

Sample CD sleeve note

Camille Saint-Saens *Carnaval des animaux / Carnival of the Animals*

Sergey Prokofiev *Peter and the Wolf*, Op. 67

Benjamin Britten *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Op. 34 (Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell)

Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor Ondrej Lenard, [Naxos 8.550335](#)

Excerpt from sleeve notes

Ten years later, in 1946, the English composer Benjamin Britten was asked to write music for an educational film introducing the instruments of the orchestra. For the purpose he chose a theme by the great 17th century English composer Henry Purcell and wrote a set of variations, each of which shows the characteristics of a particular instrument or group of instruments. The alternative title of the work, Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell, is an exact description. The other title, The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, makes fun of the titles much favoured by writers of moral tales in the 19th century, providing "young persons" with advice on how to regulate every aspect of their lives.

The theme, taken from music Purcell wrote for Aphra Behn's play *Abdelazar or The Moor's Revenge*, is played six times. At first the full orchestra plays the theme, followed by the woodwind (flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons). The theme is played a third time, this time by the brass (horns, trumpets, trombones and tuba), and then by the strings (violins, violas, cellos, double basses, and, as an extra, by the harp, an instrument not generally included in the string section of the orchestra). The percussion (drums, triangle, tambourine and cymbals) does what it can with the melody before the return of the full orchestra.

The first variation starts with the highest woodwind instrument, the piccolo, and two flutes, accompanied by the harp and violins. The oboes are given fuller accompaniment, leading to the clarinets demonstrating their agility, and to the deepest instruments of the woodwind section, the bassoons. The string section is allowed four variations, for violins, for violas, for cellos and for double basses. Four French horns introduce the brass section, with its second variation for trumpets and its third for trombones and bass tuba. The percussion instruments share the next variation. The kettle-drums (timpani) are joined by the bass drum and cymbals, tambourine and triangle, side drum and Chinese block, xylophone, castanets and gong, and, finally, the whip, simulated by hinged slats of wood brought smartly together.

The Young Person's Guide ends with a fugue, a traditional form of composition in which one part enters after another, using the same theme, so that the music grows gradually in size and intensity. The piccolo starts and the other instruments enter in order - flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, lead to violins, violas, cellos, double basses and harp, and then French horns, trumpets, trombones and tuba, followed by the percussion. At the most exciting part of the fugue, the brass instruments play again the original theme, leading to a grand conclusion.