

# Family concert tickles audience

A review of a performance of  
*Peter vs. the Wolf*  
by the  
Springfield (MA) Symphony

**The Springfield Symphony Orchestra's "Peter vs. the Wolf" wins a favorable verdict from families.**

By **CLIFTON J. NOBLE JR.**

*Music critic*

Was the wolf really guilty of "premeditated duckicide?" Did anyone actually SEE him munch the mallard? Could the credibility of orchestral witnesses, or of Peter himself, be trusted?

These were some of the questions that tickled the funnybones of about 700 people of all ages on Sunday afternoon at Symphony Hall, as the Springfield Symphony Orchestra

## REVIEW

presented "Peter vs. the Wolf," a courtroom-comedy adaptation of Sergei Prokofiev's narration with music, "Peter and the Wolf." The comedy version was arranged by Boston-based video producer Justin Locke, author of such other musical education programs as "The Phantom of the Orchestra," "J.S. Bach, Superstar," and "Concerto for Kazoo and Famous Cellist."

Since its completion in 1936, Prokofiev's delightful treatment of the tale of "Peter and the Wolf" has won the hearts of millions, surviving numerous updates (including Peter Schickele's "Sneaky Pete and the Wolf") and narrators from Andre Previn to David Bowie.

Locke's interpolation of live-acted scenes from the Wolf's "trial" into the original narrative is absolutely hilarious. From word play ("Do you promise to play the notes, the half notes, and nothing but the notes?"; "Are you a flautist who plays the flute, or a flutist who plays the flaut?") to

slapstick stage action, the production was a thoughtfully constructed, thoroughly enjoyable (for all ages) amplification of Prokofiev's original.

The program fulfilled the obligations of an educational concert cleverly, introducing the instruments through the wolf's cross-examination of representatives of each of the orchestral families, and dealing with the musical basics of melody, harmony and rhythm in an engaging, topical fashion.

The Springfield production was directed by StageWest founder and Drama Studio Executive Director Steve Hays. It featured the acting talents of Tim O'Brien as the Wolf (complete with Russian accent and fur hat), Peter Ludwig as the District Attorney/Narrator, Paul Sutton as Judge Hagen, Luke Cournoyer as Peter, and Shelley Haber as the Court Reporter.

Ludwig, a seasoned actor and dancer, delivered the narration and his barrister lines with equal aplomb. His comic pacing was superb, as were his vocal characterizations of the various animals in the tale. O'Brien's Wolf mixed buffoonery in perfect proportion to slyness. Cournoyer's Peter was the embodiment of a Boy Scout.

The SSO players, working on a tight schedule under guest conductor Eric Lindholm's concise, polished direction, played Prokofiev's score like the professionals they are, without a noticeable hitch, with every nuance in place. They also demonstrated no reluctance to clown around a bit when the occasion offered itself — the principal trumpet and trombone players offered a passable Blues Brothers imitation, accompanied by a swinging version of Peter's theme.

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## MUSIC REVIEWS

The Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, in concert Sunday at Most Holy Rosary Church. "Peter vs. the Wolf," performed Saturday at the Civic Center.

### SSO's 'Peter' a Wacky Intro to The Symphony

If you're a wolf who has eaten a duck, try not to have your trial heard by the Honorable J. Kevin Mulroy at the Syracuse Symphony Family Series. It may resemble a blend of "Alice in Wonderland" and vaudeville.

On Saturday, the Symphony presented "Peter Vs. the Wolf," a merry spinoff of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." Judge Mulroy portrayed the earnest, confused magistrate who, from his high bench, loved to klonk the district attorney (Michael Connor) with a giant mallet.

John Davies was the dastardly Wolf. The "witnesses" — symphony players — got to play large patches of Prokofiev's score and jokingly boost the cause of the Symphony.

This is the liveliest introduction to orchestral instruments I've heard, and, it was beautifully performed.

— Neil Novelli

## CONCERT REVIEWS

# Orchestra's 'Peter vs. the Wolf'

## a family treat

By CHANNING GRAY  
Journal-Bulletin Arts Writer

PROVIDENCE — After failing to corral half a house Friday night for a snooze of a tribute to the Beatles, the Rhode Island Philharmonic redeemed itself yesterday when it packed Veterans Memorial Auditorium for an amusing sequel to Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev's popular *Peter and the Wolf*.

In this version, put together by former Boston Pops bassist Justin Locke, the wolf, played out there on the edge by actor Chris Hager, has his day in court.

The charges are serious, "duckicide" in the first degree — "one gulp." But the crafty wolf rips apart the testimony offered by members of the orchestra playing Prokofiev's familiar music.

Whaddya mean the flute is a woodwind instrument, Hager snarled at principal flutist Sue Thomas? How can a woodwind be made of metal?

For a while there, it looked like the wolf might beat the rap — had it not been for a bad case of indigestion and some incriminating feathers.

Yesterday's concert was the second in the Philharmonic's fledgling family series, which has taken off in a big way. Come showtime, all the seats in the house were filled with squealing kids and their parents.

Now some may think *Peter vs. the Wolf* was inspired by a certain, high-profile trial that has dominated the news of late. But Locke, who now writes books and runs his own video business, penned his humorous spoof on the Prokofiev classic

12 years ago, after taking part in a dud of a children's concert.

Anyone can come up with a better program than this, Locke complained to the orchestra manager. Oh yeah, said the manager, then write one.

Locke's solution was to take Prokofiev's tuneful score, throw in some courtroom drama, a smattering of musical factoids and plenty of one-liners.

"Are you testifying," Hager barked at Craig McNutt as he wheeled his timpani to the witness stand, "or are you moving in?"

"Order, order," shouted the judge, NewGate Theatre's Russell Berrigan, "this is a court of law, not a kiddie concert."

It was of course, both. The kiddie concert took place at the rear of the stage, where the honorable Francis-

co Noya, Philharmonic assistant conductor, presided over the musical end of things. The courtroom was set up in front of that, where the proceedings were recorded by a gum-chomping stenographer (Classical high junior Caolan Madden), whose steno machine spewed out mounds of paper.

Next to her sat Peter (sixth-grader Rory Madden) and D.A. Jack McCullough, who was forever getting bopped over the head by Berrigan's oversized rubber gavel.

The show got off to a slow start with Hager's wolf, who had just "broken out of the zoo," horsing around in downstairs aisles, which meant those of us sitting upstairs had no idea what was going on. But once the show got rolling, Locke's witty text and Prokofiev's catchy music made for an enjoyable afternoon.

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1991 ■ WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

## 'Peter' and the 'Wolf' delightful

By Richard Duckett  
Telegram & Gazette Reviewer

Peter, as expected, won out, but the wolf gave a pretty good accounting of himself before 2,500 high-spirited youngsters yesterday morning at Worcester Memorial Auditorium.

The occasion was the Worcester County Music Association's Annual Young People's Concert, and the event (which is part of the Worcester Music Festival) had an interesting new dimension this year in the form of Justin Locke's "Peter vs. the Wolf."

Locke (a video producer from Boston who also plays bass in the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra) has come up with a clever adaptation of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" that certainly didn't suffer from lack of audience participation by the teem-

### Music review

ing number of elementary students in attendance.

While staying faithful to Prokofiev's main score, Locke adds a bit of eye-catching drama and fun-and-games for the children. The wolf makes a spectacular entrance and then defends his actions in a trial presided over by a dizzy judge who can't quite fathom what the word "metaphorically" means.

As matters and music unfold, it looks as if the wolf could conceivably be found not guilty of swallowing a duck whole (the most serious charge that is brought against him). But then the guest experts (the audience) are asked to have the final say.

The verdict was rendered with an energetic volume that might have made adult ears pop. But justice was done, albeit that the wolf did have some sympathizers on the packed main floor and in the balcony.

In keeping with the recent tradition of the annual concert, Toshimasa Francis Wada (who has been an engaging host before) was back to raise the baton for the Worcester Orchestra. Both got into the appropriate spirit of things, along with a brisk cast directed by Locke that included 12-year-old Jonathan Farr of Holden.

As entertainment and something "different," however, it's doubtful that any of the 2,500 who watched them yesterday will ever forget who Peter and the Wolf are.

# Arts/Entertainment

## 'Peter vs. the Wolf' well-orchestrated

By Ken Keuffel Jr.  
For The Patriot Ledger

It seems difficult to imagine a sequel to Sergei Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" that does justice to the original orchestral fairy tale. But with "Peter vs. the Wolf" Justin Locke has done just that — and then some.

In Locke's hilarious production, performed Sunday by the Brockton Symphony Orchestra and members of the Easton-based Center Stage at Oliver Ames High School in Easton, the music of the original score largely remains the same. But instead of just a narrator, a cast of five actors propels the story forward.

Told here is what happened the next day, as the Wolf, played endearingly by Frank Reed, is brought to trial on charges of "duckicide in the first degree." Swearing to play "the notes, the whole notes and nothing but the notes," each instrument is called to testify about what happened in the meadow.

It is the instrumentalists' testimony that in many ways makes "Peter vs. the Wolf" a more engaging and effective vehicle for introducing children to the orchestra. Who, after all, expects a youngster to really know the flute because of its association with the bird without first having viewed the instru-

ment and the musician who plays it? But because the instruments here are brought out of the orchestra and to the witness stand, the child's attention is given clearer focus.

In a lighthearted manner, the questioning also introduces the child to other important musical concepts, such as dynamics, registers and harmony. Not left unnoted is how the sounds of various instruments are produced, what role they play in the orchestra, and why, say, a single note played by a timpanist is of equal importance to a lengthier string passage.

The musicians Sunday performed their solos and ensemble passages with considerable skill. Most memo-



Music director Francisco Noya led the Brockton Symphony Orchestra in a lively performance of "Peter vs. the Wolf," Justin Locke's sequel to Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf."

orable were the contributions of oboist Julianne Martin as well as those of a string quintet consisting of violinists John M. Williams and Hilary Hamilton, violist Alfred Sanfilippo, cellist Jane Hallett and bassist David Cobb.

Williams, asked to demonstrate his abilities as a soloist, even offered

a brilliantly played excerpt from Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto.

The full orchestra also played a prominent role. Under BSO music director Francisco Noya's steady baton, they were in consistently excellent form, despite a months-long hiatus from performing.

The music was only one of the reasons "Peter vs. the Wolf" worked so well. The superb performances of Reed, David Hirtle (as the district attorney), Michaela Crowley (as the judge), and Adam Goldberg (as Peter) invariably succeeded in tickling the collective funny bone.

This was a production filled with hilarious slapstick — when Crowley wasn't overruling Hirtle's silly objections by whopping him with an oversized gavel, Reed was dying of duck indigestion. The script itself was also full of witty jokes, such as how a flutist and a flautist can both manage to play the flute.

The afternoon of laughter began on a more serious note, with the Easton Chamber Orchestra, consisting of Oliver Ames High School and Easton Junior High School musicians, playing the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 25. The ensemble, normally led by Douglas Anderson, gave the popular work a crisp, thoroughly musical reading.

### Music

**BROCKTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**, performing Justin Locke's "Peter vs. the Wolf," conducted by Francisco Noya. Cast included Frank Reed, Michaela Crowley, David Hirtle and Adam Goldberg. Special performance by the Easton Chamber Orchestra of Mozart's Symphony No. 25 (first movement). At the Philip Hallowell Auditorium, Oliver Ames High School, Easton, Sunday afternoon.

## What people are saying about "Peter VS. the Wolf":

"It seems difficult to imagine a sequel to Prokofiev's 'Peter and the Wolf' that does justice to the original. But with 'Peter VS. the Wolf,' Justin Locke has done just that-- and then some."

---*Boston Patriot Ledger*

"'Peter VS. the Wolf' is absolutely hilarious."

---*Springfield (MA) Union News*

"Our performance of 'Peter VS. the Wolf' was an absolute smash!"

---*Margaret Terry, Education Director, Phoenix Symphony Orchestra*

"'Peter VS. the Wolf' is the liveliest introduction to orchestral instruments I've ever heard."

---*Syracuse Post Standard*

"Our performance of 'Peter VS. the Wolf' set a new attendance record for our family concert series."

---*Jonathan Martin, Spokane Symphony*

"The Nashville Symphony has done the impossible. I never thought I would see seventh graders sitting on the edge of their seats totally enthralled by a symphony production. The Nashville Symphony's performance of 'Peter VS. the Wolf' was so clever and so entertaining and of such quality that an audience of 2,000 upper elementary and junior high students were held motionless and spellbound."

---*Mary Francis Short, Teacher*

"Our performance of 'Peter VS. the Wolf' was a tremendous success. Everyone involved, from musicians to actors to audience, had a great time . . . we certainly will be programming this again."

---*Richard Decker, Syracuse Symphony*

"Ticket sales were great . . . we had to turn people away. Producing the show was easy . . . it made a nice partnership with a local acting group, and we took advantage of marketing to their audience. The nature of the play offered all sorts of marketing avenues, including tie-ins to public school writing programs and information on wolves provided by the Museum of Natural Science. (We had one group of kids picket the rehearsal, with signs saying 'Raleigh Symphony Unfair to Wolves.') We performed in two venues, and the show was adaptable to each. And it was great to have the parents really involved on the performance; they were yelling 'guilty' or 'innocent' louder than the kids."

---*Virginia Zehr, Raleigh Symphony Orchestra*

"Some standing ovations are obligatory and others are spontaneous and all at once. 'Peter VS. the Wolf' certainly brought the latter. The crowd loved it and the orchestra members ate it up."

---*Chuck West, Virginia Commonwealth University*