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Family Plays

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

By
Tim Wright



The Pied Piper of Hamelin

First produced at California State University, Northridge.

Drama. By Tim Wright. Cast: 25 speaking roles with opportunities for cross-gender casting and doubling. This energetic version of the classic tale is dramatized by Tim Wright, award-winning playwright, screenwriter, television writer, independent filmmaker and educator. In this telling, the rats and the humans wage political and social war against each other and anyone who contradicts them. The Piper, a former resident of the orphans' home, comes back to get his due. When the mayor refuses to pay him for ridding the town of rats, the piper sets a daze on the adults and pipes away the children. Crippled Franz returns, healed from his limp, with news that the children are happier than ever, tucked safely away inside the mountain. The adults recognize their folly as the piper delivers a final moral narrative. Humor, action and conflict carry this story of betrayal and simple friendship with the reminder that a promise is a promise. The play can be staged with a multi-generational cast for community theatre, or with students for a summer camp or school production. May be played without intermission. The large cast of actors with costumes, props and sound carry the story. Scenery may be minimal or grand. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: PE5.

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ISBN-13 978-0-87602-408-9



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(THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN)

ISBN: 978-0-87602-408-9

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

This play is dedicated to

REBECCA AND MAX

**Two of the world's greatest rat catchers
Who never had a chance to go to Hamelin...**

Cast of Characters

Speaking Roles

The Pied Piper

The Townspeople of Hamelin

The Mayor

Werner, a councilman

Otto, a councilman

Max, a mute councilman

Herr Beckenholt, a school teacher

Klaus, a shoe maker

Gustav, a blacksmith

Zsa Zsa, a shopkeeper

Wolfgang, a farmer

Inge, a widow

The Orphan Workhouse

Franz, a crippled orphan

Mortimer, a poetic pet mouse

Herr Schmidt, the Orphan Master

Ute, his fat wife

The Children of Hamelin

Gretchen, a young girl

Helmut, a cocky boy

Jan, Helmut's schoolmate

Fredrick, the slow boy in class

The Rats of Hamelin

Ernst, the general of all the rats

Horst, the number one henchrat

Borst, the number two henchrat

Helene, an angry rat

Eva, a political rat

Kroger, a dissident rat

Rogue Rat, a sneaky rat

*Note: There's room to add more non-speaking roles, which can be
Townspeople, Children, or Rats...especially Rats!*

Synopsis of Scenes

The play takes place in, around, and under the village of Hamelin.

The year is 1376.

The month and days of June 22 through June 24.

Act One

Scene One: The Town Square, dawn

Scene Two: The Mayor's Office, immediately following

Scene Three: The Town Square, later that afternoon

Scene Four: The Rat Cellar, that night

Scene Five: Franz' bunker in the orphan workhouse, later that night

Act Two

Scene One: The Town Square, the next morning

Scene Two: "R-Day!" The Town Square, midnight

Scene Three: Franz' bunker, later

Scene Four: The Town Square, 3 a.m.

Scene Five: The Town Square, the next morning,
just after sunrise

**The play may be performed with or without an
intermission**

The Pied Piper of Hamelin by Tim Wright

premiered on July 22, 1994

California State University, Northridge

Department of Theatre Arts

Music Lawn Dome Theatre

Jeffrey Levy, director

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

by Tim Wright

Act One

Scene One

(SETTING: HAMELIN TOWN SQUARE,
JUST BEFORE DAWN

The stage is dark. Through the blue mist of night, we discover two figures moving into the town square. These forms are Franz (the crippled orphan), and his pet mouse, Mortimer. Carrying a fishing pole over his shoulder, Franz limps through the center of Hamelin. He looks back to his pet.)

FRANZ

Come on, Mortimer. We've got to get back to the workhouse before the Orphan Master and his fat wife wake!

(Franz picks up his pace, and soon disappears offstage. However, a sudden movement catches Mortimer's eye. Separating from Franz, the Mouse hides behind the city's water well to identify what he has seen. Soon, barely visible forms (the Rats) crawl from hiding places — nooks, crannies and trap doors — and begin a mad scramble about the stage. A second silhouette of figures (the Townspeople) then emerge, and the two forces begin fighting with one another. Stage lights, resembling dawn, slowly illuminate the scene, and it becomes evident what we have been witnessing — a clash of the inhabitants of the village: The human beings and the rats.)

A sweet, soothing SOUND of a Flute is heard, and all inhabitants freeze. A spot locates the Pied Piper, who is playing the tune. He finishes the song and bows. The

Piper speaks directly to the audience.)

PIED PIPER

My name is...well, that is not important. I am...a piper. A magic man, if you will. It has been said that my music can turn the dark to night, salt to sugar, and nightmares to gentle rides on the backs of air-borne unicorns. And this..

(He points to the Square)

...is Hamelin Town. I knew the village well — probably better than anyone ever knew it. Except one. But...you'll have to discover that secret for yourself. And all these misguided creatures are the inhabitants of Hamelin Town.

(Pointing to the specific groups)

People...and Rats. And both very certain that they, and they alone, should be the sole occupants of this village. But...as you will see...all will lose. And this is *exactly* what happened here in Hamelin Town hundreds of years ago. What happened when the Piper came piping...when promises were promised and pledges were pledged. For the melody still lingers — a haunting reminder that all could have been kinder. So, remember, when the Piper comes knocking at your door, he *will* take what he is due...because the Piper must be paid.

(He laughs and puts the flute to his lips. Playing his melody, the Piper disappears offstage. As he and his song fade into the distance, the war between the Humans and the Rodents resumes where it left off. Herr Beckenholt the school teacher, jumps up onto the water well and calls out to the Townsfolk)

HERR BECKENHOLT

The sun has risen! Take heed — we have the advantage now, not them! Into your homes! Bring back your guns, knives, brooms, any living killer cats! For with the light we can destroy these disgusting rats! Gustav! Klaus! Keep the vermin trapped here until our return!

(With a solid cheer, the Townspeople quickly disappear. Mortimer the mouse is trapped with the Rats as well. Each time the Rats try to escape, the Villagers cut them off. Frightened, Kroger (a Rat) calls out to his leader, General Ernst.)

KROGER

General Ernst! What are we to do?! There is no escape!

EVA

We're trapped like —

HELENE

Don't say it!

(The Rats begin to panic. Mortimer shakes with fear. Suddenly, the trapped Rats notice him and react. Mortimer knows he is not welcome here. The Vermin surround the Mouse with hostility. Ernst steps up to the White Rodent. This sudden movement surprises the Humans watching them.)

ERNST

What's this?! Who and what are you?! No wonder we find ourselves trapped! Look, here, in our midst — a human pet-spy!

(Disgusted, the Rats charge Mortimer, and the White Mouse quickly escapes through the square, within an inch of its little life. The Humans quickly react and prevent any more Rodents from fleeing.)

KLAUS

We lost the little white one! Quickly, now! Surround them! They've got some sort of trick up their fur!

(The Rats hiss and spit at their captors.)

KROGER

Human beings!

EVA

Missing link!

HELENE

Homo Sapiens!

(The frightened Townspeople keep the Rats at bay. They do not understand a word the Rodents say.)

KLAUS

Stay there, you despicable rats!

Vermin!
GUSTAV

Rodents!
KLAUS

Mankind!
KROGER

People!
ERNST

(The standoff has become tense.)

GUSTAV
Klaus...what do you suppose they say to each other when they squeak and squawk like that?

KLAUS *(laughs)*

Nothing, Gustav. Absolutely nothing. Rats are stupid creatures, bred by mistake. They don't have any intelligence. All they can do is what they do: squeak, squawk and eat!

Filthy beasts!
GUSTAV

(Ernst barks out orders to his pack of Rats.)

ERNST
Filthy beasts! Look at that mindless breed of inadequate giants! Stupidly trying to make sounds — as if they could talk like us! A mistake of creation! But we, fellow rats, we will prevail!

(The Rats cheer his statement. Ernst suddenly makes a break for it, and flies past the Townspeople and climbs up on top of the water well. He takes command and yells to his Troops.)

Quiet! What are we?! Rats or men?!

Rats!
RATS *(in unison)*

ERNST
We rats possess a higher degree of intelligence, stamina and cunning. For centuries the human vermin has tried in vain to wipe us off the face of the Earth — and, each time we have proved to be the more highly evolved

ERNST (Cont.)

species! Why, put mankind in a maze, and they would be unable to find a way out! Place them in a cage with a wheel, and they would whine and cry about their loss of freedom, while never using the wheel for exercise — to keep up their strength in the event they can flee! Why, they are so ignorant as to put cheese in a trap to catch us! Please! They left the bread out on the table for the taking!

(The Rats cheer him on)

When the other humans return with their man-made weaponry, let's pounce on them with our rat-born strategy! Charge them as one! Invade their homes! Steal their food! Kill a dog or two! And, in the blink of an eye, slide through the cracks, fly down the drains! Show them who owns Hamelin Town!

(He calls out to the two largest Rats)

Horst! Borst! You are henchrats in command! Lead this brave charge on our homeland!

(The Townspeople reappear with guns, brooms and bats. They are startled to discover the Rats cheering with a sense of victory. The Townspeople cautiously surround the now vicious and confident rodents.)

HERR BECKENHOLT *(Nervously)*

Klaus! What's going on?! What has gotten into them?!

KLAUS

I don't know...they've been jabbering their gibberish to that big one on top of the well. Then, all of a sudden, they got sort of...riled.

(Herr Beckenholt looks over his shoulder to see Ernst raise his right paw and, as though He were starting a race, suddenly drop it to his side. When He does, the Rats go wild and attack the Townspeople. Screaming in fear, the Villagers drop their weapons to the ground and scatter. The Rats chase them about the square, cheering. Soon, the assault is over almost as quickly as it began. All of the Rats have disappeared — all, that is but Ernst. He still stands on the water well, grinning from ear to ear. Taking one last theatrical bow, Ernst leaps from the well and is gone. This rat attack infuriates the Townspeople and they begin to grumble. Herr Beckenholt then leaps up on the water

well and calls out to the Crowd.)

HERR BECKENHOLT

Lovely ladies and kind gentlemen of Hamelin Town...too long have we listened in vain to the fat cats who sit in their office! They say they they can do nothing about these simple rats! They lounge behind those doors, eating and drinking up all of our taxes for their own pleasure — giving us nothing but empty promises of *someday* removing the pests. But it is in our homes these rodents choose to nest!

(The Crowd cheers in support.)

GUSTAV

The problem with the rats has gone too far! Why, my chickens will not even lay eggs!

ZSA ZSA

Our cows are too busy to give milk!

INGA

The rats have stolen all of our cheese!

WOLFGANG

They ate all my dogs!

KLAUS

They are sleeping in my bed!

ZSA ZSA

My family cannot even eat without sharing a bite —

INGA

— or a whole dinner —

GUSTAV

— with a horde of hungry rats!

WOLFGANG

Yes! They've eaten everything but my new hat!

(A Rogue Rat runs quickly through the square. As he passes Wolfgang, it takes his hat, and exits, eating the hat. Wolfgang watches the Rat, and then says to the group)

WOLFGANG (Cont.)

Now they've eaten *everything!*

HERR BECKENHOLT

And just what shall we do with the charlatan?

ZSA ZSA

The what?

HERR BECKENHOLT

You know — the fake!

INGA

Yes! The snake!

GUSTAV

The shyster!

HERR BECKENHOLT

Our old Mayor, the Burgermeister! Good people of Hamelin Town, the problem does not lie with us, for we have done no wrong. I say before we lose anymore food, dogs, cats or hats to the dirty, smelly, cowardly rats, let's put the burden where it belongs: on our lazy, shiftless, good for nothing bureaucrats!

TOWNSPEOPLE (*Cheers, then chants*)

We want the Mayor! We want the Mayor! We want the Mayor!

(The Angry Mob continues to chant and yell, and soon the foppish Mayor appears on the veranda outside his office. Dressed in a nightgown, complete with stocking cap, He sips from a glass of champagne. He is irritable with the Townspeople.)

MAYOR

Now, now, just what is this? Please...leave me be. I'm enjoying my wake-me-up tea.

(The Mayor begins to exit, but Klaus blocks the doorway. Klaus is very angry.)

KLAUS

What are you and your Councilmen going to do about *the rats*, your honor?!
(The Mayor looks back at the Townspeople)

KLAUS (Cont.)

and realizes that they mean business. He gulps, smiles and is visibly shaken)

MAYOR

What am I going to do? I will tell you. Come back after two.

(The Mayor tries to exit again, but is unable to get around Klaus. Shaking, the MAYOR turns to the School Teacher, who only smiles at him sardonically.)

HERR BECKENHOLT

It seems the "someday" you have spoken of so often has finally arrived.

WOLFGANG

Along with a hot batch of freshly brewed sticky tar.

ZSA ZSA *(Smiling sinister)*

Yes, it goes along quite nicely with all the sacks of chicken feathers the townpeople have plucked over the last few weeks, my lord.

GUSTAV

When we still *had* chickens!

(Realizing there is no way out, the Mayor grins a phony smile, trying not to panic.)

MAYOR

Am I to understand that you good, good, good, good, good people of Hamelin Town are prepared to —

(He doesn't even finish the question before they all nod in agreement. The Mayor is horrified.)

Good God, my good, good, good, people...by the by, did I happen to mention that I really think you are all good people?

(He calls out loudly)

Werner! Otto! Max! Fetch my shirt, shoes, and official Mayoral slacks!

(The Three City Councilmen: Werner, Otto and silent Max, appear through the doors. Each bring out an article of clothing : a hat, a vest and pants, which they quickly put on the Mayor. The Townspeople remain hostile.)

INGA

Our declaration to you and your council is quite clear: if by tomorrow noon the four of you have not cleared our streets of rats —

WOLFGANG

Then we will gladly tar and feather you fat cats!

(There is a scary silence as the Townspeople stare down the Four Officials. The Mayor pulls his men into a huddle and they confer for a few beats. Then:)

MAYOR *(With false bravado)*

It is an odd coincidence that you bring this very problem to me today, for I was just about to announce this executive order: by noontime tomorrow the rats will be no more! The vermin have no idea about the dastardly plan we have in store!

(The Townspeople do not react. They are suspicious.)

KLAUS

The truth, your honor...or another of your wicked, selfish lies?

MAYOR

If, my good people, I lie...then at noon tomorrow you may do what you have said you will do.

(Without a hint of fear)

Cover us with your sticky and feathery goo.

(The Townspeople are taken aback by the apparent sincerity of the Mayor's statement. They reluctantly give him the benefit of the doubt, as he continues to stand like a statue, an unwavering pose of confidence. The Townspeople soon disperse. The Mayor, with total pomposity, exits into his office. Werner, Otto and Max look to one another, and after a pause, they too scramble inside.)

(Lights fade on the Town Square.)

Act One

Scene Two

(SETTING: INSIDE THE MAYOR'S OFFICE — MOMENTS LATER)

Bolting the door behind them, Werner, Otto and Max discover the Mayor still standing with the frozen smile of honesty. They walk over to him, but the Mayor does not move. After several posings and waving their hands in front of his eyes, Werner decides to speak)

WERNER

Your honor?

(After a beat, the Mayor suddenly breaks down and begins crying like a child. He throws a tantrum. The Councilmen are startled.)

MAYOR

Oh, no! What are we going to do?! I'm too old to be tarred and feathered!
(As the Mayor continues his breakdown, Max begins eating the food which covers the large table at the back of the office. Werner and Otto try to comfort the Mayor.)

WERNER

Take it easy, sire. I am certain the happy and quaint Townspeople would never, ever, do that to you.

(The Mayor brightens for a moment.)

MAYOR

Really? You think not?

OTTO

Of course not! Why should they tar and feather you when I overheard one of them say it would be just as easy tying a rope around your neck and tossing you head first into the River Weaser?

MAYOR *(Pause, then wildly)*

What????!!!

WERNER (*Trying to calm him down*)

But, never worry, my lord. You are forgetting one important matter: all is well.

MAYOR (*Brightening again*)

It is?

OTTO

Of course! You just said so yourself! Now just what is this fantastic plan you possess to rid us of the rats?

(The Mayor suddenly flies into a rage and nearly a nervous breakdown.)

MAYOR

Why am I always surrounded by idiots?! You dolts! There is *no plan!* That was only a ploy! A ruse! A lie!

WERNER (*Shocked*)

You mean...by noon tomorrow, the rats will still be...

MAYOR

Only the four of us will die!

(Hearing this, Max chokes on a mouthful of food. The Councilmen begin to panic.)

OTTO

But, sire, what are we to do?!

MAYOR (*Trying to get a grip on himself*)

What can we do?! We've already done it all — we've used enough poison to start a plague, and the cats that haven't been eaten have been driven away. Why, every Rat Catcher in the land has taken up the task — only to find more and more rats roaming the streets each day.

OTTO

I know! Tell the townspeople the rats *have* been driven away...and what they see now are only very large gophers!

WERNER

Otto — use your head! Are you a professional dunce?!

OTTO

You're right, Werner. I forgot. The Mayor told them that story last month.
(The Mayor begins pacing back and forth with much energy, thinking.)

MAYOR

Now, the solution *must be simple*. Let's think logically. Now, what kills rats? Cats. But, we have no cats. Think. Think.

(The Three Councilmen begin pacing with him.)

What kills cats...rats...but, we have no...

(There is a knock at the door)

Rats! Just as the solution was coming to me! Will one of you get the door?! I can't hear myself think!

(The Mayor continues pacing, as the large doors open slowly. Franz, the small crippled boy, stands outside with a bucket, his scrub brush and home-made crutch in hand.)

FRANZ

Excuse me, Herr Councilmen...but I am the orphan boy from the workhouse...sent to clean your floors...by the Orphan Master himself, Herr Schmidt.

(The Mayor and his cronies pay no attention, and continue to pace. The Boy gets anxious.)

Please, my lords...I must begin at once, or the Orphan Master and his fat wife will beat me and keep my slice of bread for the day to themselves.

MAYOR (Looking around)

What is that incessant noise?!

(He sees Franz.)

What do you want, crippled boy? Away, away I say. We're much too busy today!

FRANZ (Pleading)

Please, Mr. Mayor, sir — the Orphan Master —

MAYOR

What do I care about your tears or your bread?! You must learn that even though you are a worthless orphan and a blight on our society, you have an obligation to being of Hamelin stock. Take your beatings like a man. Don't you want to grow up and be wise and polished like us?

(The Mayor is about to toss Franz out the front door, when Klaus and Gustav suddenly enter, excitedly.)

KLAUS

Mayor! Great news!