The Pied Piper of Hamelin

A community opera for narrator, singers, and accompaniment

Music: Mark Gotham Words: Robert Browning

LIBRETTO

<u>Part 1</u>

Narrator:

Hamelin town's in Brunswick, By famous Hanover city; The River Weser, deep and wide, Washes its wall on the southern side; A pleasanter spot you never spied; But, when begins my ditty, Almost five hundred years ago, To see townsfolk suffer so From vermin, was a pity.

Rats:

Rats! We fight the dogs, and kill the cats, **Towns-folk:**

They fight the dogs, and kill the cats, And bite the babies in the cradles, And eat the cheeses out of the vats, And lick the soup from the cook's own ladles, Split open the kegs of salted sprats, Make nests inside men's Sunday hats, And even spoil the women's chats, By drowning their speaking With shrieking and squeaking In fifty different sharps and flats.

Townsfolk (bullying the mayor):

Rouse up, sir! To think we buy gowns lined with ermine For dolts that can't or won't determine What's best to rid us of our vermin! Rouse up, sir! Give your brains a racking To find the remedy we're lacking, Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!

There is a faint knock on the door

Mayor:

What's that? Only a scraping of shoes on the mat? Anything like the sound of a rat Makes my heart go pit-a-pat! *[Towns-folk echo]*

The knock is repeated, louder

Mayor: Come in!

Narrator:

... the Mayor cried, looking bigger: And in did come the strangest figure! His queer long coat from heel to head Was half of yellow ... half of red;

Narrator removes cloak, revealing a red and yellow outfit (and himself to be the Piper).

And he himself was tall and thin, With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin, And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin, No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin, But lips where smiles went out and in – There was no guessing his kith and kin! And nobody could enough admire The tall man and his ... quaint attire.

P.P. (addressing the people):

Please your honour ... I'm able By means of a secret charm, to draw All creatures living beneath the sun, That creep, or swim, or fly, or run, After me so as you never saw! And I chiefly use my charm On creatures that do people harm, The mole, and toad, and newt, and viper; And people call me the ... Pied Piper. And, as for what your brain bewilders, If I can rid your town of rats Will you give me a thousand guilders?

The townsfolk mock him in disbelief

Mayor:

One? ... fifty thousand!

The Piper starts to play

Narrator (Piper):

... ere these three notes the pipe had uttered You heard as if an army muttered; And the muttering grew to a grumbling; And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling; And out of the houses the rats came tumbling:

Towns-folk:

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats, Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats, Grave old plodders, gay young friskers, Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins, Cocking tails and pricking whiskers, Families by tens and dozens, Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives – Followed the Piper for their lives.

Rats:

We heard a sound of scraping tripe, And crunching apples, wondrous ripe, It seemed as if a voice called out: "Munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon, Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!"

Narrator (Piper):

From street to street I piped, advancing, And step for step, they followed, dancing,

Exit Piper, followed by Rats; their sound fades away as they leave.

<u>Part 2</u>

Mayor:

Rejoice, rejoice, O Hamelin people, Ring the bells till you rock the steeple!

Towns-folk:

Go, go and get long poles! Poke out the nests and block up the holes!

Piper:

First, if you please, my thousand guilders! **Narrator:** To pay this sum to a wandering fellow With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!

The towns-folk have a private discussion

Mayor:

Our business was done at the river's brink; Towns-folk: We saw with our eyes the vermin sink, Mayor: ... what's dead can't come to life, I think!

Mayor and Towns-folk laugh nervously

Towns-folk:

So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink From the duty of giving you something for drink, And a matter of money to put in your poke;

Mayor:

But, as for the guilders, what we spoke Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.

More nervous laughter

Towns-folk:

Beside, our losses have made us thrifty: **Mayor:** A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!

Piper:

You folks who put me in a passion May find me pipe to another fashion.

Mayor:

Insulted by a lazy ribald?

With idle pipe and vesture piebald?

Towns-folk (joining in):

You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst, Blow your pipe there till you burst!

Exit towns-folk

Narrator:

Once more I stept into the street;
And to my lips again
Laid the long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere I blew three notes ... so ... sweet ...
There was a rustling, that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping, and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is
scattering, out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

Children:

For he leads us ... to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than the peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,

And horses soar on eagles' wings.

Exit Piper, followed by children, as if in a daze.

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Music by: Mark Gotham

Words by: **Robert Browning** (adapted by the composer)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Pied Piper / narrator: spoken part (in rhythmic notation),
Townsfolk: SATB chorus,
Mayor: baritone soloist from within the chorus,
Rats: a childrens' choir (or a solo child singer with chorus of child actors),
Children: the same (or a second, older) childrens' choir.
Accompaniment: piano; obbligato flute; optional double bass and percussion.

Notes to the performer

General

- **Box notation:** Boxes are used at the end of both parts, and at b.44ff. in Part 2. The content of the box is to be repeated (in tempo) however many times are necessary for the stage action.
- Note-heads: Triangle note-heads at the top of the stave (b.91, 93, 114) indicate a very high note (pitched, but not a specific pitch). Cross note-heads are used for spoken / shouted (un-pitched) notes in the choral part but are not used in the narrator's part which is entirely spoken (un-pitched). Small note-heads in the piano part are used for passages where the piano may be used to accompany the choral parts if necessary.

Percussion (all optional)

- Instruments: suspended cymbal(s), wood block, snare drum, bells (if available).
- **Cymbals:** The part specifies 'low, medium, and high' with pitches notated below, on, and above the single line respectively. Please use either three different cymbals or three different positions on one cymbal to give this effect ('edge' for low, 'bow' for medium, 'bell' / 'dome' for high).
- Wood block: This is used only for two pairs of door knock. Any realistic alternative is fine.
- **Bells:** The preferred realisation is that all of this part (both the scale and the repeated Cs) be played on hand bells by the 'children'. Alternatively, it can be played on hanging hand bells or tubular bells by the percussionist (if available) and / or can be reduced to just the repeated C if only one bell is available. The piano plays the first 8 bars of this section only if there are no bells (and then from bar 9 in any case).

Other ossias:

- Vocal: The desired part is given in normal notation, with ossias in cue-sized notes, and / or parentheses. For instance, in the final number, 'For he leads us', bar 165, the desired melody is E,B,G,D,B,F#, but if this is too hard for the singers involved, then use the repeated notes (E,B,B,D,D,F#) to make it slightly easier.
- **Piano:** Preferably, the pianist plays all of the full-sized notes and none of the small note ossias. These ossias are given in case of the need to accompany the choir in those sections (and for ease of doing so in rehearsal). The part may of course be shared among several pianists to lighten to load. Clearly there are difficult passages in this work requiring a skilled player.
- **Bass:** octave ossias are given for notes below E1 (which would require the fifth string or extension). In all cases, the lower note is preferred. This usually refers to isolated, 'one-off' notes, except at the very beginning opening where both notes (e.g. G, C in bars 1–2) are to be played in the upper octave if the lower note (C) is not available. That is, the line is intended as a descending fifth, not as a rising fourth.

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Robert Browning

Mark Gotham

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(**ff**)

9:12 8

Db.

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[Mayor:]One? ... fifty thousand!









End of Part 1 ||

Part II



Grace notes = LH slightly early for spreads in b.20, 23







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