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THREE NURSERY RHYMES
WITH QUESTIONABLE THEMES

for Soprano and Flute

(2013)

PROGRAM NOTE

The earliest English nursery rhymes, published in collections in the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sometimes don't have the same uplifting or child-friendly nature one might associate with the genre. Some of the more common adult themes include drunkenness, violence, and death. As I read through these collections, it struck me as strange that these poems were actually intended for children.

In *Naughty Baby*, each performer plays a different character; the soprano is the mother, singing a sweet and concerned lullaby, while the flute is the noisy and often dissonant baby. On the surface, the text is rather dark. The mother explains to her baby that if he doesn't quiet down, he'll be eaten – which, of course, is just a lie that becomes more and more embellished.

The second nursery rhyme presents a peaceful outdoor scene with “two blackbirds sitting in a tree,” which takes a sudden and brutal turn in the very last line. Throughout the song, the flute is used to paint the flow of water, the sound of birds, and the speaker's thoughts and actions.

The final poem describes the very plain life of a guinea pig. Line-to-line, it doesn't make sense most of the time; the poem seems to wander without any real meaning. The music reflects this in its simplistic and repetitive nature. The story ends abruptly with the guinea pig dying for no particular reason.

DURATION: ca. 7 minutes

Naughty Baby

Baby, baby, naughty baby,
Hush, you squalling thing, I say.
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe
Bonaparte will pass this way.

Baby, baby, he's a giant,
Tall and black as Rouen steeple,
And he breakfasts, dines, rely on't,
Every day on naughty people.

Baby, baby, if he hears you
As he gallops past the house,
Limb from limb at once he'll tear you,
Just as pussy tears a mouse.

And he'll beat you, beat you, beat you,
And he'll beat you into pap,
And he'll eat you, eat you, eat you,
Every morsel snap, snap, snap.

Two Little Blackbirds

As I went over the water,
The water went over me.
I saw two little blackbirds sitting on a tree:
The one called me a rascal,
The other called me a thief;
I took up my little black stick,
And knocked out all their teeth.

The Little Guinea-Pig

There was a little Guinea-pig,
Who, being little, was not big,
He always walked upon his feet,
And never fasted when he eat.

When from a place he ran away.
He never at that place did stay;
And while he ran, as I am told,
He ne'er stood still for young or old.

He often squeak'd and sometimes vi'lent,
And when he squeak'd he ne'er was silent
Though ne'er instructed by a cat,
He knew a mouse was not a rat.

One day, as I am certified,
He took a whim and fairly died;
And, as I'm told by men of sense,
He never has been living since.

I. Naughty Baby

Moderato (♩. = 60)

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f < > *f* < > *p* < > *f* < > *p* < > *f*

5 *mf* *sweetly* **Quasi rubato**

Ba - by, ba - by, — naugh-ty baby, Hush, you squal-ling thing, I say. Peace this mom-ent, peace, or, may-be—

12/8 *mf* *p* **Quasi rubato** *fl.* *molto*

8 *rit.* *a tempo*

Bon - a - parte will pass — this way. —

rit. *a tempo* *p* *quasi cadenza*

10 *poco rit.*

poco rit.

f *poco rit.*

12 A little faster than Tempo I (♩. = 66)

Ba - by, ba - by, he's a gi - ant, Tall and black as Rou - en stee - ple,

A little faster than Tempo I (♩. = 66)

mp *f* *mp* *f* *mf*

14

mf *f*

And he break-fasts, dines, re - ly on it, Ev'-ry day on naugh - ty peo-ple.

ff *mf* *ff* *f* *fff* *fl.*

6 + 3
4 8

16

rit.

p *mf* *p*

tr *rit.* *tr* *flautando*

20 With a sense of urgency (♩. = 72)

mf

Ba - by, ba - by, if he hears you As he gal-lops past the house,

With a sense of urgency (♩. = 72)

f *tr* *mp* 6

22 *f* Suddenly much slower (♩. 48) *poco rit.*
mf
 Limb from limb at once he'll tear you, Just as pus-sy tears a mouse.

Suddenly much slower (♩. 48)
f *ff* *poco rit.*
p

25 Solemn (♩. = 54)
p
 And he'll beat you, beat you, beat you,

Solemn (♩. = 54)
p

28
 And he'll beat you in - to a pap, And he'll eat you, eat you, eat you

31 *poco rit.* *a tempo*
 Ev' - ry mor-sel snap, snap, snap.

poco rit. *a tempo* key clicks

II. Two Little Blackbirds

Moderato ($\text{♩} = 120$) *mp*

As I went ov - er the wat - er, _____ The

Moderato ($\text{♩} = 120$)

p *f* *f* *p* *mf*

8 *poco rit.* *p*

wat - er _____ went ov - er me. _____ I

poco rit. *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *p*

14 *A little more excited* ($\text{♩} = 132$) *poco rit.* *Tempo I* *mf* *mp*

saw two lit - tle black - birds _____ sit - ting _____ on a

A little more excited ($\text{♩} = 132$) *fl.* *poco rit.* *Tempo I* *f* *mp* *f* *p* *mf* *mp*

18 *poco rit.* *A little slower* ($\text{♩} = 112$) *p* *f* *p*

tree: _____ The one called me a ras - cal, _____ The

poco rit. *A little slower* ($\text{♩} = 112$) *fl.* *p* *f*

p *p* *p* *f*

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-7) is in 4/4 time, marked Moderato (♩ = 120). The voice part begins with the lyrics 'As I went ov - er the wat - er, _____ The'. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line with dynamics *p*, *f*, *f*, *p*, and *mf*. The second system (measures 8-13) continues the voice part with 'wat - er _____ went ov - er me. _____ I'. The piano accompaniment includes a trill and dynamics *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*. The third system (measures 14-17) is marked 'A little more excited' (♩ = 132) and 'Tempo I'. The voice part says 'saw two lit - tle black - birds _____ sit - ting _____ on a'. The piano accompaniment features a triplet and dynamics *f*, *mp*, *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. The fourth system (measures 18-23) is marked 'A little slower' (♩ = 112). The voice part says 'tree: _____ The one called me a ras - cal, _____ The'. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet and dynamics *p*, *p*, *p*, *f*, and *f*.

22

oth-er called me a thief;

mf *p* *mf* *f*

27 *poco rit.* **Andante** (♩ = 80) *p*

poco rit. **Andante** (♩ = 80) *p*

So I took up my lit-tle black

poco rit. *tr* (*slowly*) **Andante** (♩ = 80) *p*

pp

33 *rit.* **Fast!** (♩ = 144) *mf*

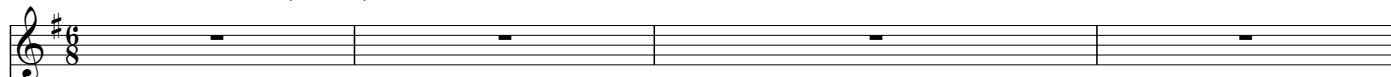
rit. **Fast!** (♩ = 144) *mf*

stick, And knocked out all their teeth.

rit. *tr* **Fast!** (♩ = 144) *mf* *f*

III. The Little Guinea-Pig

Andante moderato (♩. = 48)



Andante moderato (♩. = 48)



⑤ *p*

There was a lit - tle Gui - nea pig, Who be - ing lit - tle, was not big,

⑩

He al - ways walked up - on his feet, And nev - er fast - ed when he eat.

⑮ *mp*

When

⑱ Slightly faster (♩. = 52)

from a place he ran a - way, He nev - er at that place did stay; And

Slightly faster (♩. = 52)

mp

22

while he ran, as I am told, He nev-er stood still_ for young or old.

26

He

29

Rubato

of - ten squeak'd and some - times vi'_ lent, And when he squeak'd he

f colla parte *mp* *f* *ff*

32

ne'er was sil- ent;

mp *f* *mp* quasi cadenza *mf*

36

Though

ff *p*

* Optional: instead of singing the written pitch, actually squeak; it doesn't need to be pretty.

39

A little more in tempo

ne'er in-struct - ed by a cat, He_ knew a mouse was not a rat.

A little more in tempo

mf *mp*

43

poco rit.

A little slower than Tempo I (♩. = 44)

One day, as I am cer - ti-fied, He took a whim and

poco rit.

A little slower than Tempo I (♩. = 44)

p

49

Tempo I

A little slower (*poco rit.*)

fair - ly died; And, as I'm told by men of sense, He nev - er has been liv-ing since.

Tempo I

A little slower (*poco rit.*)

pp