

Version for Edition Wilhelm Hansen - singing translation

The Emperor's New Clothes

A Concert Opera for Symphony Orchestra, Choir (SSA) and soloists.

Music by Bo Holten

Text: Freely adapted from H. C. Andersen by Eva Sommestad Holten 2005©

English translation by Eva Sommestad Holten 2019.

The libretto is based on the principles of storytelling theatre, where choir and soloists switch between narration and character play.

Italic = Narration

Choir	Narration, courtiers, the people and the Emperor's inner voice
Tenor	Narration and the two swindlers
Baritone	Narration and the Emperor
Child with one spoken line.	

I. [The Emperor in the dressing room]

Baritone: (spoken) *Many years ago, there was an Emperor so exceedingly fond of fancy new clothes that he spent vast riches on royal robes.*

Choir: Courtiers: The Emp'ror is in his dressing room!
Look, he is in the dressing room!

Baritone: *Yes, here's the Emperor! Yes here!*

Emperor: Ahh!! What joy, what pleasure!
Finest silk and satin, ribbon and laces ...
Look, this fitted doublet, the fluttering ruffles,
the swaying skirts and bows...
Ah, that's me....!

Choir: Emp. /inner voice Swaying skirts and bows, fluttering ruffles
Look in the mirror!
Ahh, that's me!

Baritone: Emperor: That's me! This noble shape,
the swinging, the swaying...
Look in the mirror!
With taste adorning the Emperors body is truly a fine art.
Voilà!

Choir: Courtiers: The Emp'ror is in council?
No, he's in the dressing room!
He is here! Time to behold the newest royal garment!
Ah! Look at your Emp'ror!
Ah! What a pleasure, what happiness!

II. [The swindlers come to town]

Tenor: *But this day, this very moment,
two true swindlers did enter the town:*

Choir: *The first one was the stateliest,
he was clad in the dainties of diamond-set blue garters.*

Tenor: Swindler 1: Imperial highness! My Emp'ror!
Is there any higher virtue than the perfect fit,
where bodies condense to fine art, to the mirror of grace?
What could give more delight than pleasing the senses
with colour, cut and scent?

Choir: *The second one wore pocket flaps with scarlet buttons
and he did speak French:*

Tenor: Swindler 2: Monsieur l'Empereur! C'est la Beauté!
La perfection de la réflexion...

Baritone: Emperor: Look, two strangers who have come to our
sweet and humble little town.
It's said that they do know to weave the most delicate cloth,
with beautiful colours, all set in marvellous patterns.

Tenor: Swindler 1: And this same cloth has a truly magic pow'r,
being all-invisible to those who are unsuitably stupid.
or unworthy of their office.

Baritone: *The Emperor's attention was aroused:*

Emperor: This will be invisible to those who are unfit for their office.
Thus, I can tell the wise from the foolish.

All: IF YOU ARE STUPID YOU CANNOT SEE ,
HOW MOST MAGNIFICENT THIS ART IS.

Baritone: Emperor: Thus, we can tell the wise from the foolish.
[To the swindlers] I want this cloth woven for me! Now !

Tenor: Swindler 1: It's costly...

Swindler 2: Très cher....

Baritone: *The Emperor gave them heaps of silver and gold...*

Tenor: Swindler 2: Plus cher..

- Baritone:** *... and he poured more gold in their pockets,
gold into their pockets.*
- Tenor:** Swindler 1: We must at once have the finest of silks and the most precious
pearls, purple, indigo and cochineal.
- Baritone:** *The hand of the Emperor trembled slightly,
since this was a costly affair.*
- Tenor:** *But when the swindlers again were on their own,
they did put everything in their own knapsacks;
the most precious pearls, the finest of silks,
gold, purple, indigo and cochineal.*
- Choir:** *And with looms set up,
how busily they pretended to be working!
All night long so busily, busily!
All hands and shuttles were flying, dancing!*
- Tenor:** Swindler 2: Voila! Eh bien!
- Choir:** *Piff, piff, shuttle, go!
dunk, dunk, a beating beam,
Piff, dunk, piff, dunk!*
- Tenor:** *And the swindlers were working the empty looms
far into the night.
And all in town they knew
what magical powers the cloth did possess,
and they all wanted to learn how
bad and blind and stupid their neighbours were.*

III. [The Emperor sends officials to inspect the cloth]

- Baritone:** Emperor: Now I will examine what progress they do with my cloth.
- Choir:** *said the Emperor.
But he felt uneasy when recalling and remembering
that those who are fools, could not see a thing.*
- Baritone:** Emperor: I send at first my trusted minister and true servant,
for he is wise, and none is more fit for office than he.
- Choir:** *And the minister went off to the swindlers.*
- Tenor :** Swindler 2: Ah, Monsieur le Ministre!
- Choir:** *And the swindlers they pointed at the empty loom.
[Choir and swindlers pointing]*

- Tenor:** Swindler 1: The colours aren't they brilliant?!
Behold the bold design!
- Choir:** *But he could see nothing there,
since there was really nothing.
Was he dumb? Unfit for his office and position?
No one should never ever know this!*
- Baritone:** *And the minister informed the Emperor
that it delighted him immensely!
All these patterns, all these colours...
Yes, this was really most adorable!*
- Choir:** Courtiers: The most delightful patterns,
the brightest of colours!
Yes, this is really most adorable!
- Baritone:** *And the Emperor before long sent a new trustworthy official
to inspect if the cloth would soon be ready.*
- Tenor:** Swindler 1: Come closer! The colours, are these not enchanting?
Swindler 2: Bleu d'indigo, vermillon!
Swindler 1: And behold this fitted pattern of Chinese flaring flat-finches!
- Choir:** *But as with the trusted minister he did not see a thing.
No one should never ever know this!*
- Baritone:** *This fine, fitted pattern of Chinese flaring flat-finches.
Yes, this is really most adorable,
he assured the Emperor.*
- Choir:** Courtiers: The most delightful patterns,
the brightest of colours!
Yes, this is really most adorable!

IV. [The Emperor went to see the clothes for himself]

- Baritone:** *The Emp'ror now wished to see his new cloth
while it still was on the loom.*
- Choir:** *Piff, dunk, shuttle go!
Dunk, dunk, a beating beam!
Weaving and labouring with might and main,
with no warp nor weft!*
- Tenor:** Swindler 2: [Looks up from the loom]
Enfin, enfin, Monsieur l'Empereur! Bienvenu!

Swindler 1: Come closer! Let the mysteries of art overwhelm you!
Behold the fluttering pattern!
Behold the vibrant colours, the blaze!

Swindler 2: La perfection de la séduction!!

Choir: Courtiers: Yes, is it not magnifique!
Now we have something of true eminence and greatness
in our little town! Something to give us fame,
as were we a city of true importance!

Baritone: Emperor: [To himself] What is this? I can't see anything!
[The inner nightmare takes over - the voices of the swindlers fade away]

Tenor: Swindler 2: Monsieur l'Empereur?

Baritone: The Emperor: Yes, it is very nice...

Choir: Emp./inner voice Should I really be incompetent?
Should I really be the stupidest?
Dumb?

Baritone: Emperor: It has my highest approval! Highest!
Yes, it is nice...

Tenor: Swindler1: Behold the beautiful flat-finches,
arrayed in a twin-twisted spinning pattern!

Choir: Emp./inner voice Just me don't see a thing..
Dumb - incompetent

Tenor: Swindler 1: ...Look, flat-finches...!

Baritone: Emperor: [Absently] It's *magnifique*, unsurpassed, *excellent* ...

Tenor: Swindler 2: [With absolute authority] Exactement magnifique, excellent!

Baritone: Emperor: [Wakes up] To these two honourable men I hereby confer
the knighthood and token of Master Weaver!
For most notable deeds in the service of the arts!
[Pins their medallions in their button-holes]

V. [Clothes are sewn from the fabric and the Emperor is dressed]

Tenor: Swindler 1: But my dear Emp'ror!
Why not turn this lovely and extr'ordinary cloth into robes
for the splendid stately pageant you're soon to lead?

Choir: *Oh, what a haste!*

- Tenor:** Swindler 1: Leave 16 candles burning day and night,
that we in time get the Emperor's new clothes ready!
- Swindler 2: Allez-vite!
- Choir:** *People saw through the window how hard they laboured;
They feigned to roll the cloth off the looms,
they cut into the air with giant scissors,
they sewed with tiny needles with no thread.*
- Tenor:** Swindler 2: Attention!
- Swindler 1: The Emperor's new clothes are ready!
Oh, your Highness!! My dear Ministers! Welcome!
Look at this wonder of silk, brocade and laces;
the doublet, the breeches; look, this breathtaking train!
[Pretends to lift the train]
- All:** BUT SINCE THERE WAS NOTHING,
NO ONE SAW ANYTHING
- Tenor:** Swindler 1: At once take your garments off my dear Emp'ror,
and let us finally most humbly fit your new clothes
here at the mirror.
- Baritone:** Emperor: With taste adorning the Emperor's body is truly a fine art.
Let me admire my new clothes in the mirror!
- Tenor:** Swindler 2: Ahh... Magie de transformation...
- Choir:** *Yes, look at this wonder of silk, brocade and laces!*
- Tenor:** Swindler 1: And note; These clothes are light as spider web!
[Cunningly] Yes, you could fancy you wore nothing indeed!
- that's the true virtue of it!
- Swindler 2: La vertu même!
- Baritone:** Emperor: La vertu même..?
- Choir:** *...light as a spider web..*
- Tenor:** Swindler 1: Notice the Levantine cut,
...the double collar, ribbon lacing!
- Choir:** *Yes, this wonder of silk, brocade and laces,
light as spider web!*
- Tenor:** Swindler 2: Ahhh,...mmmm...Voilà!
...Eh bien.... à point... [The swindlers pretend to arrange the robe]

Baritone: Emperor: Yes, you could fancy you wore nothing indeed!

Tenor: Swindler 2: Moment, attention! Monsieur l'Empereur!

Swindler 1: Your men are already waiting with the canopy!

Choir: *...The Emperor glanced for the last time in the mirror.....*

Baritone: Emperor: Yes, well, it should be all set...
Isn't the fit *à point*?

[The swindlers leave discretely]

VI. [The great procession]

Choir: *And the Emperor walked through the streets and squares,
under the wonderful canopy.
And all his chamberlains followed holding nothing,
pretending to bear a breathtaking train.*

Choir: People: Ahh, the Emperor's new clothes are wonderful!
What a coat and what a lovely train!
It fits him to perfection! How it fits to perfection!
Yes, this is a costly dress!
[The Emperor nods and waves to the people]

Child: (spoken) But he has got nothing on at all!

Choir: People: A little child is saying: He has got nothing on at all!
He has got nothing on at all!

[It's spreading and accelerating, with laughter and relief]
He has got nothing on at all!

Baritone: Emperor: ...Yes, they are right..!
But I must bear up,
keep on to the very end!!

Choir: People: He has got nothing on at all!

[Lights dim to focus only on the Emperor. We experience his nightmare]

FINE