



Victorian
Opera



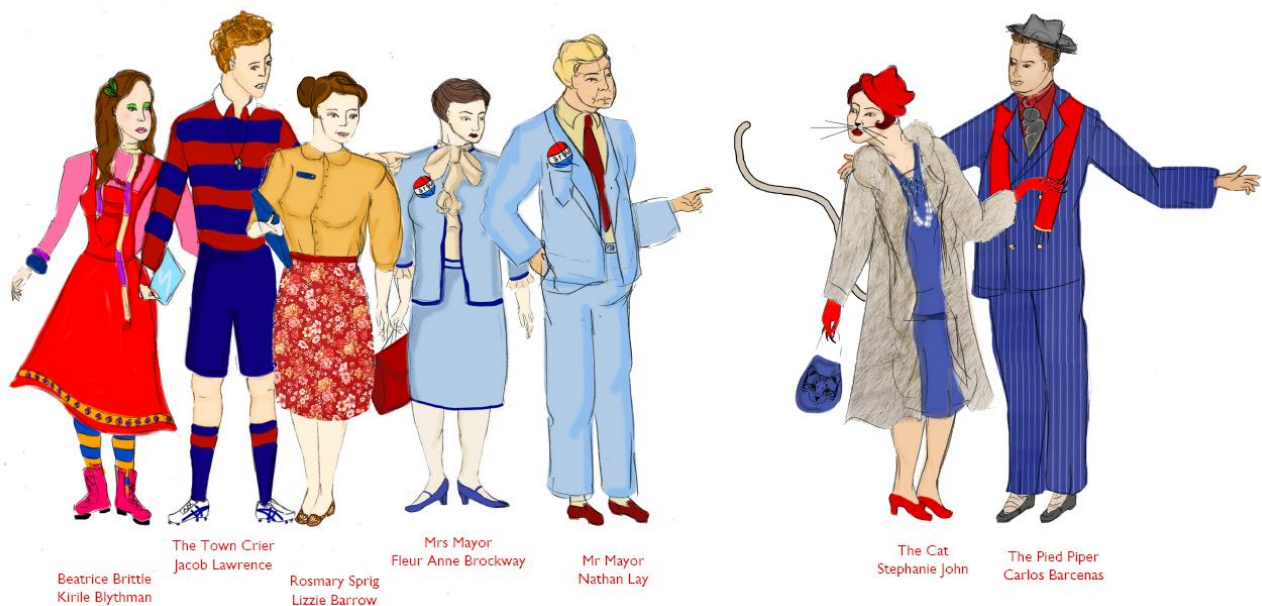
THE PIED PIPER

Education Resource



THE PIED PIPER EDUCATION RESOURCE

Introduction



The Pied Piper costume designs by Candice MacAllister

Character & Cast List

Role	Cast	Regional Tour Cast
Town Crier	Jacob Lawrence	Brenton Spiteri
Beatrice Brittle	Kirilie Blythman	Kirilie Blythman
Rosemary Sprigg	Elizabeth Barrow	Elizabeth Barrow
Mr Mayor	Nathan Lay	Kiran Rajasingam
Mrs Mayor	Fleuranne Brockway	Fleuranne Brockway
Pied Piper	Carlos E Bárcenas	Carlos E Bárcenas
The Cat	Stephanie John	Michelle McCarthy
Townfolk Chorus	Local Community members	Local Community members
Rats and School Children	Children from local communities	Children from local communities

Performances

- **Melbourne** - Arts Centre Melbourne – Playhouse
- **Port Fairy** – The Stadium
- **Shepparton** – Westside Performing Arts Centre
- **Bendigo** – Capitol Theatre
- **Warragul** – West Gippsland Arts Centre
- **Albury** – Albury Entertainment Centre
- **Mildura** – Mildura Arts Centre

The Regional Hub Program

In 2014 Victorian Opera embarked on a 3-year program to harness the creative capacity of regional Victoria with the support of the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust. The goal of the Regional Hub Program was to provide access to participative opportunities for all Victorians, build community creative capacity and social capital and be a source of new Australian artistic product.

In 2014 *The Big Sing* in Hamer Hall Melbourne, a program of popular opera choruses, provided a unique performance opportunity for regional participants from several local choirs. This performance was the culmination of a series of workshops and professional development workshops around Victoria.

In 2015, Victorian Opera presented a new Australian work *Remembrance*, composed by Richard Mills and written and directed by Rodney Hall, which travelled to Hobart, Bendigo, Wodonga, Warragul and Shepparton. *Remembrance* was an ANZAC tribute featuring music and poetry from Australia's wartime experience and engaged local community choirs in each regional centre.

In 2016 Victorian Opera returns to regional Victoria in Bendigo, Wodonga, Warragul, Shepparton and Mildura, to present *The Pied Piper* created by Richard Mills. Both children and adults from each community will participate in this work.

Synopsis of The Pied Piper: Richard Mills' version



Carlos Barcenas as the Pied Piper, leading the 'rats' away © Charlie Kinross

In the imaginary Australian town of Hamelin the townsfolk go about their business – Beatrice Brittle sells her lollies to the local children before school, Rosemary Sprigg teaches the students, and the town crier comments on the daily comings and goings of the various members of the town.

This town is being manipulated by a very greedy and scheming Mayor and his wife. They clearly have their focus on lining their own pockets with ever-increasing wealth through real estate scams, and on winning the next election. But not all in the town are happy with this. Miss Sprigg doesn't want her school ground subdivided for developers and she discusses her dissatisfaction with a wise owl.

One night the rats arrive in the dark of night and cause all manner of mayhem – eating their way through the lolly shop and entering the town's homes. The townsfolk are distraught by the devastation the rats create. Mr and Mrs Mayor offer platitudes to calm everyone down but privately celebrate the advantage of investing in pest control.

The Spanish-speaking Pied Piper arrives, with his translating Cat, offering a simple solution to the town for a handsome fee. Once the Mayor agrees, the Pied Piper leads the rats out of town to the tune of his pipe. Relieved, the townsfolk return to their homes.

When the Pied Piper returns to claim his fee, the Mayor reneges and only offers a mere portion of the originally agreed amount. In retaliation, the Piper pipes the children of the town away. The townsfolk, enchanted by the Piper, are unable to respond. They are distraught that the children have gone.

Miss Sprigg once again consults with the owl, and with its wise counsel, discovers a solution. She asks the owl to carry a message to the Piper – that she and many of the townsfolk are sorry for the behaviour of the Mayor and council, and wish to make amends.

The following morning, the Piper unexpectedly returns with the happy children. The townsfolk are ecstatic, but in reply the Piper offers the townsfolk his opinion on the current Mayor and his wife, suggesting Rosemary Sprigg as an alternate Mayor in the next election.

Miss Sprigg is voted in and immediately brings about the change that is needed in the town. She handsomely rewards the Piper for his efforts.

Background information of the Pied Piper story

The Pied Piper of Hamelin is a story that has existed for over 700 years. There are historical records that suggest the story was based on true events from the town of Hamelin in Lower Saxony in Germany. There a piper lured the rats away, and then when refused the agreed payment, also piped the children away.

There are many alternative theories about how these children might have disappeared. In some versions, almost all of the children were taken, leaving three behind: one who was lame, one blind and one deaf child. Some versions say the children were killed, in others they went to live in a wondrous land. There is some evidence to suggest that 130 children did actually vanish from the German village in June 1284, but the reason for this remains confirmed. Other theories also suggest that the children left as part of the Children's Crusade but never returned, or that the children were in fact sold off, but that the town made up the Piper story to stave off the wrath of the church or King.

There are a number of literary interpretations of the story published. The most commonly known are the versions by Johann von Goethe, the Brothers Grimm and Robert Browning. It has been converted into many stories, plays, films and animations.

The orchestration

- Wind quintet – Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, Bassoon
- Percussion - featuring marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone and tubular bell
- Piano

The music of The Pied Piper

Richard Mills has composed music for opera, solo voice, orchestra, and small ensembles. He writes for the stage, film and community. His music can be lyrical or light-hearted, dark or complex; it can be highly contemporary or strongly connected to compositional traditions.

His music for this new version of *The Pied Piper* connects to his previous work in being thoughtful, considered and contemporary, yet written very much with his performers in mind. This work is written specifically to be able to be sung by Developing Artists of Victorian Opera, community choruses and children's choruses.

In the interview below, Mr Mills describes his process and the work.

In writing *The Pied Piper* what were the influences, what were the things you needed to keep in mind as you were writing?

The influences, funnily enough were the practicalities of writing a work that children and communities could participate in and that our Developing Artists can actually sing and derive some satisfaction from. It was a musical response to a practical situation.

The difficulty as a composer is to make something that is simple, accessible and not drivel; that has a level of genuine musical invention in it, and that is nowhere near as simple as it may seem. **It's easier to be complicated, you can cover up many, many things with a whole lot of complex things, it's much harder to be simple but still to make sure the music reads and that people can understand it.** It must have a sense of structure.

Why *The Pied Piper*?

In making one of these pieces for community, for a city like Shepparton or Bendigo or Warragul, one wants a piece that the whole community can express itself through. So you need to find a story that involves the whole community, which *The Pied Piper* does, because it involves a town. The story is altered, it is not the rather grim and puritanical Browning version. I've changed the story and introduced new characters so that the story is not so pessimistic but serves to highlight the need for generosity in communities and the way that generosity leads to understanding. So I guess I've also added a few characters to give the civic life of the town of Hamelin some dimension. There's Miss Brittle the town's lolly shop lady, Rosemary Sprigg the school teacher, the Town Crier who acts as a kind of factotum and narrator, Mr and Mrs Mayor who are engaged in illicit real estate deals as well as being extremely greedy. (It comes as no surprise that they refuse to pay the Piper, they are too mean and don't pay any of their bills with particular promptness.) This gives some sense of the living dynamic of the community. The piece proceeds via a series of *aubades* (morning songs) and *nocturnes* (evening songs) so that each day, it's a kind of three day thing, is a kind of ritualistic structure to the opera. You get a sense of how the time passes. Night of course is a time of reflection, and that's when Rosemary Sprigg, a good-hearted woman, does her thinking. She's a school teacher and she has a wonderful friendship with an owl, as you do, which is very sensible, because owls are very sensible creatures. She talks to the owl and the owl talks to her, helping her bring back the children, and communicates with the Pied Piper.

The interesting thing about the Pied Piper character is that all of his role is performed in Spanish.

How did that come about?

As you know Carlos' first language is Spanish. It's a nice little sing for him in that he gets to sing in his own language and the cat translates. This is not so far-fetched, why does the Pied Piper need to be English speaking?

You've got this lovely situation of the stranger that comes into town, how the community responds to him initially and then after the incident, and I found that quite relevant in the Australian context.

That's part of the thing as well, the exotic and the foreign not being so exotic and foreign when you get to know them.

You wrote the libretto first - Is that the normal way you write?

The libretto is like the scaffolding; you can't build the building until you've got the scaffolding, otherwise things will run away with themselves and there will be some weird extension out here (*gesturing*). The libretto has to give you the shape. There are some quatrains in there but mainly it's in rhyming couplets.

I don't do both words and music very often, I did so for *The Little Mermaid*, the piece I wrote for a children's choir but this is the first time I've done it for an opera. The text in this needs to be serviceable, it needs to get on with it, tell the story, and have a little bit of quirky humour. It doesn't need to be a grand philosophic statement.

Did you have a particular voice in mind for the characters you created?

It was a question of who was available.

So you were writing for specific people? The Developing Artists – The DAPS?

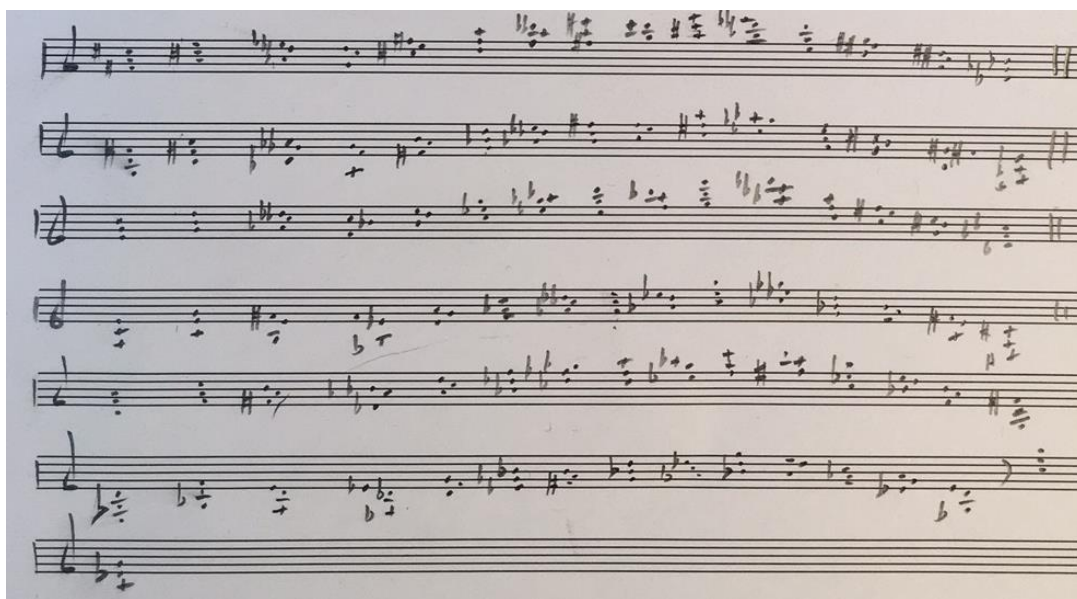
Absolutely, we were going to have Carlos as the Pied Piper and Lizzie Barrow as Rosemary Sprigg and Kirilie Blythman as Beatrice Brittle, Nathan Lay as the Mayor and Fleur Brockway as Mrs Mayor. So that kind of fell into place.

What are some of the elements of composition that are specific to you and this work?

There are a lot of different techniques in the Pied Piper. In the rats section, for example, there are a lot of free elements.

This is also to do with the instrumental ensemble; the woodwind quintet, as well as the percussion. Strings are a little bit too quiet. If you've got a large group of people singing you need instruments that have a large amount of focus. The horn and flute cut through, and I thought for this particular story, the rather detached sonority of the wind instruments would work.

One of the challenges of working with a wind quintet is that you have to be very disciplined, it's not as flexible as a string quartet or quintet. **Each of the instruments has a very distinct personality, so you have to cast the music in such a way that it works for the personality and combinations of personalities.** A string quartet is a much more homogenous ensemble, like one whole instrument. Of course it has all the internal colours but the wind instruments have very strong individual personalities and it's finding a way of bringing them together that works. The piano writing is quite virtuosic and it's a big percussion part. It's not that hard to play, it's just busy. There's the thrill of meeting instruments, such as the marimba, the xylophone, the glockenspiel and seeing how they work. That's part of the theatre of the whole work.



E.g. 1 - Richard Mills' notes for The Pied Piper

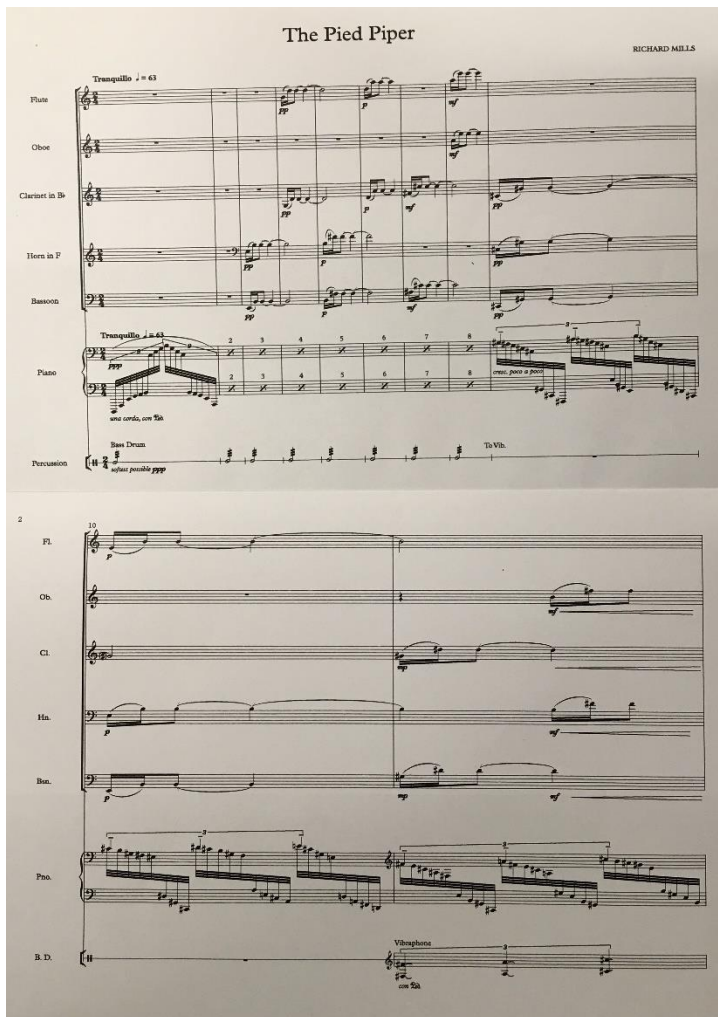
The rats' music is based on a chord progression, the 'rat progression'. See E.g. 1.

The owl's music is based on a series of sixths.

There are many other subtexts of harmony throughout the piece.

The art of writing opera is that one character's music shouldn't sound like any others. It's

important to use harmonic colour. The music for all the aubades is comprised of quite simple arpeggios. The rising fifths that open the opera paint a picture of place and the sense of spaciousness that you get creates the picture of Hamelin. (Richard plays the opening sequence) See E.g. 2

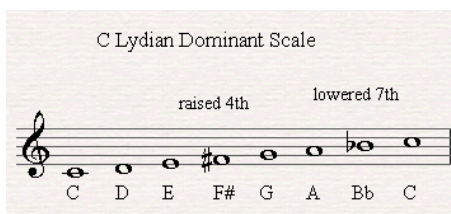


E.g. 2 - Opening bars of Pied Piper

It's being simple and artistic at the same time that's not quite so easy.

The piece is a succession of aubades and nocturnes.

The music of the children has simple diatonic harmonies in the Lydian mode. This gives it a bright feel. See E.g. 3



E.g. 3 - Lydian Mode

The Mayor and Mayor's Wife duets have a 'greasy' tonality created with semi tonal shifts. And they have a dance in the banquet scene. Their recitatives are punctuated by dominant sevenths which create a feeling of unease. See E.g. 4

Form is a human need. People need form because it helps them to understand what we're saying. What we do as humans, the whole of our intellectual apparatus in any culture, is geared to imposing order on chaos so that we can understand it. So form in art is a human need. Form operates in this piece on so many levels: gestural, ritualistic and harmonic. There are many harmonic subtexts which recur and give people that sense of familiarity and the thrill of recognition when it occurs so that it makes sense.

The music shows significant contrast. How would you describe that texturally?

If you are going to tell a story that lasts for 75 minutes you've got to have variation, otherwise people will be bored rigid. This story reflects all the different people in the community of Hamelin. The children going to school and the broader civic energy of the town. The challenge of the composer is to find the language that can tell the story.

What is the relationship of this music and the cultural context?

It has to be a piece that can be sung by amateurs and children. If the music is so difficult and complex that a child can't remember it what's the point? That's the skill of course, any fool can write something complicated.

Their little vamp, which goes through all of their pieces, has a kind of zest about it. None of it is to be taken too seriously. It's meant to be fun. There are such people in the world. See E.g.

The rat progressions shatter the calm, self-preoccupied atmosphere of the town. The only one who is really aware that things aren't quite right is Rosemary Sprigg.

She says, 'There's something nasty in this town...'

That nasty Mayor, he's after me. He wants the school yard, he wants our trees.'

The rats are an act of nature - they just happen and the percussion have fun. There's a lot of free against fixed elements.

This music has of course to be remembered, by little kids, (Richard sings the little riff 'yes sir, yes sir, yes indeed, we are ready for a feed.' See E.g. 6

In the libretto there is a juxtaposition of the joy of the children as they follow the Pied Piper and the horror of the townsfolk as they leave. How did you achieve this musically?

The children leave singing a round. The juxtaposition is in the harmony as it's quite rich harmonically. It's an appoggiatura, an old idea.

There's an interesting thing with the horn in all the nocturnes with the alternation of the stopped and open tone. The horn has a characteristic moment which is quite unsettling. You put the hand in the bell to alter the sound and then remove it. (Richard demonstrates) So you get the sinister feeling of something not being quite right. It's a feature of all the nocturnes.

Another quirky bit is when the Town Crier and Beatrice Brittle find each other, it's silly. It's meant to be an 'ah' moment.

E.g. 5 - The Mayoral Vamp

E.g. 6 - The Rat refrain

The way that you have chosen to finish the work...

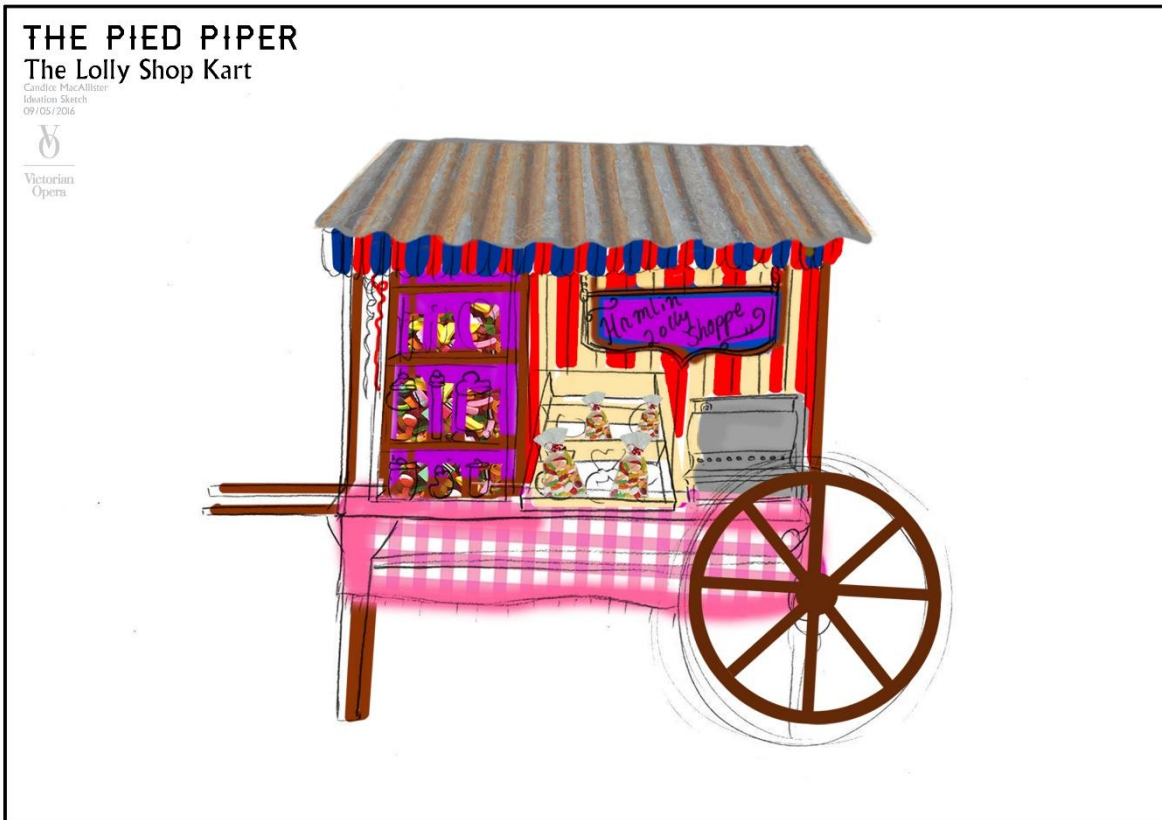
It's the idea of the nocturne again, and a kind of benediction on the town. The fifths that open the piece recur. There is a little chorale that finishes it all and then when that finishes there's the wind quintet and the piper's tune which finishes it off.

The Pied Piper is a lovely bridge between accessibility and the art form of opera.

Extension Information – Design

Candice MacAllister is a new young staff member of Victorian Opera. She was given the brief to design the set and costumes for *The Pied Piper*. Below are her responses to questions about this process.

What has been your inspiration for the design for *Pied Piper*?



Design image for Victorian Opera's *The Pied Piper* by Candice MacAllister

It's an Australian fairy tale, so I began by looking at modern Australian fables and the caricatures that I grew up with – 'over the top' characters from Paul Jennings novels, *Round the Twist*, *Strictly Ballroom* and *Muriel's Wedding*.

How would you describe your designs for *The Pied Piper*?

I hope 'fun'! They're iconic, they use social stereotypes that we create of those around us and play off the imagery associated with them. I'd describe it as a pop-up picture book of an Australian community.

What is the overarching theme of your design ideas?

The whole show is set in a town fair, so the theme of bringing a community together in terms of colour, design and style is important. Colour is something that will link the characters to each other and their world – which is all contained in a cart, literally.

What kinds of characters have you based your costume designs on?

All kinds of icons, local and international leaders for Mr and Mrs Mayor, 1920's Gangsters for the Piper and Cat, Mrs Honey from Matilda – the list goes on! Each character will be recognisable as someone you know about or have seen before.

The Pied Piper is also going on regional tour, what are the restrictions you have had to keep in mind when creating the designs for this production?

We're taking two productions in the one truck when we tour, so everything has to be constructed with that in mind! Luckily I was aware of the parameters when I began designing. It can often be easier to design something when you have some rules to follow and it makes you think more creatively and outside the box.

This production is also using a community chorus of adults, a chorus of children as rats and another chorus as the children of Hamelin. What impact has this had on your designs?

The idea of community is something that has been in the design since the beginning. The costumes are representational and will give the idea of who they are rather than be overly literal. For example the rats will have tails and ears to place over a generic base costume.



Design image for Victorian Opera's The Pied Piper by Candice MacAllister

Activities for Music students

Activity 1 – Listening and Responding - The music of Richard Mills

Listen to the following recordings of music composed by Richard Mills:

[The Love of a Nightingale](#)

Snugglepot and Cuddlepie:

- [Blossom Dance](#)
- [War March of the Gumnuts](#)
- [Finale](#)

[Soundscapes for Percussion and Orchestra](#)

Answer the following questions:

- How would you describe his music? Is there a common feel, style, set of techniques, instrumentation etc. that you can identify?
- How do think Richard Mills' compositional techniques would lend themselves to creating a work like the Pied Piper?

An example comparison of 'Pied Piper' to 'The Love of the Nightingale' by Abraham Naim, a Year Ten work experience student at Victorian Opera.

When comparing these two works by Richard Mills, one must understand the contrast of a serious and dark nature of the latter with the light-hearted nature of the former. While The Pied Piper is aimed at a community audience of people who are likely to expect to be entertained, The Love of the Nightingale is aimed at an audience more likely to already be fans of opera as an art form. In 'the love of the Nightingale', harmony is used in such a way to produce more complex colours through use of chromaticism, while in 'Pied Piper' the use of harmony produces colours through a mainly diatonic harmonic structure. 'The Pied Piper' can be seen as work that aims to entertain the audience through its choice of ideas within the story – the story itself doesn't challenge the listener but engages them through humour. In comparison, The Love of the Nightingale' is a work of passion with strong moral and societal implications.

Activity 2 – Listening and Responding - The performance of the Pied Piper

- Write a response to the performance you heard.
- What elements of the musical composition connected for you?
- Which compositional devices did you identify?
- How did the use of instrumentation affect your thoughts and feelings about the work?
- How did you think the libretti influenced the score and vice versa?
- How did the music blend with the theatrical elements?
- The composer had limitations to enable the chorus's to be 'community' singers? What compositional limitations did you identify?
- How were the main characters differentiated musically?
- What would you have done differently and why?
- Follow up by reading the reviews of the work. Do they correlate with your evaluation?

A reflection on The Pied Piper by Mei Wah Chan, a Year Ten work experience student at Victorian Opera.

The adjustments made the setting and storyline of The Pied Piper are relevant and appropriate for a community project. I find the melodies are a little uncomfortable to listen to at first, but that helps to set the mood. It is more atonal with a lot of chromaticism, which helps to express the discomfort the characters feel toward the rats. The Spanish Piper is an interesting choice as the opera is set in Australia, but it sets him apart from the community, adding to the strangeness of his presence in Hamelin. The mayor and his wife reminded me of the Thénadiers from Les Misérables with their sights set on taking advantage of others to increase their wealth.

Activity 3 – Read the score, Analyse, Compose

194

1360

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Children's Chorus

Pno.

Vib.

Off we go... off we go... on the light and play-ful toe... His en-chant-ment leads the ear... fol-low him and have no fear

Off we go... off we go... on the light and play-ful toe... His en-chant-ment leads the ear...

Off we go... off we go... on the light and play-ful toe...

Off we go... off we go...

Excerpt from *The Pied Piper*.

Look at the excerpt. This is the children's round as they depart Hamelin with the Pied Piper.

- In groups of 3 or four - Learn to sing the round, then sing it as a round
- How does it work harmonically?
- What is the sequential chord structure that allows it to work as a round?
- Using the same chord structure, in any key (as appropriate for your voice or instruments), create a short (8 bars) tune that can work as a round.

Activity 4 – Stimulus to compose

Choose a fable, fairy tale or myth that you connect with and create a short melody for one character to sing in a scene from that story. E.g.: Red Riding Hood on the way to her grandmother's house. You might choose the words directly from that story, or adapt your own.

Be clear about the key elements of:

- pitch (which voice type)
- tempo
- rhythms

Activity 5 – Composing and Recording

- In groups of three record an improvisation based on a mood as suitable for a section of a story. Work out what the basic structure of the improvisation will be first.

For example:

- Happy
 - Three sections – slow, faster, medium.
 - For three parts - drums, guitar and voice.
 - Using ostinato and repetition
 - Latin style
- Write up a reflection on the task.

Activity 6 – Create a compositional brief

- Choose a text with which you are already very familiar. This could be a novel you are studying, a short film you like, a play you are studying, a favourite but very familiar work. You might have a friend doing drama who needs music for their play.
- Imagine you are asked to create incidental music to accompany this text for an audio book or as background to the film or during set changes for the play.
- Commence the process of composing that music. Consider the following to start that process.
 - What is the mood of the source (novel etc.)?
 - What is the style of that source?
 - What considerations do you need to take into account for this imaginary brief? E.g.: will the music be played live or recorded? Is it able to be generated by computer or other means?
 - Does the music require voice? Which instrumentation and which voice types would best suit?
 - Are there cultural influences that need to be considered? E.g.: what are the instruments associated with culturally?
- Create the compositional brief for this work that you would present to the person for whom you would be composing, outlining your interpretation of the musical vision.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Thanks to Richard Mills, Candice MacAllister, Phoebe Briggs, Mei Wah Chan and Abraham Naim for their contributions and editing assistance for this resource.



The Pied Piper leading the rats away © Charlie Kinross

Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXOCHn7Vfec> – the Walt Disney Fable animation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wCwTo562Xw> – A 1957 Musical feature film

http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2011/09/msw_20110917_1105.mp3

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