



THE WHITE CAT

STORY BOARD AND PASTICHE SCORE BY DEBRA NAGY
LIBRETTO BY LARRY ROSENWALD

Prologue

Overture

François Couperin: Essai en forme d'ouverture from Apothéose de Lully

Air for the Prince

Jean-Baptiste Lully: "Plus j'observe ces lieux" from Armide

Prince: Come attend to my tale, give ear to my narration!
I am the youngest son of three,
and our father the king sends us out on a quest:

To find for him a dog, the best in all the nation,
to bring him charm and delectation.

Who of the royal sons will acquire the prize?
Whose dog will please the king, find favor in his eyes?

So I wander alone, not knowing what will follow,
uncertain where to turn between each hill and hollow.
Kindly stars, lend your aid to me,
that I in this dark wood my fated course may see.

Act I

We meet the White Cat in her garden. She is wise and talented, displaying her abilities as a singer and dancer.

Couperin: Rondement from Apothéose de Lully

Fable: The Ant and the Grasshopper



On summer days,
Grasshopper sings and goes a leaping,
On summer days,
and all can see her as she plays
Not so the ant, who hardly sleeping
gathers her store for winter keeping,
on summer days.

On winter days,
Grasshopper has no food for eating,
on winter days,
on barren fields she goes to graze;
meanwhile the ant, in well-stocked larder,
calls out, "you should have labored harder,"
on winter days.

Lully: Chaconne from Phaeton

Act II

Couperin: Les Sylvains

The Prince wanders in to encounter golden gates and a mysterious, ornate palace. His eye is caught by luminescent walls painted with scenes from fairytales. The Prince is welcomed into the palace by mysterious disembodied hands who help him change clothes and usher him into a dining room where he is greeted by the White Cat.

SONG OF WELCOME

Michel Lambert: Vos mépris chaque jour

White Cat: Noble prince, bienvenu! As long as you may be here,
I shall provide for you a place of shelter, as airy as bright!
You need not be afraid of anything you see here,
neither of hands in air, nor of cats in wondrous assemblies of white.
And if, from time to time, I sing a tale or three here,
be at ease, be at ease, my desire is to bring you delight.

Jean-Baptiste de Bousset; Pourquoi doux Rossignol

Prince: Dear cat, you are most kind, off'ring welcome to me;
yet I must ask, yet I must ask, what is your story?
Very few of our cats speak so eloquently,



Nor live in abodes of such glory.

White Cat: Dear Prince, what charming words, but I beg you, let be;
A simple cat, of kindly heart, is here before you.

Prince: Still I would know the mystery that hides from observation.

White Cat: Be not hasty, my prince, await the revelation!

She leads him off...they find themselves back in the labyrinth

Fable: The Lion and the Rat

Once a Rat, the story goes,
lay beneath a Lion's toes.
The animal king,
not seeking to sting,
nor giving way to anger,
spoke so sweetly to his friend,
and put him out of danger.

Days went by as quick as thought,
Lion now in trap was caught.
But good-hearted Rat,
when he heard of that,
his pity was awoken;
ran to the trap and gave a bite,
and all the cords were broken.

Tiny creatures oft we see
helping out the powers that be.
But also 'tis true:
these powers must do
as kindly as they're able.
Let them not tell me, with a sneer:
"that's only true in fable."

Couperin: Barricades misterieuses

A year has passed...

André Campra: Aimable vainqueur from Hésione

White Cat: Dear friend, I do fear
that the time is near –
the year is now ending,



and homeward tending
you'll soon disappear.
Think of your mission,
pursue your ambition,
abandon me here!

A dog
you must find,
and homeward shall carry,
speed on, never tarry,
on through storm and wind.
But ponder well
what wise women tell:
that sometimes a gleaming
is nothing but seeming,
not truth but a spell.
What in me lies
is all at your service,
to conquer the prize.

A musician hands the white cat a small package. She in turn hands it to the prince. Confused, he turns over an acorn in his hands. Of course, he accepts the cat's gift and prepares to take his leave. Before going, he sings a song...

Lully: Bois Épais from Amadis

Prince: Ah 'tis true, I must now be going,
the stream of time is onward flowing,
though never have I known such joy as here with you.

If I could be a cat, or you gain woman's features!
Why must I forsake the best of creatures?
When, when may we our bond renew?

ACT III

Scene 1: Our young Prince returns along with his brothers to the king. The Prince meekly presents his acorn.

Couperin: Descente d'Apollon from Apothéose de Lully

The King is flustered and defensive...and demands his son undertake a new quest.

Couperin: Rumeur souterrains from Apothéose de Lully

The Prince exits looking concerned...

Scene 2: The White Cat sits on a bench in her garden, looking depressed.

Senallé: Preludio in g minor

The Prince wanders in slowly, finding his way back to the White Cat. The White cat spots the Prince: she's overjoyed that he returned to her.

Lully: "Tout vous a dit" from Amadis

White Cat: Happy am I,
to be together!
Your presence brightens up the weather,
I feel a clearer sky
(so) happy am I
to be together.

Prince: And I as well
know no joy can excell
or can equal the pleasure
of my delight, surpassing all measure.
And I as well
know no joy can excell
or can equal the pleasure
of my delight, surpassing all measure

Cat and Prince together:
And I as well
know no joy can excell
or can equal the pleasure
of my delight, surpassing all measure.

Popular Tune: La bonne aventure

Prince: Dearest cat, my royal sire
a new mission has decreed:
that his sons for him acquire
a new wonder for his need.
'Tis beyond the power of man!
White Cat: "I will help you if I can."



Prince: What we now must find or wheedle
is a linen sheet so fine
you can draw it through a needle
in a single slender line!
Far beyond the power of man!
White Cat: “I will help you if I can.”

The couple are transported to the labyrinth.

Fable 3: The Tortoise and the Eagle (after Marin Marais)

Once our friend the tortoise –
on her back her house she bore –
sought to learn the way
across the sky to soar.
True it is I tell you,
truth is all my care,
‘twas our friend the crawling tortoise
sought to fly upon the air!

Off she went alone,
and wandered low and high,
to learn to fly from Master Eagle,
ruler of the sky!
His response was laughter,
then these words came after:
“your goal cannot be found,
you must crawl upon the ground.”

“Tis your destiny,
accept the simple way
you’re meant to be,
crawl ever on, and leave the skies to me.”
True it is I tell you,
truth is all my care:
even now the humble tortoise
sought to fly upon the air!

Weary of debate
the eagle now at last
these words did state:
“upon my back now climb, no time to wait!”
Higher up and higher
soars the winged flier,



then drops her there alone
to let her plummet like a stone.

Here's a tale of woe:
I've seen a reckless fool
attempt to go
atop a mill, then fall from high to low.
So our story teaches:
she who over-reaches
will never learn to fly
but to the ground will fall and die.

Couperin: Barricades misterieuses

Meanwhile, the young prince passed another year full of entertainments and happiness in the White Cat's lovely company. The time soon came that the Prince had to leave again.

A musician hands the white cat a jeweled box that contains a large-scale walnut. She in turn hands it to the prince. He peeks inside and is astonished.

White Cat: Prince, hide away this tiny treasure
till journey's end,
for it contains the linen measure
I give you; attend!

Prince: Sweetest of cats, you are forever
to me so kind
How can I thank you! I can never
put this out of mind.

And if only
I could ever linger here,
for lost glory,
for the pomp of royal throne
never, never,
never would I shed a tear.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: Sans Frayeur

White Cat: Gentle prince, I rejoice: your heart is full of caring;
most princes, though, refuse all sharing.
Ah, ah, they only love themselves alone.
This tiny cat, though humble in her seeming –
and only fit for hunting mice –

finds delight in your fond esteeming.

The prince tucks the jeweled box under his arm, kisses her paw, and departs.

Couperin: Enlèvement de Lully from Apothéose de Lully

ACT IV

The prince kneels before the king and offers the box to him. The king peeks inside and pushes it away. The prince peers inside and pulls out a large walnut. He motions to a musician to bring him a nutcracker.

Couperin: Accueil entre doux et agard from Apothéose de Lully

Thinking to find in the walnut the famous piece of linen, instead he finds a hazelnut; he cracks that, and is surprised to see a cherry stone. They looked at each other; the king smiled and laughed at his son for being so foolish to believe a walnut could contain a piece of linen. He cracked the cherry stone, which contained its kernel.

Then a loud murmur arose in the room, and nothing could be heard but that the youngest prince had been duped. He made no reply to the jests; he opened the kernel and found a grain of wheat, and in the grain of wheat a millet seed. In truth, he began to doubt and murmured between his teeth "Why, cat, White Cat, you have made a fool of me."

However, he opened the millet seed, and the people were astonished when he drew from it a piece of linen four hundred ells long,

Couperin: Vole de mercure from Apothéose de Lully

All the birds, beasts, and fishes were painted on this fabric, with trees, fruits, and plants of the earth, the rocks, the curiosities and shells of the sea, the sun, moon, Stars and planets of the heavens. Clearly, the beauty and rarity of the linen could not be compared with anything else in the world.

When the king sees the piece of linen, he becomes as pale as the prince was red from his prolonged efforts to find it.

Couperin: Descente d'Apollon from Apothéose de Lully

The King is flustered and invents one final challenge for his sons...The Prince prepares to depart.

Couperin: Les Sylvains

The White Cat is excited to see that the prince has returned, but the prince is upset. She attempts to comfort him.

Popular Song: Amis ne parlons

Prince: Hear me, my friend; my father sets us a final quest:

White Cat: Tell me, dear prince, the prize you seek in your final test.

Prince: Finding a lady fair of feature and good of heart,
she to be queen, and rule our kingdom in every part.

White Cat: Finding a lady fair of feature and good of heart?
I shall assist you, gentle prince, with my every art.

They return to the labyrinth to while away their time.

Fable 4: The *Swallow and the Nightingale*

White Cat:

Eager to see her Philomele,
Procne into the woods did go;
there she beheld her songful sister,
singing a song both high and low.
“Tell me,” she said, “why do you linger
here in the wood? Please let me know.

“This is the goal of all your music,
charming the creatures of the wood?
Or at the most some oafish peasant,
hopeless to tell the bad from good,
who for reward will seek to snare you
into his nets as prize or food.

“Come to the kings, my dearest sister
there in their courts you joy will find,
there will enjoy a gilded dwelling,
treats and delights to please your mind.
There you will feel how much you gain, dear,
leaving this desert far behind.”

“What you commend, my dearest sister,
is in all truth captivity;
how can I savor any pleasure
if in a cage I’m bound to be?
Every cage is but a prison;
here in this desert I am free.”

The Prince applauds her performance.

Campra: l’Aimable vainqueur from Hésione

White Cat: Yet again, I do fear
that the time is near –
the year is now ending,
and homeward tending
you’ll soon disappear.
Think of your mission,
pursue your ambition,
abandon me here!

Prince: ‘Tis true,
a fair bride
I must now acquire
though all I desire
[is] to stay by your side.

White Cat: If I assist,
you must not resist –
your task may distress you
but truly will bless you;
let it not be dismissed!
And at the last,
if we can be faithful
our troubles are past.

Couperin: Sarabande from Onzième Concert

The White Cat insists that the only solution is for the prince to cut off her head and tail. Naturally, the prince is horrified and could not bear to take the life of the cat he loves so dearly and owes so much to. Finally, she convinces him.

As soon as he has done the deed, he is completely dumbstruck at the transformation that takes place.

ACT V

Couperin: Concertant avec les ombres liriques from Apothéose de Lully

The young prince approaches the castle carrying a glassy, white rock dotted with gold and rubies. The sounds of trumpets announce his arrival at the palace.

Couperin: La Triomphe

The Prince approaches the king and offers the white rock for inspection.

Prince:

Father, dear father, come listen to me
here in this pebble a cat you will see,
sweet is her mewing and gentle her heart,
solace and great joy will she impart.

King:

A cat! Are you afraid that our palace will be eaten up by mice?!

Couperin: Ombres liriques from Apothéoses de Lully

The king inspects the rock suspiciously, and he goes to open it, it shatters.

Couperin: Vol de mercure from Apothéoses de Lully

Appearing like the sun which has been for some time hidden by a cloud, the White Cat emerges. Appearing in human form wearing a flowing dress with a floral crown, the White Cat approaches the king and makes a low curtsy. The King is notably astonished.

Lully: Passacaille d'Armide

White Cat: Noble king, be at ease, I would never
such a king from his kingdom disserve!
Of the lands where I reign
one shall be your domain,
to your other sons two
each a kingdom is due.

In return I but ask your affection,
and the hand of your son as my husband to be.
Once united in happy connection,
we shall reign, two as one, in our kingdoms all three.
Once united in happy connection,
we shall reign, two as one, in our kingdoms all three.

Prince: Kindly fate, I am happy past telling,
my delight, all delight far excelling.



LES
DÉLICES
DEBRA NAGY, DIRECTOR

THE WHITE CAT
Premiere Performances April 1-3, 2022
In Akron & Cleveland, OH

Prince & White Cat: For our love is a love to last beyond the years,
like the stars in the sky and the eternal spheres.
For our love is a love to last beyond the years
like the stars in the sky and the eternal spheres.

The king and the court uttered cries of joy and astonishment and marriages for all three brothers were celebrated at once. Then each went to rule his own kingdom.

The beautiful White Cat was immortalized as much by her goodness and generosity as by her rare merit and beauty.

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