



## Carnival Of The Animals

By John Lithgow  
Illustrated by Boris Kulikov  
New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004

*“But oh, what a fabulous night he had had,  
When his world was turned into a zoo.”*  
—from the book  
“Carnival Of The Animals”

After wandering away from a school field trip, mischievous lad Oliver Pendleton Percy The Third falls asleep in New York’s Natural History Museum. John Lithgow’s literary interpretation of Camille Saint-Saëns’s musical suite *Carnival Of The Animals* tells the story of Oliver’s dream, in which his classmates, family, and friends are transformed into the creatures from the music. Illustrator Boris Kulikov brings the animals to life, and takes the reader on an overnight journey through the museum.

Oliver’s dream begins when the stuffed animals in the room where he is sleeping come alive. First he sees his teacher, Professor McByrd, as a lion, and the parents of all the kids on his block as hens and cocks. Continuing his tour through the museum, he sees his two neighbors as dancing tortoises, his school nurse as a dancing elephant, and his school librarian as a kangaroo,

while all the freckled girls in his class comprise a flock of birds.

As Oliver continues, he sees the boys on the wrestling team as jackasses (who show off to the birds), and his music teacher as a singing baboon. Oliver finally wanders upon a cuckoo sitting in an empty nest, worried about her missing young chick. But Oliver realizes that the cuckoo is actually his mother, worried about him. A night watchman then discovers the sleeping Oliver and sends him home to his parents.

Lithgow created this rhyming narration as a text for a New York City Ballet *Carnival of the Animals* performance, set to Saint-Saëns’s music with this book as narration, which debuted in 2003. Each book comes with a CD of the story being read aloud by the author, accompanied by the Saint-Saëns piece as performed by Chamber Music Los Angeles.

Camille Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals* is a set of fourteen orchestral character pieces, each of which is meant to describe a particular animal, usually by mimicking the sounds it makes or characterizing the way it

moves or carries itself. What a wonderful way to introduce the instrument families to children! This book and music could also introduce a student field trip to a symphony concert, or lead to a discussion of how sounds are produced on instruments. As a creative activity, students might also invent a “new” orchestral instrument or write a different story using classroom instruments (woods, metals, skins, shakers). *Carnival Of The Animals* is a fine, creative marriage of story, pictures, and music that an Orff teacher could use as the basis of numerous music lessons. ■

*Dr. Carol McDowell has been a practicing Orff-Schulwerk educator as a university professor, instrumental music teacher, and preschool music program lead. She is certified as an instructor at various levels in Kodály, Music Theory, and Orff Schulwerk. McDowell earned her doctorate at Florida State University, and has completed numerous research projects as well as performances, presentations, and published articles. Presently, she is a member of the Orff Echo Editorial Board.*

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