



MARY'S NOTES

The Pied Piper's Revenge (original music & words by Mary Cohen)

The Pied Piper's Revenge was a Millennium Commission for CBSO Education, first performed by pupils working alongside members of the CBSO in 2000.

DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE PIECE for

- ❖ experienced narrator
 - ❖ experienced intermediate string ensemble (*with optional double bass*)
 - ❖ string beginners (*initially as 'The Rats' and later as 'The Children'*)
 - ❖ tabor (*optional*)
- *15 short movements:*
works well as a project for several schools/ensembles, rehearsing separately and coming together for some final rehearsals.
 - *suitable as an outreach project with professional players:*
particularly good for projects that have pupils/groups scattered across a wide area, who can only come together at the final rehearsal stage.

PARTS

- **Violin 1** needs confident players of grade 6 standard; there are artificial harmonic solo bars in movements 13 & 15 that may need a teacher or professional, but an easier alternative version is provided.
- **Violin 2** needs confident players of grade 5-6 standard.
- **Viola** is a 'real' viola part, exploiting the C string sound; could be managed by a very confident grade 4 player with excellent intonation, but probably best with players of grade 5-6 standard.
- **Cello** has one or two really tricky chromatic moments, perhaps needing professional support; overall probably best with players of grade 5-6 standard, but there are some easier movements that less advanced players could join in.
- **Double Bass** is optional, but makes a huge difference to the dark quality of the piece if available.
- **Beginners** only have to produce squeaks or drum-like taps, but it is all very rhythmic and needs to be 'spot on' to be effective. Done well, the opening of the solo 'Rats' movement gets the hairs standing up on the backs of the audiences' necks!
- **Narrator** needs to be experienced (possibly a drama teacher or pupil) as the quality and pace of the narration 'drives' the piece.
- **Tabor (optional)** needs to be very rhythmic and with a stable tempo (but it could be played by one of the junior string players).



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BACKGROUND

When I was about nine, my class was introduced to Robert Browning's famous poem '*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*'. This tells a powerful story, possibly based on a real historical event that may have occurred in the summer of 1284.

Written records from the thirteenth century are scarce, but the story of the mysterious loss (or exodus) of 130 children is reported to have been depicted in a glass picture that was made for a Hamelin church sometime before 1300.

Although this picture was either lost or deliberately destroyed in 1660, it seems to have been either the source or inspiration for a rhyme now inscribed on the wall of Hamelin's *Rattenfängerhaus* (the "Pied Piper House"). This rhyme mentions two elements that Browning uses in his poem: a piper dressed in many colours, and the loss of 130 children 'in a *koppen*' (now thought to be a hill in the countryside near Hamelin).

The original 'historical event' was clearly considered significant enough to have been handed down by word of mouth for almost a hundred and fifty years. Then, at some point between 1430 and 1450, it was written down in Latin as an addition to a manuscript from Lüneberg; although this manuscript was lost for many centuries, only coming to light again in 1936.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, in their book about German legends (written in 1816), include a very dark version of this story from Hamelin, in which the piper appears as a rat catcher. However, this 'rat catching' element was only added to the story of Hamelin's missing children two or three hundred years after the original event.

Since the original story is shrouded in mystery, and it has been continually adapted and embellished over the centuries, I put some new touches of my own into the Narrator's text for *The Pied Piper's Revenge*. In particular, it seemed only fair to offer the audience a possible solution to the mystery of what happened to the children!



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STORYBOARD & PERFORMING NOTES

1. Prologue

*Hamelin, the eve of the summer solstice, June 1284.
Slivers of moonlight shiver and dance on the River Weser*

The slurred notes in violin 2 & viola represent the lapping of the water in the river, while the pedal notes in the other instruments convey the moonlight and darkness.

2. Dratted rats!

On the wharf, deep inside darkened grain-stores, rats scratch, and squeak, and scabble, eating their way through the last remaining sacks, until they are exhausted.

Players should find the best place to make squeaky sounds, bowing behind the bridge. To be effective, this needs to be as rhythmic and precise as possible, so give it plenty of rehearsal time. Start from focussed silence to make it really scary!

3. Midsummer Fair

While the rats sleep, Hamelin wakes to the rumble of heavy carts. Merchants from near and far, bringing their wares to the market.

The opening figure depicts the carts. In bar 5, the merchants are whistling 'Summer is a-coming in', copied by the children; and hovering above all of this, the high shimmering sounds in the violins heralds the presence of a mysterious dark force. In bars 18 – 20 we hear the Pied Piper motif for the first time; he is lurking somewhere in the crowd.

4. Jongleurs

The sound of a pipe and tabor draws attention to a troupe of dancers and acrobats, all dressed in brilliant reds and yellows.

The tapping in bars 1- 8 should mimic the sound of a band of drummers – so use a soft heavy relaxed finger action to achieve this effect. From bar 9 we hear the full version of the Pied Piper theme. At the end of the movement there is a slight sense of unease.

5. Overwhelmed

Delicious food smells waft from the stalls and drift across the wharf, rousing the hungry rats from their sleep. In a terrifying wave, rats pour from the grain stores into the market, destroying and devouring as they run amok.

In bar 1, the pizzicato heralds menace. From bar 3 onwards, a further sense of unease and unpleasantness is conveyed by the whole tone scale figures in the violins, who disconcertingly are playing a whole tone apart. In bar 12 the beginner 'Rats' are heard, then the other players join in with improvised squeaks too. At this point the leader needs to cue in the Rats as well as leading off the end of the tied semibreves. One of the Rats can lead off the improvisation.

6. Ferment

An ever growing population of rats has plagued Hamelin for months, and this devastation is the final straw. Angrily, a crowd assembles to demand action from the Mayor.

The lower strings depict the gathering crowd. In bar 5 the melodic fragments represent the Mayor gathering his thoughts.

7. Proclamation

Nervously the Mayor orders a notice to be read out all over the district, "Hamelin Council here announces: Master Rat-Catcher urgently needed, payment by negotiation".

The pizzicato crotchets give both a sense of movement and the collective quickened heart beat of the community. The tune needs to be played as if on trumpets, with the 'dim. molto' (in the repeat) indicating that the proclamation party is moving to another place. This is a good movement to give to some younger or less advanced players, and it can be effective to position two or more 'Proclamation groups' at the edge of the performing space to play in sequence.

8. The bargain is struck

Next afternoon, the jongleurs' piper knocks at the door of the council chamber. He fascinates, with endless tales of swarms he's charmed and plagues he's cured. Whilst not really believing him – indeed almost as a joke – the Mayor grandly makes an offer, "One thousand florins if you rid Hamelin of its rats".

The overlapping whole tone harmonies in the violins convey a sense of unease – there is a dark and sinister side to this Pied Piper, despite his gaudy yellow and red garb. The council feels this, and their hearts are beating unevenly.

9. Incantation one

Time seems suspended, and people frozen to the spot, as the piper casts his spell. A great wave of rats flows slowly, almost soundlessly, through the streets, falling at last over the wharf, into the River Weser, to be swept far away by the current.

The rats are heard in bar 1; then there should be an eerie silence before the Piper's ancient-sounding whole tone incantation steadily gathers momentum. The 'Rats' are being hypnotised and lured away by the Pied Piper; if possible, have a door for them to pass through so they go out of sight as the movement ends. Bars 23 – 32, where the rats fall over the wharf, is a particularly hard section both to play and to bring off. If the slurs are too difficult, do separate bows in all the instruments. (Possibly have these bars solo).

10. Interlude

In a dream-like state, the people of Hamelin clear away the mess left by the wave of rats.

The long held notes are a reminder of the 'suspended time'. The melody should be almost unemotional – the people of Hamelin are slowly coming round after the strange event, and can't quite feel anything yet.

11. The bargain is broken

By late afternoon, the mood has changed to celebration. Cheerfully the piper seeks out the Mayor to claim his reward. Like an icy flash comes the mocking retort, "You caught no rats! They fell into the Weser and were drowned. Be off with you".

As the town recovers, the children begin whistling again, and people move around with more energy. In bars 7- 10 the Piper knocks once more at the door of the council chamber, and the Mayor gives his 'icy' response in bar 20. The darkening mood of the Piper is felt: from bar 23 - end his theme gets more and more intense, ending in bar 31 with a snarl in violin 2.

12. A dreadful revenge

The piper turns to the crowd, hoping they'll take his side. But they are in no mood to let the council part with a thousand florins. "You 'caught' no rats! They fell into the Weser and were drowned. Be off with you!" Pale with fury the piper hisses, "If you won't pay what's justly mine, I'll take something valuable of yours to sell". And before anyone can stop him, he slips from sight.

Above a dark pedal in the bass, the Pied Piper's motif builds to a climax in bar 11, to be followed by a flash back of the rats falling into the Weser – or is it a portent of what is to come?

13. Incantation two

Once more time is suspended. Once more onlookers are frozen to the spot. But now it's Hamelin's children who form a silent wave. One hundred and thirty quiet pairs of feet follow the piper through the Ostertor Gate, never to return.

Now the Pied Piper's ancient 'charm' becomes even more sinister. From bar 9 the singing of the hypnotised children is heard, interwoven by snatches of the Piper's motif played very high in violin 1.

14. Lamentation

One hundred and thirty children are missing, including the Mayor's daughter. For the rest of their lives the parents will lament. All efforts to trace the children are in vain. Rumours abound: they have been kidnapped and sent to the Crusades, or sold as serfs to a distant landowner. That Hamelin should never know the fate of these children is the piper's dreadful revenge.

The pizzicato represents the sobbing, gasping, grief of the people of Hamelin. Above this the sound of the dreadful incantation that haunts their memories.

15. Epilogue

It is Lent 1318. From many countries, musicians have gathered in Bruges to sing, play and swap stories. There's talk of 'Drumless Lane' in Hamelin where music is forbidden, even for weddings and celebrations. From a far away time, a old man of forty recalls a snatch of tune, and memories flood back. Years spent as a child in a great band of other children - one hundred and thirty was it? - travelling with a jongleur from town to town, working as dancers, acrobats, and eventually as minstrels.

Thirty four years have passed. This 'old man of forty' is remembering the tune he heard as a boy of six, when the jongleurs entered Hamelin in June 1284; one of the children stolen by the Pied Piper, he has survived and become a musician. During the church season of Lent (when music is not allowed to be heard in public), he has travelled to Bruges to attend the first recorded 'conference' of minstrels, in 1318.

'The Children' should re-enter the performing space silently, pick up their instruments quickly, and join in at bar 25. (If they were wearing 'rat' make-up earlier, this needs to have been removed). After all the sinister darkness, this movement should reach a joyful climax; a really good *subito pianissimo* in bar 41 helps the build up.