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BCT production teaches, entertains at same time

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Abe Reybold's delightful adaptation of "Peter and the Wolf" elaborates on Sergei Prokofiev's orchestral tale and turns it into a theatrical, balletic and musical montage.

Showing through today at Birmingham Children's Theatre, the production retains the composer's intention, which is to introduce instruments to the orchestra. With the able assistance of Christopher Confessore and the Alabama Symphony, Prokofiev's popular score is given context by casting Prokofiev himself (Stephen French in a Russian accent) as the narrator and flashing back to his childhood and family life in Russia.

Some of the dialogue likely escaped most of the elementary school students Monday at the BJCC Theatre, particularly commentary about Soviet artistic censorship and the composer's dealings with concert promoters. But what kids came to see, they got - a scary wolf with orange eyes (Will Harrell), a fluttering bird (Audrey Cardwell), a mischievous cat (Morgan Smith) and a duck (Tam Debolt) destined for the wolf's stomach.

The brightly adorned animals, wearing Todd Roberts-designed costumes, were a hit as Peter, engagingly portrayed by ninth grader Jordan Fisher, bounded and cartwheeled as he connived to overthrow the wolf.

Drawing from a well-worn paradigm of youngsters, imagination, dreams and moral messages, the show is part "Where the Wild Things Are" and part "Nutcracker," with hints of "The Lion King." At an hour long, it stretches Prokofiev's 30-minute score with excerpts from Tchaikovsky, other Prokofiev scores and historical dialogue, yet it manages to educate and entertain at the same time.

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