around the wolf to distract him, Peter lowers a noose and captures the wolf by its tail. Just then some hunters appear who had been tracking the wolf and try to shoot it. Peter stops them, and they all take the wolf to the zoo. You can hear the duck quacking from within the wolf. Oh, really!

The story is narrated as the musical score is played. Peter is represented by the string instruments, his grandfather by a bassoon, the duck by an oboe, the cat by a clarinet, and the bird by a flute. The hunters are represented by the bass and kettle drums, and three horns represent the wolf. The story never grabbed me, and after the first year I found Mrs. Howenstein's instruction boring. Having to attend this symphony throughout elementary school was a drag. I developed a huge dislike for *Peter and the Wolf*. I wondered why the symphony couldn't perform other, more beautiful compositions for us. Fortunately my disdain for *Peter and the Wolf* did not diminish my love for other symphonic works.