



Hans Christian Andersen in the Park

By Thomas A. Todd, July 2018

During their annual Scandinavian Music Festival in upper Manhattan, Danish Music Director Dorrit Matson and her New York Scandia Symphony always make sure to include special concerts for young audiences. These children's programs are being enjoyed by kids and adults alike and contribute something unique to the cultural scene of Northern Manhattan. This year, Ms. Matson chose two humorous and gripping fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen and turned them into two exciting children's concerts.

On Saturday, June 16, Andersen's story *Papa is Always Right* had its premiere performance in Inwood Hill Park. Ms. Matson had commissioned her orchestra's principal violist, Frank Foerster, to write original music to accompany the narration, and included music by the Danish composer Poul Schierbeck (1888-1949) as well. Puppets and stuffed animals provided delightful visual entertainment, as narrator Sandra Billingslea maneuvered them imaginatively while reading the text at the same time. Ms. Billingslea also taught the children how to say the animals' names in Spanish and in Danish! Scandia Symphony's chamber ensemble sounded terrific in the picturesque greenery; most impressive were the trumpet player, who could sound just like a whinnying horse, and the trombonist, who imitated a cow's "mooh" most convincingly. The next day, in Fort Tryon Park, the same group of performers presented *The Tinder-Box*, complete with witch, three huge dogs, soldier, princess and a treasure chest overflowing with gold coins. Music from Scandinavia (arranged by Mr. Foerster), as well as some scary sound-effects from the string players, contributed greatly to the impact of the performance. Thanks to the beautiful weather, both concerts were well attended. The quality of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, combined with the beauty of the music, left a deep impression on everyone present and makes us look forward to next year's Scandinavian Music Festival.