

Snow Music

By Lynne Rae Perkins
Greenwillow Books, 2003



Reviewed by
David Thaxton

Blue skies, barren hills and a big red "H" on the weather map are unwelcome sights for snow lovers waiting for winter's first frosty embrace. I'm not sure whether he knew the crisp

October air had stirred my longing for the coming snows, or if he were simply taken by the musical content, when Omar (a student in my class) brought me the new book he had found in the library. Immediately, I was transported back to those magical mornings of my childhood when overnight, with one magic white blanket, winter erased the autumn. Lynne Rae Perkins' *Snow Music* not only captures those first snows elegantly, but musically.

The story follows a child in pursuit of an escaped dog across a freshly made winter soundscape, encountering meandering wildlife, traffic and a helpful friend along the way. The search, while ultimately successful, is merely secondary to the intertwining of the various paths and accompanying sounds, textures and contemplations that arise from the transformed landscape. From the wink-and-nod Zen reference, "What is the sound of one bird hopping?" to the conversation between the friends over the newly found dog, the book speaks with subtle humor and gentle wisdom.

"Why are you saying he's good?"
"So he'll like coming home."

Against the backdrop of watercolor illustrations ranging from the rich depth of the night to the stark white brilliance of the day, the text itself

sings and dances. From the opening invitation for all to whisper "peth peth peth" as the night snow is gently falling, to the sentences scampering about as animal tracks across the pages, the reader is beckoned to whisper, sing, chant and dance throughout the book. Children have a hard time resisting the invitations like, "Cover your mouth with your hand and sing a song from the radio," and quickly they become an integral part of the storytelling process.

Many of the musical references are featured directly in the illustrations, complete with staves and barlines. Whether it is the fancifully notated "Jingle Huff, Jingle Huff" of the running dog, or the intricate rhythms of a passing car's exhaust, the mostly non-traditional notation is decodable and quite appropriate. The approach to

interpreting the music, however, is wide open. While the book is easily read with vocal sounds, it provides equally legitimate starting points for non-pitched percussion, or even "found" sounds. One could even turn around and derive movement activities from it. Indeed, it tugs at the creativity of the teacher and students alike.

Once again, late fall has crept back into the air. The November weather map had far too many red "Hs" and blue skies for my taste, but things are looking up. *Snow Music* came off the shelf, winter arrived in my classroom, and outside, the pitter-patter of rain is slowly turning into the nearly silent whisper of snow.

"peth peth peth peth..."

Dave Thaxton serves on The Orff Echo editorial board.

