

EUGENE FRIESEN

Cello Man

Art Form: Music

Style: Classical to Contemporary

Culture: Western European and America

MEET THE ARTIST:

Eugene Friesen has created a unique voice among the cellists of the world. Drawing on a childhood filled with the great masterworks of Western music, as well as the influences of hymn, ethnic and popular music, Eugene uses cello and voice to create new music which is accessible and personal. A graduate of the Yale School of Music, Eugene takes the cello out of its traditional classical realm, propelling it forward as an exciting instrument with immense powers of free expression. Mr. Friesen has been a member of the acclaimed Paul Winter Consort since 1978 and with the Consort, won a Grammy award in 1994. He has also toured and recorded with Trio Globo and with such diverse artists as Dave Brubeck, Betty Buckley and Toots Thielemans. Distinguished cellist Yo-Yo Ma says of Mr. Friesen, "The music is beautiful and so is the playing." Eugene tours internationally from a home base in Vermont where he lives with his wife and children.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Cello Man is a solo performance by cellist Eugene Friesen created in collaboration with Faustwerk Mask Theater. In a show designed to portray the many facets of a serious artist and a soulful instrument, Eugene weaves a spellbinding fabric with stories, songs, masks and inventive techniques on cello and electric cello. Repertoire for *Cello Man* features Friesen's original music in a variety of styles: blues, contemporary, folk, electronic and pop, and includes a duet with the recorded song of a humpback whale. The use of masks designed and created by director Rob Faust adds a dramatic element to the performance. During segments of the show, Eugene transforms himself with masks and costumes, integrating the character with the music he is playing. The results, surprising and often comic, physically illuminate the humanity present in each piece of music.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The following aspects of music education are introduced in *Cello Man*.

The Cello: The cello is a member of the string 'family.' Other members of this family, the violin, viola and double bass, all share the same evolution from ancient, plucked instruments, like the harp and the lute. Another 'ancestor' of modern string instruments is the *viola da gamba*, a string instrument with a soft, earthy tone which is rested on the player's legs (*gamba* is an Italian word meaning leg). The best quality string instruments are made primarily by hand as they have been for centuries. The wood most used is pine for the top face of the instrument, maple for the side and back and ebony for the fingerboard. The finest bows are usually made from pernambuco wood from the rainforests of South America. Though the shape of modern string instruments is excellent for its acoustical properties, the shape was originally chosen to honor the female form, revered for its life-giving abilities.

Improvisation: Although Eugene Friesen was taught to play the cello by learning traditional classical music, he also enjoys making up his own music, or improvising. Improvising has a history as long as music itself. It has only been in the past 150 years that classically trained musicians in our culture have not been encouraged to develop this skill. Before that time, musicians were able to look at a rough sketch of a musical idea and improvise melodies and harmonies as modern jazz musicians do today.

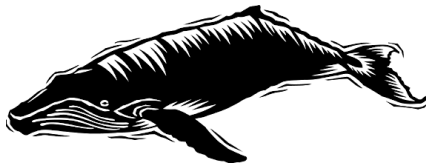
Pablo Casals: One of the greatest artists of the twentieth century, Pablo Casals discovered ways of playing the cello which he taught to many generations of young cellists. Because of the physical ease with which he played, Casals increased the soloistic potential of the cello tremendously; at the same time, his abilities to play a piece of music simply and from the heart cast new light on musical performance in our time. Eugene's final piece is a tribute to this masterful artist, who died in 1973 at the age of 97.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What character or musical segment of Cello Man did you find most memorable? Why?
- What kinds of feelings did you have as you watched the performance? Did certain parts make you feel joy? Sadness? Fear?
- What was Eugene trying to convey by having the characters of the squirrel and the bear play the cello?
- What does the term *improvisation* mean as it relates to playing a musical instrument?
- One of the themes demonstrated by the performance is transformation. In what ways did Eugene allow himself to become transformed by the masked characters? How did the characters transform or dramatically change the style of Eugene's playing?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SCIENCE:

Eugene uses a recording of a humpback whale made by an underwater microphone called a hydrophone. Sound travels well in water, and the oceans can be noisy places. Dolphins use whistles and clicks when hunting for food, male humpbacks sing to attract females, and large orca whales make sounds by slapping the ocean's surface or breaching - leaping out of the water and coming down with a splash! The most sophisticated use of sound is in echolocation, a skill perfected by toothed whales and bats. There are about 78 species of whale in two main groups: (1) toothed whales such as the dolphins and sperm whales that hunt fish and squid and (2) huge baleen whales that feed by straining fish and small animals from the water. Have students select a species of whale and in cooperative groups, research and report on the whale's life cycle, its skeleton and anatomical features, whale social life and mating, and the method by which it hunts or gathers food. Suggested topics: blue whale, killer whale, humpback whale, dolphin, porpoise, the horned narwhal or sperm whale.



Legend:

- Artistic perception
- Creative expression
- Historical & cultural context
- Aesthetic valuing
- Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- Listen to music of diverse styles noting differences in the musical elements (melody, harmony, rhythm) and instrumentations of each one: classical, jazz, folk, rock, rap, world music, pop and new age. Choose one or two musical selections or styles and have students paint a picture while listening, using the music as a source of inspiration for their artwork. Encourage them to experiment with the elements of line, shape and color as they express their ideas and feelings.
- In pairs, have students explore the concept of improvisation. First have each student create a sound pattern using body percussion: slaps, claps, stomps, clicks, etc. Once their patterns or phrases are established, have them communicate back and forth, altering the rhythm, dynamics or percussion components as they 'converse' with sounds.
- Make a wearable and expressive half-mask with a paper plate. Start by cutting an equilateral triangle out of the bottom half of the plate. The triangle should point up and the peak should be rounded because this is where the mask will rest on the bridge of the nose. Now measure the distance between the centers of the wearer's eyes. Center this distance on a horizontal line just below the peak of the cut-out and make marks for eyes. Cut out the eye holes. Paint and/or decorate the mask with construction paper, feathers, yarn, sticks, leaves, dried beans, glitter, ribbon, etc. Lastly, attach a strap of elastic, either stapling the strap to the mask or punching holes and tying the ends.
- Study and analyze the mask you have made. What kind of character might it be? What emotions seem to dominate the mask? Put the mask on and select a posture, walk or movement that expresses its features. Choose a musical instrument to play, or create sounds or a song which further brings the mask to life. Present a one-minute performance of your mask-and-music character.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ammer, Christine. *Harper Collins Dictionary of Music*. Harper Perennial, New York, NY: 1991.

Tuchman, Maurice. *Masquerade*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA: 1993.