“Thunder and Lightning” Joined by the Eulenspiegel Puppet Theatre Company
by Natalie Dailey

Over the years, NISO has performed many successful concerts, been joined by numerous talented musicians, and delighted multiple audiences with music that can only be a result of passion and dedication. “Thunder and Lightning,” this season’s first concert, brings the fun to a whole new level by featuring a new element never before seen in a NISO concert: puppets.

The Eulenspiegel Puppet Theatre Company will join NISO this fall for the presentation of Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf, providing a puppet show to accompany the piece.

The Eulenspiegel Puppet Theatre was founded in 1974 as a touring group composed solely of founder Monica Leo and Teri Jean Brietbach, who joined in 1975. Forty years later, what was originally a two-woman show is now a non-profit organization based in West Liberty, Iowa; its performers have traveled internationally as well as to 28 of the 50 states in the U.S.

The company was asked to join NISO for “Thunder and Lightning” by NISO principal conductor Christopher Stanichar. “My unofficial role is to feature Iowa artists,” Stanichar said. He found the Eulenspiegel Puppet Theatre Company while looking for a way to provide a visual display for Peter and the Wolf, and reported that the company was “gracious and excited” about his request.

Peter and the Wolf is the story of a young boy, his grandfather and animal friends, a handful of hunters, and a menacing wolf. Each character in the story is represented by a specific instrument while a narrator tells the story. The Eulenspiegel puppets will further help bring the piece to life for audience members.

The composition was originally written for children, and indeed, Stanichar estimated that 1,100 children will be coming to the Concert for Children on the afternoon of November 18. However, Stanichar also claimed, “Whether you’re young or young at heart, you’re going to enjoy the piece.”

The challenge of the “Thunder and Lightning” concert, according to Stanichar, was finding pieces that would appeal both to children and to adults who enjoy classical music.

Strauss’s Thunder and Lightning Polka and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7, which will also be featured in the evening concert, hold definite appeal for those who appreciate classical music. Peter and the Wolf, however, is unique in that it has a very clear story, and it is educational because all the instruments are introduced without feeling like a lesson, Stanichar said. Both young and old are likely to enjoy Peter and the Wolf.

Stanichar also said, “This is one of the strongest years we’ve had with the orchestra since I’ve been here. I think people will be proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish.”

The concert will take place on November 18 in Dordt College’s B.J. Haan Auditorium at 7:30 in the evening. Tickets can be purchased at the True Vine in Sioux Center and Dove Christian Bookstore in Orange City. Tickets are also available for purchase the night of the concert.
A Season of Symphonic Colors
By Karen A. De Mol
The Season of Symphonic Colors is about to begin! All symphony seasons present a variety of “colors” (by which is meant the unique tone quality of the various instruments), but the 2014-2015 NISO season will be particularly colorful. Here’s a look at the four concerts in our season.

The centerpiece of the Fall Concert on Tuesday, November 18, is Prokofiev’s delightful Peter and the Wolf, which uses different instrumental colors to represent the characters in a story. Perhaps you know the story! Happy-go-lucky Peter is represented by light-hearted strings, the grandfather by the low and pungent bassoon, the sly cat by the clarinet, the bird by (of course) the flute, and so on. Enacting this story while the orchestra plays will be the Eulenspiegel Puppet Theatre, which will also perform for the Concert for Children in the afternoon, using puppets specifically designed for this NISO concert. The program will also include Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7, light and celebratory and full of dance rhythms, written, it is said, when Beethoven was in love with his “Immortal Beloved.” The program will begin with the flashing instrumental color of Strauss’ Thunder and Lightning Polka, to which this concert owes its title.

The Pops Concert on January 31, 2015, will feature the colorful voice of Spider Saloff in a concert paying musical tribute to George Gershwin. In addition to the NISO orchestra, Saloff will be accompanied by pianist Jeremy Kahn.

“I Like Tchaik” is the title of the Spring Concert on April 18, which will feature entirely music by Tchaikovsky. The featured “color” is that of the cello; Anthony Arnone, professor of cello at the University of Iowa, will join the orchestra for the virtuosic Variations on a Rococo Theme. Another highlight of the program is the passionate Fifth Symphony, full of despair, romance, and triumph, which will feature the powerful brass section of NISO. And the opener is the lilting “Waltz” from Sleeping Beauty. Yes! We like Tchaik—and we are convinced you will too.

Our Guest Concert on Saturday, April 18, features Rhythm and Brass, a dynamic ensemble of brass and percussion that has performed here before, to popular acclaim. The program promises to be brilliant, big, and, of course, brassy!

Meet the New Principal Players
By Natalie Dailey
NISO welcomes three new principal players.

Timothy Hillyer is the new principal percussionist. In addition to NISO, he plays with the Des Moines Symphony, Lincoln Orchestra, Omaha Symphony, and Sioux City Symphony. He attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha and did some work for his master’s degree, during which time he also played with some other groups in Ohio and West Virginia. An important teacher to Hillyer was Dr. Tomm Roland, a teacher from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, who “inspired me to go out and listen to all kinds of new music, and to learn new instruments,” Hillyer said. He has been playing percussion for 18 years and is excited to play again with NISO’s principal conductor Dr. Christopher Stanichar, who conducted the orchestra during Hillyer’s first year at UNO.

Also new to the orchestra is Jill Wigton, who is the assistant principal first violin. She played with the Sioux City Symphony for 25 years before joining NISO this season. Wigton attended Morningside College in Sioux City, where she studied violin under professor Larry Brandolino, who Wigton says “took me to the next level.” Another important teacher was her first instructor, Dorothy Walker. Walker “gave me my foundation,” Wigton says. Wigton said she enjoys that she feels welcome in NISO - already an integral part of the orchestra. Her sons, Christopher and Nathan, are an inspiration and an important part of her life.

Finally, NISO also welcomes principal violist Fei Chen. Chen studied in both Beijing, China, and Montreal, Canada, and has previously played in both the Sioux City Symphony and Lincoln City Orchestra. While Chen says he has been very “fortunate” to have so many good teachers, it was his mother who first taught him to play, and his family’s involvement was key to developing his musical skill. Chen appreciates the community support that NISO receives and praised NISO’s “perfect connection” between community and the arts. Chen reported that the local students’ involvement with music in the program is inspiring for him.