

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Micaela Schmitz

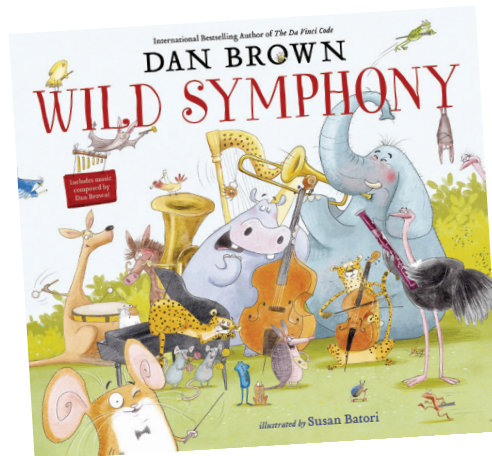
Wild Symphony

Written and Composed by Dan Brown

Illustrated by Susan Batori

Performed by Zagreb Festival Orchestra

Rodale Kids/Penguin Random House, LLC, 2021



Dan Brown's *Wild Symphony*, illustrated by Susan Batori, is a series of colorfully depicted poems, each about a different animal. It can be read alone, but is more useful with its accompanying soundtrack, available as an app or on streaming services such as Spotify. Brown, best known for his book *The Da Vinci Code*, also composed orchestral music for this book. Recorded by the Zagreb Festival Orchestra, each piece is a miniature, perhaps inspired by Saints-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*. The book is not a narrative as such, so the poems—except for the first and last—can be read in any order. Each poem is accompanied by a related aphorism such as, “Now and then, close your eyes and listen. You might ‘see’ something new.”

Batori's playful illustrations are appealing, and children enjoy spotting the animals and counting them. Animals playing instruments is not realistic, thus it is OK that the boar/warthog is chasing butterflies. In reality, boars destroy gardens, but we suspend our disbelief! There was good support for my friend the spider, whom I love for its ability to kill off mosquitoes, and each poem ends with some sort of learning point or moral. *Wild Symphony* also has some humor, as in the Kangaroo poem: “Bounce to run—Ka-Boing! Ka-Boing! Bounce for fun—Ka-Foing! Ka-Foing!” This could be a springboard (pun intended) for some movement.

Wild Symphony's accompanying app is interesting, but seems designed to be used with a child at home, where both adult and child can see and hear together. Readers point their phone at a page and the correct music plays. This is not always flawless. It also has an option to push the arrow button on your device for the next piece of music to play sequentially. Apparently the app includes a “secret video” of the author talking and playing the piano, which was not obvious to me when I first looked at it. To use the book in a classroom, teachers will want to consider streaming individual movements as an alternative to the app, adapting to available technology, type of class, and the concepts taught. I also found that the illustrations were not big enough for everyone in my classroom to see. An option would be to capture and project the illustrations for future use.

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If you wish to read the poems to your students with the music as underscore, plan to rehearse ahead. If you read them with the music, you will find certain sections need careful timing. The Cheetah poem surprised me by its pace. It starts with stillness and sneaking, but changes to running at top speed. If you do not read the slow part of the poem in time, you will be interrupted by music for the fast part. For this reason, I suggest playing the music first, having

students guess the animal, reading the poem, and perhaps playing the music again afterwards.

In my classroom, I read this book with many levels and have found, with 20 animals total, it is too long to read to kindergarteners in one stretch. This story probably works best with Grades 1 and 2 and would be most enjoyed in small segments at a time rather than in one read-through. Older students can discuss the orchestral instruments and families or Brown's use of contrasting articulation, tempo, meter, and register to reflect the character of the animals. It might also be useful to discuss the sound the animal or its environment, such as the ocean, makes in real life.

Wild Symphony can invite movement, both metered and non-metered. Each poem/musical piece inspires different types of movement. Some poems are short enough for children to memorize,

but teachers can also recite them. Most are rhyming couplets. There are definite patterns of meter in the poetry; these can physicalize compound duple or a straight forward duple. Orff Schulwerk educators may choose whether movement accompanies the poem in a metered fashion or portrays the music in a more free-form way. Available for just under \$10, *Wild Symphony*, with its text, illustrations, and music, brings good value to the Schulwerk classroom. ■

MICAELA SCHMITZ, after a decade of performance and leading freelance workshops, teaches kindergarten through Grade 8 classroom music at two Catholic schools in Kentucky, one of which has never had music taught before. She completed AOSA Teacher Education Levels I and II with chapter support and is currently benefitting from the Orff Digital Mentorship Program.

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Considering Curriculum

With our students, we sing, play, move, and create. We invite students into musical experiences that integrate their input and lead to creative outcomes. What structures help us design experiences that meet the developmental, situational, and personal needs of our students? How do we set the stage for experiences that deepen musical understandings over time? Look to the Winter 2023 issue, **Considering Curriculum**, to open a dialogue about our Orff Schulwerk practices through diverse curriculum-development lenses including peer teaching, constructivism, concept-based learning, and play.

