

WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION PRESENTS

# *Little Miss Muffet Goes to the Opera!*

MARY GRESOCK



*Little Miss Muffet Goes to the Opera!* is copyrighted by Mary Gresock, 2009.  
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**WOLF  
TRAP**

INSTITUTE FOR  
EARLY LEARNING  
THROUGH THE ARTS



# ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

**Mary Gresock**, a professional singer/actor, stage director, voice teacher, and teaching artist, has been a Wolf Trap Institute Teaching Artist since 2000.

A graduate and staff member of the Teaching Artist Institute in Baltimore, Mary is currently a Master Teaching Artist with Kennedy Center's D.C. Partnership Program, Charlottesville Opera, and her own opera residency outreach company, Odyssey Opera Theatre. Mary toured with Washington National Opera and Baltimore Opera's opera outreach programs for more than 15 years as a performer and stage director. She has performed principle and supporting roles with such companies as Ohio Light Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Washington National Opera, The IN Series, Signature Theatre and Studio Theatre. As a Master Teaching Artist with Wolf Trap Institute, Mary continues to combine her passion of exploring the arts with children through STEM residencies, facilitating Teachers' Professional Development Workshops, and training new Wolf Trap artists all over the country and beyond. Her original "Little Miss Muffet Goes To The Opera" has been featured in recent summers at Wolf Trap's Theatre in the Woods, and remains the center of her Wolf Trap Family Workshop called Music, Words, Action!

## ARTIST'S CREATIVE PROCESS FOR THIS PERFORMANCE

"I chose to build an opera around the nursery rhyme *Little Miss Muffet* because many children are not familiar with it. If I could bring Miss Muffet alive through opera, perhaps this would spark a desire to find out about other wonderful nursery rhymes.

An opera is a story that is communicated through a blending of many arts: music, drama, dance, costumes, and scenery. To transform the nursery rhyme into a lively opera, additional dramatic content—a big dilemma, a surprise, and a plot twist—was added to enhance the story. I also wanted the main character, Miss Muffet, to be someone the children could relate to and enjoy getting to know—like another classmate. More importantly, I did not want the spider to be scary. I chose specific words and actions to portray the spider as a lovable creature.

With these goals in mind, I set about filling out the nursery rhyme with events that happen before and after the rhyme. The musical structure of this opera follows a pattern of recitative (dialogue that is sung) and arias (solos). Five of the arias in this performance use melodies from well known operas such as *Carmen*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Die Fledermaus*. I changed the words to express the emotions and events of this particular story.

Through the experience of watching and listening to *Little Miss Muffet Goes To The Opera*! I would love the audience to become more aware of how opera is another way to tell a story, that the words are all sung in opera, and that sharing expresses kindness which builds friendship."

- Mary Gresock



... opera is another way to tell a story,  
[...] and that sharing expresses kindness  
which builds friendship.

- Mary Gresock

## FOR THE TEACHER...

### BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

**Digging into STEM: Investigate Fun Spider Facts!** How do spiders make webs? Do all spiders make webs? What do spiders eat? How many legs does a spider have? What else is special about a spider's body? How many different kinds of spiders are there? Where do they live?

**Learn about Opera and Musical Performance.** Introduce opera and musical theater to children by sharing opera music and trying to put words, dialog and story to music. Have children try to sing sentences!

**Introduce Movement Opportunities.** Encourage children's creative movement. Can you move like a spider? If you were a spider, how would you move if you were making a web, exploring a new space, or investigating something new?

**Explore the Story!** Introduce children to the nursery rhyme "Little Miss Muffet". Learn new vocabulary from the story. What are curds and whey? What is a tuffet? Children can play roles to dramatize the Little Miss Muffet story.

**Sharing and Caring Builds Friendship!** Share children's literature with themes related to sharing and friendship. Discuss sharing and how it can help us get along with one another. Ask children about what kinds of things they share in the classroom. Discuss classroom routines that promote sharing.

### AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

The teacher can follow up the performance in one or more of the following ways:

**Let's Make an Opera!** Have "Opera Time" in the classroom, trying singing rather than speaking instructions, questions and conversation.

**Set Stories to Song.** Now that children have experienced opera, think together about familiar stories and books that you can use to create musical theater experiences.

**Explore Sharing and Friendship at Mealtime:** Discuss how Miss Muffet chose to share her favorite food with the spider, and how that made her feel. Explore how friends and family can make each other comfortable when they share mealtimes at home and in the classroom.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Audio (CD and Streaming):

- Classical Kids. October 19, 2004. *The Best of Mozart* (Audio CD, Children's Group).
- James, Rufina. December 11, 2007. *40 Favorite Nursery Rhymes & Songs*. (Audio CD, Children's Group).
- Monk, Allan. Banion, Brian. Lichti, Daniel. Dahl, Gregory, et al. September 23, 2003. *World's Very Best Opera for Kids... in English!* (Audio CD, Children's Group).

### SPIDER STORIES:

- Carle, Eric. *The Very Busy Spider*. New York: Philomel Books, 1984.
- Kirk, David. *Miss Spider's Tea Party*. New York: Scholastic, 1994. Print.
- Hoberman, Mary A, and Nadine B. Westcott. *The Eensy Weensy Spider*. Boston, Mass: Little, Brown, 2000.
- McDermott, Gerald. *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*. New York; Chicago; San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

### STORIES ABOUT SHARING:

- Nelson, Kadir. *If You Plant a Seed*, 2015.
- Wright, Maureen H.W.I.L.T. *Share, Big Bear, Share!* Amazon Childrens Pub, 2017.

### SPIDER FACTS:

- National Geographic: Spiders
- Smithsonian Institution: Spiders

## ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE

This performance is a mini-opera about a special day in the life of Miss Muffet. Through song, acting, dance, costumes, and scenery, Miss Muffet meets someone who loves curds and whey as much as she does. Through Miss Muffet's dilemma and choices, children will learn about the kindness and joy of sharing and making new friends.

## Small Bites!®

A unique arts experience modeled on an original program from the Arts Centre Melbourne, Australia.



## ABOUT WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE FOR EARLY LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

Research has proven that the arts are a powerful tool through which children can learn. Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts was established in 1981 under a grant from Head Start, a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to support teachers' professional development and young children's learning. Through residencies and workshops across the country, early childhood professionals in partnership with Wolf Trap Teaching Artists learn arts-based techniques and strategies that empower them to integrate the arts in all developmental domains of curriculum. Age-appropriate experiences in music, movement, drama, and puppetry foster a love of learning and help support young children's skill development in social relations, creative representation, initiative, logic, mathematics, language, literacy, movement, and music.

### WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE OFFERS A VARIETY OF SERVICES INCLUDING:

**Professional Development Workshops** for teachers that are designed to provide age-appropriate performing arts strategies that are linked to early childhood curricular learning outcomes.

**Family Involvement Workshops** offer parents and caregivers of young children an introduction to performing arts activities that can be employed at home, in the car, and even in line at the grocery store.

Wolf Trap Institute operates successful programs across the United States and has taken its services to nearly 100,000 children, educators, and parents/caregivers throughout 28 states.

For more information about Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, please visit: [www.Wolftrap.org/Education](http://www.Wolftrap.org/Education), or call 703.255.1933 or 1.800.404.8461.

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