

The Carnival of the Animals

By Pat Adams
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JEFFERSONVILLE – It is high summer and when you have a day as beautiful as last Sunday, July 22, you want to do something to honor and celebrate such wonder.

Luckily, we had tickets to see the collaboration between The Weekend of Chamber Music musicians and NACL Theatre actors at the Eddie Adams Farm in Jeffersonville. The drive from the Beaverkill Valley over the Shandeleer Road was reason enough to go – but the ultimate pleasure came when we walked up to the high meadow and plopped down on the grass to see this imaginative show. Families, most with young children, were scattered over the grass. Judith Pearce, founder and president of WCM, encouraged the children to sit close to the barn – because “something wonderful will happen at the end.”

First, a character played by Brad Krumholz appeared in an antique wheelchair. To me, he looked like a rather scary old man on oxygen but the children were watching in rapt attention. Silently he wheeled around, fiddled with a radio in his lap and then waved his arms to open the barn door, which revealed the WCM musicians: Mark Rush on the violin, Nancy Green, violoncello, Tannis Gibson, piano and Judith Pearce on the flute and piccolo. They played Camille Saint-Saens’ “The Carnival of the Animals” while the NACL actors, most on stilts, performed a fantasy in colorful costumes. At times the performance was pantomime and sometimes it looked like ballet.

A beautifully feathered creature, played by Tannis Kowalchuk, appeared and produced an egg which she cuddled, kissed and rocked. But soon she fell asleep and a lithe creature in black, who had been dancing on the barn roof, managed to steal this egg from her.

Was this black creature a skunk? I asked the children by me and they shrugged – it didn’t seem to matter that they could not identify the villain. The next character appeared, a tall feathered figure with hooved feet, which was portrayed by Glen Hall. Was he a rooster? But what about those hoofs? Even his role in the drama wasn’t clear to me.

I looked at the children’s faces. It was clear that for them, this mythical figure was just that, mythical, and the roles of the animals were not fixed to some preconceived notion. Animal identification clearly was not the point. One of the children said simply but wisely, “If you think it, then it is real.” At that point, I joined in the childlike response to the show – just watch, listen and wait to see what happens.

There was one character the children
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immediately identified, a tall, silky blue butterfly with flowing wings which emerged from the egg. Brad Krumholz performed as the butterfly. The result was a great celebration where the children in the audience were given bubble solution and the afternoon air was filled with sparkling bubbles, blown in all directions by the breeze.

Brad Krumholz explained that the NACL performers listened to Saint-Saens’ music and each character established his/her role and costume. It was a free-form, sometimes real and sometimes mythical interpretation of the music. In the program there was an ancient Chinese proverb quoted for this show, “A bird does not sing because it has an answer – it sings because it has a song.” This program was about singing, not about answers.

The show combined two local perform-

ing groups that enrich our area with their commitment to art and community. NACL offers workshops for children and adults as well as producing shows that encourage active intellectual participation. The Weekend of Chamber Music has been performing in Sullivan County for fourteen years and has brought renowned artists to play in a variety of venues. This summer they had two sold-out performances and their workshops, which give the audience an opportunity to sit in on rehearsals and ask questions, were also well-attended. Now, with the use of the Eddie Adams barn space, they have a beautiful “home” for their productions.

To have a beautiful drive, to sit in a high peaceful meadow surrounded by children, to listen to skilled musicians and watch imaginative actors – it was a perfect way to celebrate a perfect day.