

## Of Mice, Music, and Paper Cutting

*Silent Night: The Song from Heaven.* Linda Granfield. Illus. Nelly and Ernst Hofer. Tundra Books, 1997. 24 pp. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-395-2.



Tundra Books has produced another beautifully-illustrated story from the past that combines a lively narrative with informative historical material. Linda Granfield, having written *Amazing Grace: The Story of the Hymn* and *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae*, now gives us a delightful account of the origins of the Christmas hymn, "Silent Night." As with her other books, Granfield's purpose clearly is to write a story that will engage younger readers while providing historical detail that will educate all readers. *Silent Night: The Song from Heaven* is especially effective because its illustrations, by Nelly and Ernst Hofer, are themselves part of the larger story of how art emerges and devel-

ops through time and is transmitted from one cultural site to another.

Granfield's text includes four components: a story of children preparing the Christmas Eve creche scene in a small village church in Austria in 1818; a concise historical account of the circumstances surrounding the unusual music produced for that church's Christmas Eve mass — and its eventual emergence as a worldwide favourite; a reminder of the remarkable Christmas truce of 1914 when British soldiers in the trenches heard "Stille Nacht" being sung in the German trenches, and the soldiers of World War I fraternized for too brief a moment; and an account of the "cut paper art" known as Scherenschnitte — which originated in Asia centuries ago, was developed as "silhouettes" in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, and is reproduced with wonderful intricacy in this book by the Hofers, who learned the art in their native Switzerland.

If this book seems a little disjointed, it nevertheless contains many riches. Beyond its stunning illustrations and effective storytelling it reminds us of the fascinating ways that cultural forms evolve and of the curious turns of history. It may even recall personal experiences for readers. The story reminded me that the probable reason for the organ's failure to sound that Christmas Eve (and hence the request for Franz Gruber to write a simple melody for voice and guitar) was mice eating holes in the organ's leather bellows. Mice in organ chambers and around consoles are familiar pests for many organists. I remember one Christmas Eve having to use pine-scented deodorizer to stifle the smell of a recently-departed rodent somewhere below me under the organ console. Fortunately, the organ still functioned and I used it to play "Silent Night," among other carols.

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