

imaginable, and its coming to fruition is a kind of homecoming to our true selves.

-Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*

I had the occasion to hear a lecture-demonstration by Stephen Nachmanovitch, and subsequently attended his workshop on improvisation for musicians. After meeting him, I wondered how I possibly could have missed his delightful, inspirational book "Free Play," which was published 10 years ago, but is still fresh and timely.

Stephen Nachmanovitch is a violinist, composer, poet, teacher and computer artist. He studied psychology and literature at Harvard, and has a Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness from University of California, Santa Cruz. His mentor was the famed anthropologist Gregory Bateson. He has explored improvisation in his own solo violin performances, teaching and writings. When he performs, he plays with feedback from the electronic violin as an ingredient in his improvisations.

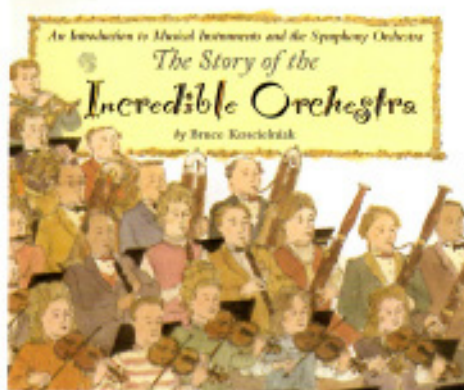
Stephane Grappelli writes, "Improvisation, it is a mystery. You can write a book about it, but by the end no one still knows what it is." Yet this small volume, *Free Play*, puts us directly into the flow of the inquiry and encourages the reader to penetrate the mystery. This is a book that comes out of practice, is structured like a poem, and is as personal as a private music lesson.

Nachmanovitch discusses improvisation in connection to all arenas of life, not just performance or visual art. What are the sources of inspiration and how can we play with what we have in hand? How does spontaneous creation work and can we practice it? What is a helpful attitude toward mistakes and how can one surpass one's perceived limitations? These are some of the questions the reader is privileged to investigate by means of Nachmanovitch's reflections. He uses his own struggles and insights as examples, as well as teaching stories, illustrations and quotations from many other sources and traditions.

In the search for the fresh, the true and the personal, one must inevitably encounter obstacles. Nachmanovitch discusses fear, judgment and the roles patience and surrender play in opening up to possibilities in the here-and-now.

Filled with pithy quotations and endlessly quotable himself, Nachmanovitch weaves themes and stories throughout the entire book, inviting the reader to come along for the ride, come out to play, join in the exploration. For inspiration, further pondering on the process, practical suggestions and specific exercises, this is a book to return to often.

-Terry Boyarsky



**THE STORY OF THE
INCREDIBLE ORCHESTRA**
An Introduction to
Musical Instruments and
the Symphony Orchestra
By Bruce Koscielniak
Houghton Mifflin, 2000. \$15.

The Story of the Incredible Orchestra is a fact-filled, colorful picture book that introduces the instruments of the orchestra, gives a brief history of those instruments, and tells how they came to be grouped together in the orchestral setting. To trace the development of the modern orchestra, author/illustrator Bruce Koscielniak, who is himself a musician, takes the reader on a journey from the time before the standard orchestra existed, about 1600, to today.

He begins by describing early ensemble music and illustrating several dozen instruments, including lutes, harp, psaltery, viols, shawm, chalumeau, recorder, crumhorn, tabor and sackbut, providing brief descriptions and drawings of people holding and playing the instru-

ments. More detailed information and facts about the instruments are provided in adjacent boxed-in areas in a manner that would allow a child to revisit the pages many times, layering on additional information as curiosity dictates. Following this, Koscielniak presents information about performance practices of different style periods — Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and early 20th century — interspersed with background on various instrument families such as strings, winds, brass and keyboards, and introduces the reader to terms like "reed," "tuning screws," "pads," "bell," "mouth-piece," "valve" and "tubing."

Though the author's assertion that the birth of the orchestra can be attributed to Renaissance composer Giovanni Gabrieli seems questionable, this does little to diminish the value of the book, for the remainder of its historical information is accurate.

The book opens the door to the science of sound and tells how sound vibrations escape the "f-holes" on a cello, how piston valves work, and how some idiophones are tuned and some are of indefinite pitch. In its conclusion, it ventures into a light discussion of contemporary practices, including jazz and synthesized sound. "Something old, something new" is a phrase posed to readers as they are left to ponder what music of the future might be like. There is no CD to accompany the book, so teachers will want to provide their own recorded selections for enrichment.

-Judith Cole