Ugly Duckling

Synopsis for an operetta libretto based on A.A. Milne’s play of the same name
Lyrics of first two songs by Jeffrey Whitfield; the script and remaining lyrics by Don Orfeo
*NOTE: Some of the dialogue is brazenly stolen directly from the original play!*

## Cast

Chancellor

Princess Camilla

King Morph, her father

Queen Zazu, her mother

Prince Simon

King Ollie, his father

Queen Isabel, his mother

Dulcibella, maid in waiting to Camilla

Egbert, Dulcibella’s boyfriend and son of the Chancellor

Carlo, Simon’s Lord High Chamberlain

Great Aunt Malkin

Royal Court members, Townspeople.

# Act I

The throne room. Opening song: “**Stream the Streamers**.” King Morph is asleep on his throne, USC; the townspeople are decorating the castle for the anticipated wedding of Princess Camilla to Prince Simon who will be arriving shortly. The Chancellor is attempting to keep the excited crowd from disturbing the King’s sleep while at the same time supervising the decorating.

The Chancellor drives the crowd offstage, reviews the décor, looks at his watch (an hour glass strapped to his wrist or to a pocket chain), bemoans the time and after several mild physical and verbal attempts, successfully wakes the king by announcing that the footsteps of his wife Zazu the Queen can be heard approaching.

The briefly discuss the quandary of the daughter the Princess Camilla not being particularly attractive, and discuss it in detail in the song “**The Princess is a Charming Girl**.”

Queen Zazu joins them, and questions about Prince Simon, but little is known other than his age and his coming from a prestigious family and kingdom. She then sings “**The Queen’s Lament**,” describing the futility of past attempts to find a husband for their daughter. She also describes their ritual law of the suitor having to answer a riddle to earn the hand of the Princess.

The King then sings “**The King’s Lament**,” explaining the cryptic curse placed upon Camilla by his Great Aunt Malkin.

Princess Camilla enters; she is wearing a facial treatment clay masque, such that the audience cannot really make any judgment on her physical appearance; her loose gown further hides any clues as to her looks. She announces that Prince Simon is arriving, as she heard the drawbridge lowering. However, due to poor maintenance, it takes the bridge about a half hour to fully open. The Chancellor leaves to tend to Simon’s arrival. The King and Queen decide it is time to share their plan with the appropriate people; the Queen follows after the Chancellor to explain it to him, and the King talks with Camilla.

The King and Princess Camilla sing the duet “**The Facts of Life**,” in which he lays out their plan to have her Maid in Waiting, Dulcibella, stand in for her so as not to frighten away Prince Simon.

Dulcibella’s arrival to the King is announced; Camilla leaves to her chambers.

The King and Dulcibella sing the duet “**Woo and Coo**,” in which the King attempts to instruct the beautiful (plus-size) but clueless woman on how to behave to be appealing to Prince Simon. He discovers that she has a boyfriend, Egbert (“Eg” for short), who works as the cook in the kitchen and is the son of the Chancellor [In the original play, he works in the armory and is no relation to the Chancellor], and finally suggests that if she tries to keep her mouth closed and think of Eg, then everything should work out OK. They exit as he escorts her to the place to wait for Simon. She returns, to privately contemplate her difficulty of being quite intelligent while socially inept, in her song “**How Do I Survive**” then exits to her assigned waiting place for the Prince.

Prince Simon wanders in from another direction, sees the thrones, and sits down, singing “**One of My Dreams**.” Princess Camilla enters, masque-free and nicely dressed; In the duet “**How It Is**,” they start with introductions, he explaining that he is Carlo, assistant to Prince Simon, and she identifies herself as Dulcibella, her maidservant. He then explains how he came in separately to avoid the drawbridge noise, she explains her role as maidservant, and as they discover each other’s secrets and personalities, and fall in love in song. They explain in the song “**When Circumstances Take the Stage**” and in words that his parents also failed to see the beauty in their son, and arranged for Carlo to substitute, which means that in another part of the castle, Carlo and Ducibella are meeting under the pretense of being the Prince and Princess. They sing that when all is arranged, the Prince will be in full armor and the Princess will be covered by a veil. They won’t uncover their faces until after the wedding and will display surprise so as to appease their parents. They sing their love duet “**When I See the Beauty**” before attempting to depart; their exit is aborted by the entry of the Kings and Queens together with Carlo and Dulcibella and the Chancellor; they enter to the pompous music of the “**Grand Entrance**.” [Simon’s parents are not seen in the original play.]

There is a ritual test for the Prince: a riddle to be answered. The “**Riddle Song**” ensues. The king had provided Carlo with the answer, but the Chancellor catches everyone off guard by explaining that the same riddle cannot be asked for a second time. In the “Riddle Song,” the riddle is incorrectly answered but successfully explained away by the Prince.

The chancellor, Prince, Princess, Carlo and Dulcibella exit, to prepare for the wedding. The Kings and Queens sing a madrigal quartet “**A Marvelous Enterprise**” celebrating how their children seem to have become more beautiful than before; they then retire to their respective suites. [The original play more or less ends at this point.]

The Chancellor enters with Eg, and offers to do the cooking for the wedding feast. Eg declines and explains to his father in the song the “**Chef’s Nitemare**” Why Eg will do the cooking. The Chancellor exits; Dulcibella appears, and she and Eg end up discussing the pros and cons of marriage in “**An Apple and an Orange**.” (It quickly becomes apparent that while Dulcibella is crazy about Egbert, oblivious to her is his apparent lack of interest in her.) He retires to the kitchen, and Dulcibella returns to the princess’s chambers.

To the tune of the “**Wedding March**,” the townspeople enter in anticipation of the wedding, followed by royal parents, then the Chancellor leading the armor- and veil-wearing Prince and Princess. (Carlo and Dulcibella surreptitiously enter joining the townspeople and are modestly disguised.) The Chancellor officiates. However, at the end, as their kiss is required to finalize the marriage, when the visor and veil are lifted, both sets of parents enter into a rage over the “**Deception**,” separate the bride and groom, and call off the wedding. The lovers are distraught as they are pulled away from each other in the finale, and thus ends Act I.

# Act II

The throne room. It has the appearance of the remnants of a wild party that got badly out of control. Princess Camilla is pondering her sudden gain and loss of love, expressed in “**Camilla’s Lament**.” In “La Traviata” style, she hears Prince Simon outside the window; he enters and they rejoice at their reunion, and plan their escape, but not before marveling at the sheer bravery Prince Simon showed in again breaching the castle wall. Suddenly, to their horror, they hear the drawbridge being closed! How can they open it again without being caught by King Morph and Queen Zazu?

They are joined by Dulcibella, Egbert and Carlo, and explain their plight They decide that Egbert and Dulcibella will fix a royal meal with a sleeping potion for Camilla’s parents so that the exit can take place without any harassment. The Princess will arrange for the lowering of the drawbridge; Carlo and the Prince will arrange for the horses. Carlo shares his horse prowess in “**Master of Horses.**”

They sing “**Royal Duty**” then exit to carry out their respective responsibilities; King Morph and Queen Zazu enter, followed by the Chancellor who is pushing a wheelbarrow full of papers. He explains that all their bills have come due, and their overgenerous tax policies has now rendered them bankrupt, and according to their own laws, they are now at the same social level as ordinary villagers. But can’t they change the laws? No, because they’re no longer king and queen! All this is explained in the trio “**What’s done is done,**” then followed by “**Woe are We**” to express their sadness at their loss of wealth.

Suddenly they realize their only chance for fiscal salvation is to approve of the wedding to draw upon Simon’s prosperity. They call in King Ollie and Queen Isabel, and in a quintet of “**Forgiveness**,” offer an olive branch to the royal couple. King Ollie and Queen Isabel seem surprisingly willing to accept the offer and even makes a counter offer in the form of an apology for their rash behavior. All are friends again, and call in Egbert to serve the wedding feast. He was preparing to use the vial of sleeping potion he is holding but is shocked to see the four royals on such friendly terms, and quickly puts it in his pocket. (The leg on the pocket side becomes asleep!) King Morph sends the Chancellor to fetch the Princess, but he returns empty-handed, as they’ve already approached the castle gates. In “**The Great Escape**,” Egbert spills the beans, and the royals call in the townspeople to find the vagrants and bring them back. King Ollie and Queen Isabel suggest that King Morph and Queen Zazu offer a reward to expedite their return; King Morph and Queen Zazu then make the same request of the other royal couple. As both couples in “**Fiduciary Responsibility**” get into an argument as to who should take the responsibility, the missing escapees arrive. A discussion of dowry ensues; it becomes apparent that Simon’s parents had actually ended up in the same boat: all were reduced to ordinary villagers and are about to break off the marriage again, when Great Aunt Malkin intercedes. She explains that the parent’s concern is not about wealth; She explains in her song “**When I Was Born**” that it is about happiness, and how they enjoyed love at first sight, at first meeting. The villagers sing their welcoming song “**You are a royal one of us**.”

The “**Wedding March**” reprises, as their true love wins out, and is so successful that, to a brief quote from the “Friendship Duet” (“Dio, che nell’alma”) of Verdi’s opera “Don Carlos,”[[1]](#footnote-1) it inspires Egbert and Carlo to join hands in love. So who is left? Dulcibella and the Chancellor, both initially reluctant, until in their reprise of “**How Do I Survive**” they realize the mutual benefits of good food, good company, and a happy life amongst the villagers. Themes from the opening “**Stream the Streamers**” provides the closing music for the operetta.

Don Orfeo

April 30, 2022; amended through March 14, 2023. 2nd and 3rd amendments Sept. 30, 2023 and Feb. 12, 2024.

1. [page 116 of the score] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)