

## The Peace Child DC / East Coast Schools Tour

In the Spring of 1984, we produced the DC Schools tour, performing a 60-minute version of the show with a cast of 10 – 8 x professionals, two children. We then took that show on the Road – to York, Pennsylvania and Princeton – with a rotating cast of children, including Garth Kravits (from the original Kennedy Center show) and Caitlin Siegel. In each city, we hooked up with a chorus of local children – who joined in all the songs, and became the Peace Children of the future ( - and, of course, brought all their families along to see the show!)



*Caitlin Siegel and Garth Kravits*

### **“Peace Child” comes to DC schools**

*by Jane Mattern Vachon*

About 12,000 students in the DC public schools saw the musical drama "Peace Child" performed here last month. The Peace Child Players' company, headed by London playwright David Woolcombe, put on the production, with actors including students from local schools as well as members of the company.

DC is the first public school district in the country to put on the play system-wide, though it has been used in several other school districts and in many private schools across the nation. For two weeks in March, the

bring the children up out of their seats and into the aisles. But the serious theme keeps them quiet and attentive--and that's not easy for an hour when you're ten years old.

"Peace Child" is about two children, an American boy and a Soviet girl, who meet and begin to talk about alternatives to nuclear war. Eventually they manage to get the leaders of their two countries to meet and talk. The leaders agree that peace simply is not possible, but in talking they discover that they, too, have things in common, among them fishing.

In getting their leaders to think

## ...Peace Child

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they succeed in getting the leaders to talk? It doesn't really matter, the play tells us. It doesn't even matter who they were. Because it could have been any child in the audience--you, or you, or you. The thing we have to remember, the players tell us, is that all of us carry within us the power to create peace, and we must all use that power with all the energy we've got.

The performance is as full of vitality as the message it conveys. The colors, the bold, simple choreography, the theme of love, unity, friendship, and peace is a positive and reassuring message. The threat of war and death are dealt with seriously as the reasons we need to work for peace, yet the play resists succumbing to the fears of the nuclear age. It offers the hope that each one of us, whether a child or an adult, can make a difference. The play is a celebration of life, of the earth, and of human

### Teaching children about peace

It is in part because of the nameless fears that children have of the nuclear age that DC public schools sponsored the production. Gilbert Hoffman, Director of the Chapter II federal education block grant in DC, cited a recent Washington Post survey which found that fear of nuclear war is a major concern of young children in the Washington DC area. "We cannot ignore that," Hoffman says. The school district provided teachers with an instructional packet to help them prepare children for the ideas presented in the performance, and to encourage follow-up activities. "It's something that makes the whole experience more meaningful," Hoffman says. "We don't regularly teach about peace, but we want to make sure, just as we would for any play or event we put on, that it's meaningful to the students."

Hoffman explained that "Peace Child" was first performed here in Washington over a year ago at the Kennedy Center. DC Councilperson Hilda Mason took a



Chorus at the Princeton Parish Church show, Princeton, New Jersey



special interest in it, and a meeting was called. "Both the superintendent of public schools and the president of the school board expressed a desire to have our students participate, not only as an audience, but also in the performance," Hoffman says. That meeting resulted in an agreement "whereby if we provided space for rehearsals and the three evening paid performances for the Peace Child Company, they would provide us with free performances for our students during the day."

#### How "Peace Child" began

How did "Peace Child" come to be?  
Writer and producer David Woollcombe

explains that it was a cooperative effort between himself and his mother-in-law. Combining Bernard Benson's The Peace Book and music from David Gordon's "Peace Auditoria," the pair created a story/play of children bringing peace to the world.

Evening performances of "Peace Child" are to be held in DC's Wilson High School on April 16, 17, and 18. Tickets are \$5.00, \$7.50, and \$25.00 for sponsors. You can get tickets by writing to the Peace Child Foundation, Box 33168, Washington, DC 20033.

*Jane Mattern Vachon is on the Peace Center newsletter*



## 'Peace Child' musical features local chorus

"Peace Child," a musical for all ages, is coming to Princeton Sunday at 5 p.m. in the Nassau Presbyterian Church. (The performance will not take place at Lawrence High School as previously announced.)

Starring with the professional cast will be 14-year old Marco Clarke of Washington, D.C., who has held leading roles in "Street Dreams" and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," and Catelin Siegal, of the Peace Child Players Company.

Joining the professional cast from Washington over 40 local children will provide the chorus. "Peace Child" may be unique in children's theater in that its volunteer chorus allows a high degree of participation from local children, families, schools, churches, and community groups.

"Peace Child" is based on Bernard Benson's "The Peace Book" which has become widely popular in Europe, receiving the endorsement of Anwar Sadat, Pope John Paul II, and others. The book became a play through the

collaboration of British playwright David Woolcombe and his mother-in-law. "Children are really the star of this show, in its concept and its presentation," says Mr. Woolcombe. The chief message of the musical surrounds an American boy and a Soviet girl whose friendship leads to peace.

"Peace Child" premiered at the Royal Albert Hall, London, and was first performed in Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center in December, 1982. Now on a coast-to-coast tour, the play is generating widespread support from all ages. The playwright, Mr. Woolcombe, hopes to use the financial and public support to create a Soviet sister company: on May 6 he will visit the U.S.S.R. to begin negotiations with this goal in view.

Ticket prices are \$3 for adults and \$1 for children under 12. For more information, contact the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament at 924-5022 (days) or 426-0010 (evenings). Reservations are recommended.



SUE ELLEN PAGE leads some local children in rehearsal for their part in the chorus of "Peace Child," to be presented Sunday.

(Andrea Kane photo)