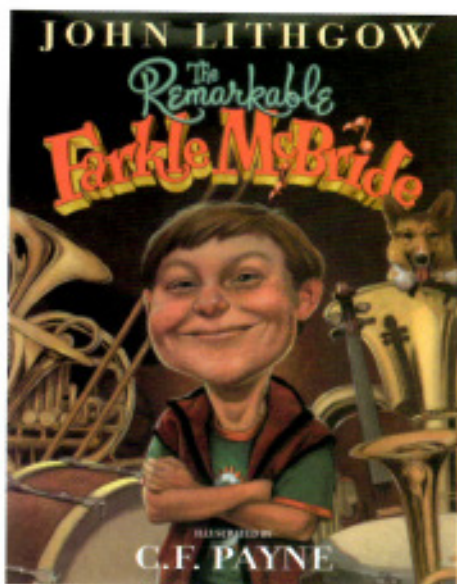




THE REMARKABLE FARKLE McBRIDE

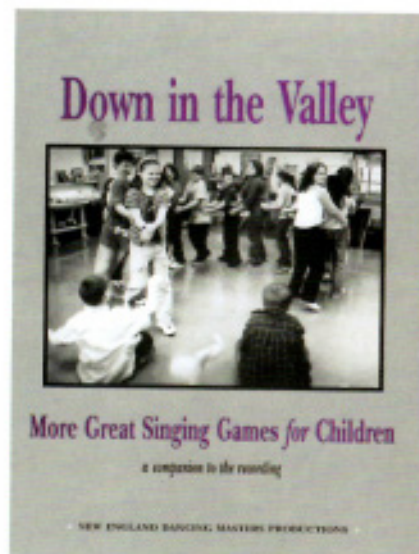
By John Lithgow;
illustrated by C. F. Payne
Simon & Schuster Books for Young
Readers, 2000.
\$16.

Actor John Lithgow, of "Third Rock from the Sun" fame, and Cincinnati illustrator C. F. Payne team up to give us a marvelous tale of a prodigy, Farkle McBride, who drums, strums, blows and bows his way through years of unsatisfying musical study to eventually discover the musical experience that does satisfy him. Starting at age three, he tries and masters a succession of instruments — violin, flute, trombone, timpani and cymbals — each time growing tired of the instrument at hand and going on to the next. However, his years of musical study lead Farkle to a very rewarding culmination: becoming an orchestra conductor! Because he is such a genius with the instruments he has studied, he has performed each with the orchestra; when called upon to substitute for the ailing conductor, he discovers his musical fulfillment.

The story is told through rhyming verse, beginning with a kind of limerick and including all sorts of other schemes. With each instrument — violin, flute, trombone, percussion — Lithgow livens up the verse with delightful "deedle-ee," "tootle-ee," "vroom-pety," and "clang-a-ma-clashes." Using

vivid facial expressions that easily illuminate the exact sentiments of fickle Farkle, his often dismayed parents, and the very serious orchestra members, Payne brings to life the clever story. The book concludes with a beautiful double-page fold-out that open the curtains to expose the entire orchestra. I can hardly wait to share this book with students!

—Judith Cole



DOWN IN THE VALLEY More Great Singing Games for Children

Edited by Andy Davis, Peter
Amidon, Mary Alice Amidon
New England Dancing Masters
Productions, 2000.
Book \$15; CD \$15; cassette \$10.

Down in the Valley is a collection of 25 great (really!) singing games for children of all ages. They range from the simplest follow-the-leader and follow-the-words games to those with jumping and clapping patterns that will challenge the most sophisticated middle school students. Although about a third of these games can be found in other publications — and credit is given to each person or source from whom the editors learned them — one of the strengths of this collection is its diversity. Songs of city kids and country kids are represented as are those of the South, Appalachia, New England and throughout the United States.

The book and CD (or cassette) are sold separately, but the book contains all the songs and game instructions so it can be used without the recording. The book also has suggestions for successfully teaching the games, choosing leaders and making space in your classroom for dancing. A glossary, a list of further dance resources, an index of the games by formation and engaging photographs of children participating make this volume a rich asset for the music teacher.

The value of the CD (which contains no dance instructions) lies in its lively singing — by both children and adults — and its entrancing accompaniments. It is a helpful tool for the teacher who is learning the songs. In some instances, the recording can also be used to introduce the games to the children, who will soon make them their own and sing willingly without accompaniment.

As the book reminds us, these songs have traditionally been sung by the game participants without instrumental support. Indeed, several of the games encourage solo singing (my first-graders unselfconsciously sing "Charlie Over the Ocean" so they can chase each other skipping around the room). Teachers may want to raise the pitch of most of the songs into "head voice" register.

In the introduction to the book, the New England Dancing Masters encourage adaptation of these games to the children who will be playing them. They point out that the games were created by children and that children have changed them over time and in various circumstances. Teachers are encouraged to let the children determine some of the rules, create new motions and find new steps as they become a dancing community.

For the teacher who knows many singing games this book (and CD) will be a welcome addition, broadening the repertoire. For those who have little experience with these child-delighting activities this collection is a wonderful place to start.

—Alan Purdum