

Rhody's Big Adventure: A Stay-at-Home Travel Adventure

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The Story of Rhody's Big Adventure

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you about *Rhody's Big Adventure*, a collaborative project with my violin students that began during COVID lockdown. It has opened up opportunities for them to learn not just violin techniques, but the magic of music as a way to experience and explore our world.

My name is Patricia Davis and I am a NYC based professional violinist, passionate music educator, Suzuki Violin teacher and composer. I'm currently performing on Broadway in *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Music Man*. I have performed for many years at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, with groups such as American Symphony Orchestra, The New York Pops and Orchestra of St. Luke's. I have performed in music festivals throughout the U.S., Europe, and Canada and I have had the privilege of collaborating with legendary opera and pop stars.

My music journey began in North Carolina at age 5 with piano lessons and singing in children's choirs at church. My passion for music started a few years later when I began studying with an influential Suzuki violin teacher who had just returned from Japan, where she studied with Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, the founder of The Suzuki Method. I earned a Bachelor of Music (Eastman), ARCM (London's Royal College of Music), and both MM and DMA from SUNY Stony Brook. In recent years, I completed my long-term Suzuki Teacher Training at The School for Strings in NYC, earned a "Suzuki in the Schools" Learning Lab Certification, and have completed several teacher enrichment courses at Suzuki institutes across the US.

I am on the faculty of Geneva Conservatory of Music (GCM) in NYC where I teach the Suzuki Method to individual violin students as well as group classes, ages 4-17. GCM has been the platform where I have developed my own creative and innovative teaching tools.

I began writing *Rhody's Big Adventure* in April 2020, one month into the pandemic lockdown. I was looking for a way to cheer up my students, who suddenly could only have their lessons over Zoom. We were all stuck at home and we needed an adventure.

I remembered how my NYC Suzuki mentor, violinist Allen Lieb, demonstrated several twists on the folk song *Go Tell Aunt Rhody*, a simple tune in Suzuki Book 1 that is learned by every Suzuki student around the world. He showed how the same melody could take on different characteristics by using different

techniques and finger patterns. I realized that I could use this inspiration to take my students on a journey around the world and beyond. I am forever grateful to Allen for that spark.

Rhody's Big Adventure was born in my tiny 6th floor apartment in NYC, as I listened to the sounds coming in my window. With the quiet of lockdown, I could hear the whistle of Amtrak trains passing along the Hudson a few blocks away. Choo Choo Rhody emerged from that sound—and became our means of transportation for our imaginary journey. With Broadway shows shut down, I spent a lot of time listening to National Public Radio. A story about endangered rainforests, along with the sounds of birds in nearby Riverside Park, became Rainforest Rhody. I wrote each of the variations for solo violin and began to share them during Zoom lessons.

That fall, it was big news when a tiny, stowaway owl was found in the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree. It immediately became clear in my imagination that “Rhody” was that owl, and that she would be taking her diverse friends on a grand musical journey. My students loved the idea!

Fourth-grader Anna said, “I know! How about Rhody goes to a construction site?” and imitated the sound of a jackhammer. Construction sounds came through my window, too, and became Jackhammer Rhody. When summer came, Anna asked for Rhody at a July Fourth celebration. I created Fourth of July Rhody for her, evoking Sousa’s Stars and Stripes.

My students and I have created many more adventures. Rhody has been to Lincoln Center to hear a performance (Rhody’s Waltz). She has switched from driving a train to riding on a camel (Arabian Rhody). She wears a cowboy hat (Henhouse Rhody-o) and a space helmet (Outer Space Rhody). She has visited Dublin (Irish Rhody) and London (Royal Fanfare Rhody). Rhody has been to the French Quarter in New Orleans (Jazzy Rhody), sung with friends around a campfire (Rhody’s Ballad), and visited the South Pole (Antarctica Rhody).

Over time, the imagined destinations have evolved into a full-fledged set of 16 virtuosic variations for solo violin, in the style of Paganini Caprices. And the requests keep coming in. Five-year-old James has asked if Rhody can go to the ocean or ride a Ferris wheel.

While my students loved listening to me play Rhody’s songs, they wanted to learn them too. It became clear that I needed to compose a beginner version of *Rhody's Big Adventure* for my students ages 4-12 who were beginning their violin journey. After I finished writing this simple version, I asked my Broadway colleague and friend Lawrence Yurman to create a piano accompaniment. We had fun recording from each of our individual homes.

Each of these etude-like variations teaches a specific violin technique as well as activating the learning of basic music theory concepts that are highlighted in each variation. They also incorporate kinesthetic learning through stomps and shouts—as indicated in the score—which are very unusual in violin music! They have become a beloved part of both group classes and private lessons. I’ve witnessed how many ways *Rhody's Big Adventure* has sparked excitement, imagination, and creativity. My students continue to come up with additional places where Rhody the Owl should take us next. Several students have even created their own artwork based on the various travel destinations.

What I think is especially valuable and innovative about this project is the ongoing, collaborative exchange of ideas between myself as teacher and my wonderful students. They are not simply playing established pieces that someone else wrote. They are part of the creation of something exciting and

new. And they are having great fun—which means that they are motivated to learn. They are gaining a solid technical foundation that will serve them well whether music remains a hobby or becomes a career.

Both versions of *Rhody's Big Adventure* now serve as a 'tried and true' daily regimen for me and my students to build mastery of our violin skills. My students have embraced this adorable owl's music travelogue with great enthusiasm and are looking forward to playing the first public performance in February 2023 at the Geneva School of Manhattan. One of my students said of her 6-year-old brother, "To say that he is obsessed with *Rhody's Big Adventure* is an understatement!"

I created each Rhody variation not only to educate, but also to transport, dazzle, entertain, inspire and motivate both students and listeners as they experience a sonic landscape of the world. I believe that other subjects such as math, science, social studies and geography could be incorporated, too. I have seen my students excited to discuss the details of each destination and curious about what they would find. An expanded version of *Rhody's Big Adventure* could consider different places' unique and diverse culture and history, as well as global issues such as climate change and endangered species. The variations' musical meters could serve as a tool to understand the relation of numbers to rhythm.

When a colleague sent me the announcement of the Lowell Mason House's Music Education Advocacy Competition, it resonated deeply with me and seemed to be along the exact same lines of what I have been striving to accomplish. I have big ideas for Rhody the Owl's future. I envision leading a series of workshops at Suzuki institutes and in school classrooms beyond NYC. I would love to use *Rhody's Big Adventure* to promote innovation and creativity for future generations of music students, teachers, composers, and music lovers around the globe.

In thinking about how the Lowell Mason House could contribute to promoting innovation and creativity in music education, it strikes me that the collaborative aspect is something you could build on. We have all become isolated in many ways, more so thanks to COVID, and yet we live in a big, beautiful, and diverse world. Students and teachers could be invited to share their own stories, their own experiences and cultures, to transform familiar sounds together into new variations.

Recording of Rhody's Big Adventure

Please enjoy this stay-at-home performance of the beginner level version of *Rhody's Big Adventure*, with me on violin and Lawrence Yurman on piano.

YouTube link to the simplified variations with piano accompaniment:

<https://youtu.be/A-RiJM2P1yo>

If the link doesn't work, please copy the above URL to your browser window. Please let me know if you have trouble accessing the file.

The variations include:

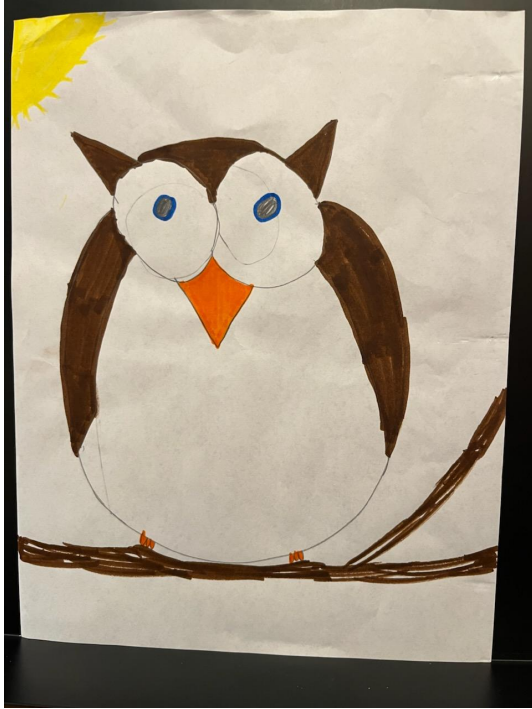
Rhody's Theme

- 1 Choo-Choo Rhody
- 2 Irish Rhody
- 3 Marathon Rhody
- 4 Rhody's Waltz
- 5 Royal Fanfare Rhody
- 6 Arabian Desert Rhody
- 7 Rainforest Rhody
- 8 4th of July Rhody
- 9 Rhody's Lament
- 10 Antarctica Rhody
- 11 Jazzy Rhody
- 12 Reverent Rhody
- 13 Rhody's Ballad
- 14 Jackhammer Rhody
- 15 Outer Space Rhody
- 16 Henhouse Rhody-o!

Students' Artwork

I love when my students share their artwork!

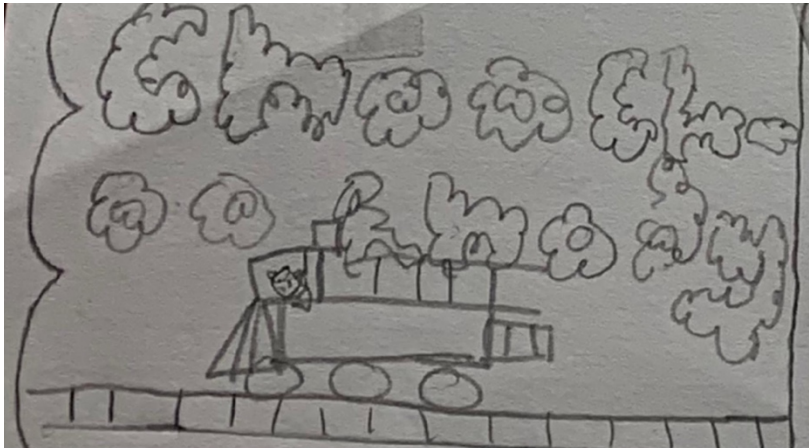
Here is Rhody on a sunny day...



and roosting in her tree at night.



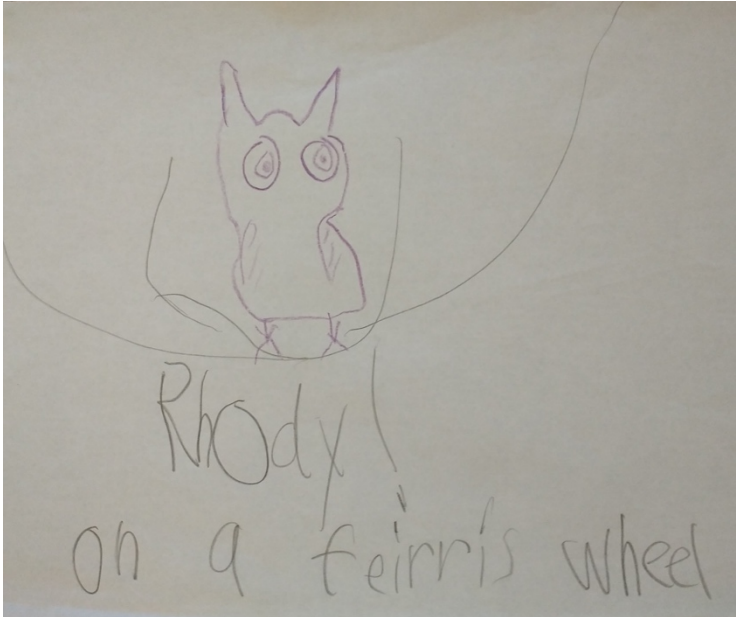
Here is the train whose sounds we make in Choo Choo Rhody.



Rhody in outer space!



An idea for a future Rhody adventure.



Sheet Music

The sheet music is part of the fun! Here are some examples.

VIOLIN

Choo-Choo Rhody

Patricia Davis
Pno arr Lawrence Yurman

Trudging (♩ = 96)

7 **Chugging along** (♩ = 126)

13 *simile*

17 *Choo - choo!*

20 *legato*

VIOLIN

Henhouse Rhody-o!

Patricia Davis
Pno arr Lawrence Yurman

Brightly with a strut and a cluck (♩ = 84)

VIOLIN

Marathon Rhody

Patricia Davis

Piano arr by Larwrence Yurman

Vivace (♩ = 100)

Go!!

mf

simile

1

4

Yay!

VIOLIN

Jackhammer Rhody

Patricia Davis

Pno arr Lawrence Yurman

Continually annoying (♩ = 100)

Musical notation for the first system of 'Jackhammer Rhody'. It consists of two staves in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff shows a whole rest. The second staff begins with a triplet of eighth notes marked *ff* and *strigento!*. This is followed by a quarter note with an accent (>) and another quarter note with an accent (>). The final measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet marked *sfz* and a circled annotation '(STOMP)' with a downward-pointing arrow.

VIOLIN

Outerspace Rhody

Patricia Davis

Pno arr Lawrence Yurman

Searching and without gravity

Musical notation for the first system of 'Outerspace Rhody', measures 1 through 12. It is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a 4/4 time signature. Measure 1 starts with a piano (*Pno.*) dynamic. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Measures 5 through 12 feature a triplet of eighth notes, with the instruction *con sordino e sognando* written below the staff.

Musical notation for the second system of 'Outerspace Rhody', measures 13 and 14. Measure 13 continues the triplet of eighth notes. Measure 14 features a glissando leading to a circled annotation 'SHOOTING STAR!' with a star symbol above it.