



Anne & Rob Burns as A Reasonable Facsimile

“Music of Shakespeare’s Time”

Entertaining and Educational PK-12 Programs
For Schools, Libraries, and Community Centers

“THE CAT, THE RATS AND THE PIPER’S BRITCHES” Lower Elementary, Pre-School - Study Guide

INTRODUCTION

“THE CAT, THE RATS AND THE PIPER’S BRITCHES” is a musical production set in a small Renaissance village. Town musicians, Nan and Robin Piper (played by Anne and Rob), awaken one morning to discover that rats have been nibbling on food in the pantry. Because their pet cat (a puppet) seems disinclined to try to catch the rats, Nan and Rob reason that they can drive the rats away with music, just like the Pied Piper. They try out various music and instruments, all the while, the rats keep stealing food. The story is based on a 1562 poem by John Heywood. Rob and Anne dress in period costume and perform songs from Renaissance Europe on copies of old instruments. Students participate in many of the selections, and the story is resolved in a very musical way!

SOURCES

An excellent source about the Renaissance is *Handbook of the Renaissance* (1999) by Lee McRae. Ms. McRae's book is suggested for grades 7-12, but reviewers have also thought it useful for Middle School and it's a good resource for teachers. For more details about Shakespeare's England, look at *Daily Life in Elizabethan England* by Jeffrey L. Singman (Greenwood Press, 1995). Try your school or public library for other sources. Look under the subject headings: “Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616,” “Renaissance,” “Renaissance — Juvenile literature,” and “Musical instruments — History.”

For “mood music,” A Reasonable Facsimile has a CD *Popular Music of the Renaissance*, available. Part One, *About As Close As You Can Get* is for general audiences and Part Two, *The Merry Pranks of Robin Goodfellow*, is for children, especially lower elementary ages. There is also a song booklet called *The Merry Pranks of Robin Goodfellow* which contains the words and music to the songs in Part Two of the CD. CDs are \$15 each, and song booklets are \$10 each. Postage is included to addresses in the U.S. Make checks payable to Second from the Bottom. Order from Second from the Bottom Music, PO Box 80294, Rochester MI 48308.

There is a website that tells about Renaissance musical instruments: Musica Antiqua's "Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments." It features a picture, a sound byte, a description and a bibliography for each instrument.

(OVER ➡)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Before the Performance

Introduce the performance: "Today (or soon) we will have the opportunity to see a musical production called "THE CAT, THE RATS AND THE PIPER'S BRITCHES" performed by a duo called A Reasonable Facsimile. The show is about Renaissance town musicians having trouble with rats. Two professional musicians, Anne and Rob Burns, will be playing music and acting out the parts."

Ask how many students have been to a music or theatre production. Discuss how an audience should react to the performers; e.g., laughter, applause or sometimes silence.

Ideas for discussion:

- Discuss the Renaissance - (The period 400-500 years ago in Europe) Just how long ago is 400 years? Are students' parents, grandparents 400 years old? How did people live 400 years ago? Did they have computers, electricity, automobiles, records or cassette players?
- Discuss what sort of communities existed in the Renaissance — Farms, villages, large cities. Have students visited a Renaissance fair or a recreation village (such as the Michigan Renaissance Festival or Greenfield Village)?
- Discuss the famous playwright, William Shakespeare, who lived 1564-1616 in England. Do students know of any of the plays (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, etc.)? Have students seen any of his plays in the theatre, in a movie or on television? The language of the plays is English, but it is 400 year old English and sounds a little different.
- Discuss how young people might have lived in the Renaissance — Modern schools versus home schooling, apprenticeships. Modern toys and games versus making own entertainment.
- Discuss animal intelligence, and how animals can often outsmart humans.

After the Performance

- Have students draw a picture of something they remembered and liked in the production.
- Discuss favorite parts or songs in the show.
- Talk about careers in music, theatre and dance.

The Instruments

(Depending on the length of the presentation, students may or may not see all of the instruments listed below)

Renaissance Guitar, 3-hole Pipe, 6-hole Pipe, Hammered Dulcimer, Bones, Recorder, Fife, Drum, Shawm, Bagpipe