

**The Pied Piper of Hamelin (1990)**

*Text by Robert Browning, freely adapted by the composer*

Once upon a time, in Hamelin town,  
A famous German city,  
The River Weser, deep and wide,  
Washed its walls on the Southern side,  
A prettier spot you never have spied.

But, almost five hundred years ago,  
When begins my ditty,  
To see the townsfolk suffer so  
From vermin was a pity.

A Plague of rats!  
Rats! Yes, rats! Millions of them.  
They fought the dogs and killed the cats  
And bit the babies in the cradles.  
They ate the cheese from out the vats,  
And licked the soup from the ladles.  
They split the kegs of salted sprats,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
And even spoiled the women's chats  
By drowning their speaking  
With shrieking and squeaking  
In fifty different sharps and flats.

A stranger appeared in the town hall.  
"I can rid your town of the rats," said the Pied Piper, "for a price."  
"But how will you do this deed?" asked the Mayor.  
"I am able, by means of a secret charm,  
To draw all creatures beneath the sun  
That creep, or fly, or run.  
And I chiefly use my charms  
On creatures that do people harm:  
The mole, the toad, the newt, and the viper.  
That's why they call me 'The Pied Piper.'  
But, if I make your town rat-free,  
A Thousand guilders will be my fee."

"Five thousand guilders would seem more fair,"  
Said the townspeople and, of course, the Mayor.  
Into the street the piper stepped,  
Smiling first a little smile,  
As if he knew what magic slept  
In his quiet pipe all the while;  
Then, to blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,  
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,  
And as the notes on the pipe he 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.  
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,  
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,  
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,  
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers.  
From street to street he piped advancing,  
And step for step they followed dancing,  
'Til they came to the river outside of town,  
Where all plunged in, and all were drowned!

Then up to the mayor, who looked quite bewildered,  
Came the Pied Piper for his thousand guilders.  
"A thousand guilders!" The mayor looked blue,  
And so did the people of Hamelin too.  
"We saw with our eyes, the vermin sink,  
And what's dead can't come back to life, I think.  
Besides, the Plague has made us thrifty.  
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty."

The piper's face fell.

"What, you threaten us, fellow?  
Do your worst. Blow your pipe until you burst!"

Once more he stepped into the street,  
And played the notes that were so sweet.  
Out came 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.

The Mayor was dumb, and the people stood  
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,  
Unable to move a step, or cry  
To the children merrily skipping by.

And to Koppberg Hill his steps addressed  
And after him, the children pressed.  
Great was the joy in every breast  
For he never will cross that mountain crest!  
But, as they reached the mountainside,  
A wond'rous portal opened wide,  
As if a cavern had suddenly hollowed  
The piper advanced, and the children followed  
And into the mountain all were swallowed!

Alas, alas poor Hamelin!

The mayor sent East, West, North and South  
To offer the piper, by word of mouth,  
Silver and gold to his heart's content  
If he'd only return the way he went.  
But they saw 'twas a lost endeavor;  
The piper and children were gone forever.

So, remember, dear friend,  
Avoid the viper.  
Be honest, and true,  
And always pay the piper!