

A RAT'S TALE (revised)

[Orchestral Introduction]

Chorus: Back and back the rivers run,
 Back the moon and circling sun,
 Turn the clocks to yesterday,
 Slow the stars and Milky Way,
 Stop the brain from hurtling on,
 Search the heart for love long gone,
 Turn the winter back to spring,
 Listen to your memory sing.

*[With German accent, the Narrator speaks as
 Heinrich the Rat]*

Heinrich: Quiet! Wunderbar, my children. Very sweet. But who do you
 think you are, the Vienna Boys Choir? You're only the backup singers. So
 back up! Now comes the headliner! That's me.

[To Audience]

Guten Abend, ladies, gentlemen and children. Allow me to introduce myself
 ~ I make so few appearances. Heinrich Ratte is my name, vindication is my
 game. I come from a quaint German village on the river Weser. A tiny
 whistle-stop, a quiet borough, the place of my childhood - *the town of
 Hamelin*. Does that perhaps ring a bell?

[Pause]

The river Weser? Maybe two bells?

[Pause]

How about *Rats*? Maybe now comes the big Glockenspiel, hm?

[Pause]

Ja, this is the story of the Pied Piper. But it will not be Herr Robert
 Browning's cheap tabloid version. Nein! It will be the true story. That
 fateful day when the Pied Piper came to Hamelin, I call Pearl Harbor Day of
 1376. A day that will live in infamy!

You must realize, this is very painful for me. We're talking
 six hundred years ago. Fortunately, my great-great-greatgreat-great-
 great-great-great grandparents survived. Grandpa Ludwig left a written
 eye-witness record of that tragic day when the Piper led thirty thousand
 rodents to their watery grave. Talk about Helter Skelter! He survived
 because he was volunteering at the YRCA ~ the Young Rats' Christian
 Association. Grandma Greta was sick in bed from rat poison. Thank God for
 the written account. Today it would be on TV within the hour.

[Confidentially]

The “Pie-eyed Piper” is what Grandpa Ludwig called him. He was hooked on *something*, that's for sure, with that cockamamie flute of his. All those high-frequency notes went zing! right to his brain. He came one July day to our little town of cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, and stuck his head inside the door of the Town Hall meeting. “I’ll get rid of your Rats,” he said.

Mayor Dinckelhoff and the Town Council should’ve said, “Am-scray, Dummkopf!” But it was election year and they were, shall we say, in deep political doo-doo. The reason was, you see, a slight problem with the Rats of Hamelin. *Over-population!*

Chorus: Rats! Everywhere, Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats
And bit the babies in the cradles.

Heinrich: Grandpa was not a baby biter!

Chorus: They ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the porridge from the ladles.

Heinrich: Grandma was not a moocher!

Chorus: Made nests in gentlemen's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the ladies' chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats!

Heinrich: *[To Chorus]* Achtung!
[To Audience]

May I be frank? It's a deplorable fact that for centuries we Rats have borne the humiliating stigma of public scorn. We've become the symbol of all that's revolting. Cruel epithets abound. For example ~

[To Chorus]
My choir of angels, please? Bitte?

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: Try it once more, meine Kinder, but TO-GETH-ER. Ignore the conductor.

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: *[To Audience]* Ah, ja! I smell a rat! But it's just an expression. You don't *really* smell a Rat. Who ever smelled a Rat? A Skunk, maybe, but

not a Rat! Not a Chipmunk, Squirrel, Woodchuck, Gopher or Hamster. Odorless. And the Bunny? Long silky ears, soft cuddly body, Easter festivities up the ying yang, pretty baskets, green excelsior, colored eggs, gumdrops and that yucky milk chocolate. Ach!

Need I remind you of the Academy Awards of 1996? Who was nominated for an Oscar? A PIG! You think Pigs don't smell? Have I got news for you! First it was Rin-Tin-Tin, then Bambi, then Dumbo, then Lassie and now a Pig named Babe. When is it going to be *our* turn? Can a Pig scale a building in a scurry?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Tunnel under grain elevators in a hurry?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Slither through sewers?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Of course, not! Can a pig leap from tree to tree?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Swim from wharf to wharf?

Chorus: Not on your lorf!

Heinrich: Yet nobody ever says, I smell a *Pig*. It's always ~

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: Many intolerant slurs have crept into our language. And at which minority's expense are most of these disparaging and politically incorrect remarks made?

[To Chorus]

Hands?

Chorus: *[Hands up]* Rats, mein Herr!

Heinrich: Precisely!

[Tearfully]

Why *us*? We have no agenda.

Chorus: *[Chanting]* Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc..

Heinrich: *[Bette Davis]* What a dump! Peter, Peter, Peter, when
 are you going to clean up this Rat Hole?

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc..

[Police siren]

Heinrich: *[Godfather]* Dino, lean close. I don't have much time.
 You'll be godfather now. Find out who Ratted on the Family.
 I think Salvatore is the Rat Fink.

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc.

Heinrich: *[Mae West]* Beulah, honey, when ya finish peelin' me that
 grape, I want you to Rat my hair. It's sittin' over there on the
 microwave.

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc..

Heinrich: And last, but by no means least ~ the cruelest cut of all ~

Boy: *[James Cagney]* Ya dirty Rat!

Heinrich: *[To Audience]* It's the same hatred that played itself out on a
summer day long ago in that teutonic hotbed of hidebound hostility, that
hopeless haven of hypocrisy, that humble, hapless hamlet of ~ no, not
Honolulu, not Hong Kong, not Hackensack ~ in Hartford, Hereford and
Hampshire, hurricanes hardly happen ~ but in Hamelin in 1376, we had
Hurricane Piper!

“Come in, Herr Piper!” said the Mayor, heaving his pendulous paunch toward
the door. Not that Mayor Dinckelhoff was fat. No, no. Just a little broad-
shouldered around the hips. So in he came ~ the Piper and his curséd Flöte.
Flute, to you simple people.

Chorus: His queer long coat from heel to head
 Was half of yellow and half of red,
 And he himself was tall and thin,
 With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
 And light loose hair, and swarthy skin
 There was no guessing his kith and kin.

Heinrich: It'th true. There wath no gething hith kith and kin. Not to
change the subject, but everytime it's a Year of the Rat, you put out a lousy
postage stamp. But we don't sell like Elvis or Marilyn. There's no Rat Holiday

for postal workers. No Hallmark Hall of Fame Rat Special. No Rat Star placed on Hollywood Boulevard. No Andrew Lloyd Webber musical called *Rats*.

[Angrily]

Heinrich Ratte is my name! Vindication is my game! That's my bumper sticker ~ with my picture, of course. We Rats have been given a bum rap. Why isn't an informer called a Mouse Fink? Why can't you throw money down a Gopher Hole? Why isn't it Moles who abandon a sinking ship?

Tom and Jerry, Bugs Bunny, Garfield, Sylvester, T.S. Eliot, get lost! Let's hear it for the Rat Heroes who give their lives to biomedical research, who orbit the planet in space labs, who sacrifice personal happiness to be pets to grubby

little brats! Puss 'n' Boots, go suck an egg!

[Sniffing]

Hold it. I smell something. Don't you smell it?

[To Conductor]

Maestro? Can't you smell it? An intoxicating aroma.

[Pause]

Aha. I smell a Swiss cheese sandwich in the viola

section.

[Finding a paper bag containing a sandwich]

Look at this –

[To Violist]

Your mother never heard of Miracle Whip? And it's not even on pumpernickel.

[To Conductor]

I notice the writer gave you no lines. So let me say this, Maestro ~ you have to give us a Rat Theme.

Conductor: A Rat Theme?

Heinrich: I thought you had no lines. You have to come up with a Rat Theme, Maestro. We have Lara's Theme. We have the Jedi Theme, the Titanic Theme, and let's not forget the Theme from *Exodus*. But we have no Rat Theme. This is not good!

Chorus: The Pied Piper, mein Herr ~

Heinrich: All right, back to the plot. Here's what happened. The Piper approached the Mayor and Council. "If I rid your town of Rats," he said, "will you give me a thousand in royal silver?"

"We'll give you that and more," burred Mayor Dinckelhoff.

Chorus: So into the street the Piper stepped,

And blew three notes upon his flute ~
 Tootle-ee-toot!
 Tootle-ee-toot!
 Tootle-ee-toot!

Then all of a sudden was heard a grumbling,
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling!
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling!

Heinrich: Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats!

Chorus: Rats!

Heinrich: Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats!

Chorus: Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives
 Followed the Piper for their lives.
 His music, his piping, drove them wild,
 Their brains entranced, their feet beguiled!
 From street to street he piped advancing
 And step by step they followed dancing ~

Heinrich: Until the river's brink appeared ~

Chorus: And in they plunged ~
 And disappeared.

Heinrich: *[Deeply moved]* And in they plunged ~
 And disappeared.

Chorus: Cold the river, black the night,
 Vast the sky of splintered light,
 Riverrun and thunderwall,
 Brambleburn and shadowfall,
 Eye of silver, heart of lead,
 Hope is drowning, love is dead,
 Sleep in winter, dream in flame,
 From the ashes sing your name.

*[Orchestra ends dreamily with a flute
 obligato]*

Heinrich: Maestro, schtöpen der Musik! What is this, anyway, a flute
 concerto?

[Going to podium]

Let me see that score!

[Perusing it]

Who authorized this flute solo? Did not my agent specifically say, *no Flötenspieler?*

[To Flautist]

It's cut. You're dismissed! Take a hike!

[To bewildered Conductor, as Flautist exits]

Nein, nein! It's too late to apologize.

[To Audience]

So unprofessional. Appalling.

[Yelling to Flautist]

And watch out for Peter and the Wolf!

[To Audience]

Flute-players! Always loitering around orchestras, looking for a handout!

[To Conductor]

You should thank me. I'll save the orchestra money, or my name isn't Heinrich T.W. Ratte.

Chorus: T.W.?

Heinrich: *[To Audience]* I suppose you're wondering what T.W. stands for? Everyone does. I get so much e-mail. T.W. stands for "Twitching Whiskers." It's a family tradition ~ one pup in every litter is honored with that name. I was the lucky one in my litter. There I was, suckling between my fourteen brothers and sisters, when all of a sudden ~

Chorus: Mein Herr! The story!

Heinrich: Ja, ja, the story! Back to the story.

You should've heard the village people
 Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple!
 "Go!" cried the Mayor, "and get long poles!
 Poke out the nests and block up the holes!"

And then, wouldn't you know it, this Pied Piper, this
 contract killer from Hell ~ Anthony Hopkins, go home! ~
 he marched up to Mayor Dinckelhoff and demanded his
 blood money! "A thousand pieces of royal silver you
 promised," he said.

"A joke! It was a joke!" laughed the Mayor. "You floated
 on your flute and the Rattsies went bonkers. It was the piercing notes you
 played. A thousand in silver for that? We could've done it ourselves on a

Ah, mood music. How beautiful. This is the Rat Theme you promised. Our own “Rat-sody in Blue.” I knew once we got rid of that flute, it would all be uphill.

[To Audience]

Would you believe these dull, lifeless eyes were once beautiful, beady pink eyes? I've battled cold and heat, hunger and mange, trauma, internal parasites, weak eyes. And I won't even mention injuries from that wooden thing with the metal clamp that went *Snap!* when I reached for the Velveeta. Cheese. See this crippled paw? But do I complain? Nein. You might say, I've gnawed my way to the top, sometimes barely squeaking by ~ hoping beyond hope to be discovered by somebody big. I'm ready for my closeup, Mr. Spielberg!

[To Conductor]

Thank you for the beautiful Rat Theme.

[To Audience]

Mr. Spielberg could turn this into one helluva movie.

Chorus: Heinrich Ratte is his name!
 Vindication is his game!
 All he wants is a little fame!

Heinrich: Vindication sucks! I have bigger fish to fry! Ja, fame interests me. I can see it now: “Heinrich T.W. Ratte” on the marquee. Does anyone know Spielberg's cell number?

Chorus: Ah! Heinrich – Heinrich – T.W. Ratte!

[Orchestra and Chorus hold penultimate chord]

Heinrich: Mickey Mouse! Eat your heart out!

[Orchestra, Chorus & Heinrich swell to finish]

The End