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Inspired by the works of Edward Lear
Limerick illustrations by Edward Lear

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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LIMERICKLE was originally created and produced with The Patchwork Players at the Walden Theatre in New York City. It was later produced at the GeVa Theatre in Rochester, NY, and made possible in part through a grant from the Ford Foundation.

"...the treatment of Lear's comical sense is innovative, vigorous and self-assured...the translation of his literal efforts into the visual supports the premise that to be 'lost in a world of nonsense is a lovely waste of time.'"

—The New York Times

"At its best, this children's theatre piece, fashioned from the nonsense verse of Edward Lear, is both imaginative and colorful."

—Backstage

"...a charming show. This mosaic of silliness and good fun exhibits rich imagination."

—Show Business, New York City

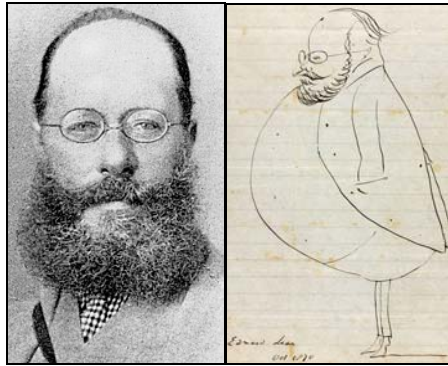
"fanciful... (a) kid-size treat..."

—The Times-Union, Rochester, NY.

LIMERICKLE

FANTASY/FARCE. Inspired by “The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World” and the poetry of Edward Lear. On a dull day, Violet and her brothers, Lionel and Slingsby, decide to build a boat and take a trip around the world. Violet invites her cat, and Lionel and Slingsby take along a Quangle-Wangle. At sea, the seafarers encounter the monstrous boat-eating Seeze-Pyder, who leaves them stranded on an island. There, the adventurers meet the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò, the island’s “gardening manicurist” who keeps the plants happy by telling them bad jokes. Following some large footprints, a meek creature appears holding a hat over his large, luminous nose and informs the travelers that they are inside a daydream. To escape the daydream, the travelers seek out Lady Jingly Jones, who tells the travelers that they must get lost and then be found by the Akond of Swat. As the adventurers try to get lost, they meet rude, red-eyed mice; ballet-dancing fish; a cooperative cauliflower; and dancing pelicans. Audiences of all ages will love this play’s whimsical characters and imaginative, frolicking folly. Incorporates some of Edward Lear’s limericks and several of his songs/poems including, “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat,” “The Akond of Swat,” “The Quangle-Wangle’s Hat,” and “The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.” If desired, music for “The Pelicans” and “The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò” may be incorporated.

Performance Time: Approximately 60-75 minutes.



Edward Lear, 1866. Edward Lear's self-caricature, 1870.

"His mind is concrete and fastidious,
His nose is remarkably big,
His visage is more or less hideous,
His beard it resembles a wig."

ABOUT THE STORY

Edward Lear (1812-1888) was an artist, illustrator, poet, musician, and writer. Born in London, Lear was the youngest of 21 children and was raised primarily by his sister Ann. Lear is credited with popularizing the genre of literary nonsense and is best known for his collections of nonsense stories, poetry, and songs including "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat." In addition, Lear is well known for his limericks, which differ from traditional limericks in that there is no punch line or bawdy content and the first and last lines do not rhyme but instead end with the same word. Lear composed music for many of his poems but only two songs have survived: "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò" and "The Pelican Chorus." During his lifetime, Lear published several collections of stories, songs, and poems: *Book of Nonsense* (1846), *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1870), *More Nonsense Songs, Pictures, Etc.* (1872), and *Laughable Lyrics* (1877).

AUTHORS' NOTE

This is a true ensemble play. It uses text, visuals, movement, and sound to create a theatrical experience where the creative ideas and energy of the acting company, the director, and the designers are essential. There are also ample opportunities to incorporate original music, choreography, and design elements.

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 3 F, 18 flexible, extras)
 (With doubling: 4 M, 3 F, 9 flexible)

- NARRATOR/EDWARD LEAR:** Narrates the daydream; male.
- VIOLET:** Imaginative girl; female.
- SLINGSBY:** Violet's brother; male.
- LIONEL:** Violet's brother; male.
- CAT:** Violet's cat; flexible.
- QUANGLE-WANGLE:** A highly intelligent creature who is invited on the trip by Slingsby and Lionel; flexible.
- SEEZE-PYDER 1-3:** Creature that eats boats, rocks, trees, metal, and Heavy Metal; flexible. (*Note: Three actors create the monstrous creature. More extras may be used, if desired.*)
- YONGHY-BONGHY-BÒ:** Strange creature who thinks he has a terrific sense of humor; works as a "gardening manicurist"; flexible.
- CHOCOLATE DROP BUSHES 1-3:** Bushes dripping with chocolate chips and other candy; tended to by the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò; flexible.
- LADY JINGLY JONES:** Medium who knows the answers to most questions even before they are asked; speaks with an accent and makes strange mystical sounds and occult motions while speaking; her chants are ice-cream flavors or other funny verbiage; female.
- GONG WITH THE LUMINOUS NOSE:** A meek creature who holds a hat over his large, luminous nose; carries a gong that he uses to accentuate words and actions; male.
- MADAME FILET DE SOLE:** Fish who teaches ballet to other fish; refuses to teach mice to dance because they have no respect for the performing arts; female.
- RUDE RED-EYED MICE 1-3:** Mice who comically threaten and bully others; have red eyes; flexible.

COOPERATIVE CAULIFLOWER: A cauliflower who likes to cooperate; flexible.

KING/QUEEN OF PELICANS: This character is split into a King and Queen who talk to each other; the Queen is a grand dame and the King is submissive; flexible.

PELICANS 1-3: Dancing pelicans who are members of the Pelican Court; flexible.

AKOND OF SWAT: Daydream caretaker; flexible.

EXTRAS: As Ducks, Old Man, Old Woman, Young Lady, Ballet-Dancing Fish, Plants, and Starfish.

Note: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

OPTIONS FOR DOUBLING, TRIPLING

BUSH 1/ MOUSE 1/PELICAN 1/SEEZE-PYDER 1 (flexible)

BUSH 2/ MOUSE 2/PELICAN 2/ SEEZE-PYDER 2 (flexible)

BUSH 3/ MOUSE 3/PELICAN 3/ SEEZE-PYDER 3 (flexible)

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SETTING

A variety of imaginary places.

SET

A bare stage, though there are ample opportunities to incorporate original design elements.

PROPS

“Boat” painted in different colors
Ribbons and cloth, assorted colors
Scroll
Watering can
Gong
Large footprint
Oranges (may be artificial)
Hat with rolled-up ribbons, for Quangle-Wangle
Block (large enough for Quangle-Wangle to stand on)
Large “rock” for Cooperative Cauliflower (large enough to
hide Violet, Lionel, Slingsby, Cat, and Quangle-Wangle)
Small black book
Reading glasses, for Queen
Shirt, hat, or sign that reads, “Akond of Swat”

SOUND EFFECTS

Overture
Heavy metal riff
Glowing nose, for Gong
Strange sounds
Eerie noise
Rumble
Regal royal court music
Courtly music
Music for nonsensical dance

LIMERICKLE

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"AND HAND IN HAND, ON THE EDGE OF THE SAND,
THEY DANCED BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON,
THE MOON,
THE MOON,
THEY DANCED BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON."

—FROM "THE OWL AND THE PUSSY-CAT" BY EDWARD LEAR

LIMERICKLE

(AT RISE: The Company enters playing improvised and/or traditional instruments, creating an "overture." They greet the audience and then sit near them in a circle. Note: Actors move fluidly in and out of characters as the story unfolds.)

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Not such an awfully long time ago, there were three young people whose names were—

VIOLET: *(To audience.)* Violet!

SLINGSBY: *(To audience.)* Slingsby!

LIONEL: *(To audience, overly enthusiastic.)* And Lionel! *(Trips and falls down due to his enthusiasm.)*

VIOLET: Lionel, are you all right?

SLINGSBY: Wait a minute, Violet, I must caution you. He may have fractured his carcass or—

LIONEL: I'm fine. I tripped.

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* These three young people got together on what proved to be a rather dull day and decided to do something about it.

(Violet, Slingsby, and Lionel pace as they try to think of something to do.)

SLINGSBY: *(To Violet and Lionel.)* How about—?

VIOLET/LIONEL: No.

VIOLET: What if we—?

LIONEL/SLINGSBY: No!

LIONEL: Maybe we could—? *(Violet and Slingsby glare at him.)*
I guess not, huh?

VIOLET: *(To Narrator.)* Listen, we're having a little trouble here. Could you help us out?

NARRATOR: Of course, walk this way. *(Leads the Company in a silly walk around the stage and they sit on the floor. To Lionel, Violet, and Slingsby.)* Would you like to play a game?

LIONEL: Charades!

NARRATOR: All right. What's this one?

(Narrator performs two gestures and Slingsby immediately guesses.)

SLINGSBY: Take a trip around the world!

LIONEL: This is no fun. You played this before.

VIOLET: Wait. Why don't we do that? It's as good as anything.

LIONEL: Do what?

ALL: Take a trip around the world!

SLINGSBY: But how can we do that? The world is currently 23,000 miles, or 40,075 kilometers, across at the equator. It has vast mountain ranges, burning deserts, and mysterious jungles with tigers and leopards and—

VIOLET: But if you remember, Slingsby, 75 percent of the earth's surface is water.

SLINGSBY: A brilliant conclusion! We'll take an ocean-going vessel.

VIOLET: Or even a boat!

LIONEL: *(Gets an idea.)* I've got it! Let's take a boat!

VIOLET: *(Sarcastic.)* Very good, Li.

(Lionel, Violet, and Slingsby help the Company form a "boat.")

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* So, the three little people constructed a boat...with help. It was a very special boat...a boat painted in all different hues. For instance, the prow was... *(To Audience Member.)* What color was the prow? *(Audience Member responds with a color.)* [Blue], did you say? Well, [blue] it is. And the rudder was... *(To Audience Member.)* What color? *(Audience Member responds with a color.)* [Orange]? Yes. A wonderful color. And the sail was striped. How's white and purple? *(Or Narrator may ask another Audience Member for the colors. Note: The Company*

provides the colors with ribbons and cloth.) Now, at last, the ship was ready to shove off.

VIOLET: Wait. Hold everything. I forgot my cat. *(Exits to fetch cat.)*

LIONEL/SLINGSBY: Aw, no, not that stupid, dumb old cat.

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* It seems that Violet's brothers were violently opposed to her bringing the cat.

LIONEL/SLINGSBY: Ugh!

(Violet enters with her Cat.)

CAT: That's no way to treat a feline domesticus.

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* This being the case, the brothers decided to take a slightly more retaliatory measure.

LIONEL: *(To Violet.)* We've decided that if you're going to bring that cat—

SLINGSBY: *(To Violet.)* We're going to bring our brand-new, highly intelligent—

LIONEL/SLINGSBY: Quangle-Wangle!

NARRATOR: *(To Audience.)* At this point, Violet instinctively asked...

VIOLET: *(To Lionel and Slingsby.)* What's a Quangle-Wangle?

(Quangle-Wangle enters.)

LIONEL/SLINGSBY: *(Introducing the Quangle-Wangle.)* Ta-da!

VIOLET: That's a Quangle-Wangle? What's so special about a Quangle-Wangle?

QUANGLE-WANGLE: Oh, nothing. Except I hate little girls.

(The Quangle-Wangle, Cat, Violet, Lionel, and Slingsby chase each other around briefly until the Company separates them.)

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* And so after these short but unpleasant introductions, the ship set sail...north.

ALL: North!

(The ship and Crew "sail" through the space.)

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* A quick check of their instruments told them that they were headed to Iceland. But this brought confusion due to the fact that Iceland was becoming greener than Greenland. So they decided to change course to the south.

ALL: South!

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* They landed in Peru, where the Inca Indians gave them many beautiful gifts. But being forgetful, they left them in ruins and set a course east.

ALL: East!

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Where they met a lovely Geisha girl, who lead them on a tour of fishing boats, which turned out to be junk. Therefore, they set their sight to the west.

ALL: West!

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* To the Shamrock Isle of Ireland, where they met a spirited band of leprechauns. But since these wee folk didn't want to part with any of their gold, they thought it best to head to the middle of the ocean.

ALL: Middle of the ocean!

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Where they finally sighted –

LIONEL: Land!

ALL: Land-ho!

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* It was such a cause for joyous and tumultuous celebration that the Captain threw a lavish yacht party. *(Note: Narrator takes on the character of The Yacht Captain. As Yacht Captain.)* Let's have a lavish yacht party!

(The boat vanishes and a lavish cocktail party is created with music, dancing, and eating and drinking, and other party activities. In the midst of this chaos, the Company freezes while the Actors perform the limericks. Each limerick is broken up by more chaos and more freezes, breaking the action. [Note: The actors and director may experiment with this section finding ingenious ways to perform the limericks. Lear wrote many limericks and others may be substituted

or added, if desired, as long as they fit with the nature of the script. Additional lyrics are included at the back of the script.] Old Woman, Old Man, Young Lady, and Ducks mime the actions for the following limericks.)



NARRATOR: *(As Old Woman mimes actions.)*

There was an old woman of Chertsey,
Who made a remarkable curtsey,
She twirled round and round, till she sank underground,
Which distressed all the people of Chertsey.



NARRATOR: *(As Old Man mimes actions.)*

There was an old man from Peru,
Who never knew what he should do,
He tore off his hair, and behaved like a bear,
That intrinsic old man of Peru.



NARRATOR: (*As Young Lady mimes actions.*)

There was a young lady of Norway,
Who casually sat in the doorway,
When the door squeezed her flat, she exclaimed,
"What of that?"

This courageous young lady of Norway.



NARRATOR: (*As Old Woman mimes actions.*)

There was an old lady of Russia,
Who screamed so that no one could hush her,
Her screams were extreme, no one heard such a scream,
As was screamed by the lady of Russia.



NARRATOR: *(As Old Lady and Ducks mime actions.)*
 There was an old lady of France,
 Who taught little ducklings to dance,
 When she said, "tick-a-tack," they only said, "Quack."
 Which grieved that old lady of France.



NARRATOR: *(As Old Man mimes actions.)*
 There was an Old Man with a beard,
 Who said, "It is just as I feared!"
 Two owls and a hen, four larks and a wren,
 Have all built their nests in my beard."
 NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Suddenly, in the midst of the
 lavish yacht party, an ear-splitting cry was heard. *(An
 earsplitting cry is heard offstage. Violet, Lionel, and Slingsby
 huddle together for safety. Violet calls for her Cat. Lionel and*

Slingsby call for the Quangle-Wangle.) Little did they know that this was the cry of the boat-bashing, canoe-crushing, kayak-cracking, ship-chomping Seeze-Pyder.

(The monstrous Seeze-Pyder enters and approaches, making horrible noises. Note: Three actors make up the monstrous Seeze-Pyder. Additional extras may be used, if desired. Terrified, Violet, Lionel, and Slingsby squeeze into a shivering clump. Finally, the Quangle-Wangle courageously pops up.)

QUANGLE-WANGLE: *(To Seeze-Pyder.) Stop! (Frightened, the Seeze-Pyder freezes.)* Who are you, and what do you want?

SEEZE-PYDER 1: *(Friendly tone.)* Hi, everybody. I'm the Seeze-Pyder. How do you do? *(Extends hand.)*

SEEZE-PYDER 2: *(Stage whisper.)* Not that way. Be meaner.

SEEZE-PYDER 1: What?

SEEZE-PYDER 3: *(Shouts.)* Be meaner!

SEEZE-PYDER 1: *(To others, feigning meanness.)* Hi! I'm the Seeze-Pyder! How are you?! *(To Seeze-Pyder 2, 3.)* How's that?

SEEZE-PYDER 3: Terrible. But go on.

QUANGLE-WANGLE: *(To Seeze-Pyder.)* What do you want?

SEEZE-PYDER 1: *(Trying to remember.)* I...uh...

SEEZE-PYDER 2: *(Stage whisper.)* I eat boats...

SEEZE-PYDER LEADER: What? Sorry?

SEEZE-PYDER 3: *(Shouts.)* I eat boats!

SEEZE-PYDER LEADER: Oh, right, okay. *(To Quangle-Wangle.)* I eat boats.

SEEZE-PYDER 2: *(Stage whisper.)* Meaner!

SEEZE-PYDER LEADER: *(To Quangle-Wangle.)* I eat boats meaner!

SEEZE-PYDER 3: *(Shouts.)* Idiot! Say it meaner!

SEEZE-PYDER 1: *(Realizes.)* Oh. *(To Quangle-Wangle, feigning meanness and escalating into a frenzy.)* I eat boats meaner! I eat boats meaner! I eat boats meaner! I eat little people! I'll eat you all!

CAT: But why eat our boat? *(To others, aside.)* I'm glad it doesn't eat cats.

SEEZE-PYDER 1: I like wood...I eat wood. I like little people...eat them. Like cats...eat them.

CAT: Ooops!

SEEZE-PYDER 1: I eat rocks...trees...metal...Heavy Metal—

LIONEL: *(Surprised.)* You like Heavy Metal?

(Heavy metal riff is heard. This stops the Seeze-Pyder for a moment.)

SEEZE-PYDER 1: Stop! Old school. Me into [hip hop] now. But, first, I eat. *[Or insert another music genre.]*

QUANGLE-WANGLE: But, my friend, it seems that after such a big meal of boat fricassee, you'd be too full to eat all five of us. So, tell you what I'm gonna do, an offer you can't refuse: You let four of us go, and I'll offer one of us as a sacrifice. *(To others.)* To the common welfare. I mean, it's only fair. *(Seeze-Pyder 1, 2, 3 think it over, agree, and approach Quangle-Wangle.)* No, not me, you fool! *(Points to Violet.)* Her!

(The Seeze-Pyder chases Violet. The others counter the attack by building their own monster and scaring the Seeze-Pyder off.)

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* And so...after frightening the dreaded denizen of the deep back into the ocean, the crew hung on to what was left of their valiant vessel and swam toward shore.

(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle start to "swim." Cat reluctantly jumps into the "water.")

CAT: *(Finding the "water" unpleasant.)* Owwwwwww!

NARRATOR: I'm sorry, I thought you were a *cat-fish*. *(To audience.)* They swam and swam...some doing the

Australian crawl, some the Butterfly, some were free-styling, while others kept their eye out for dorsal fins and gaping jaws. Finally, they became so tired that they were swept ashore by a friendly wave.

(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat collapse on the "shore.")

CAT: They are absolutely right; cats do not like water.
(Shaking himself dry.)

VIOLET: Li, are you all right?

LIONEL: I think so. *(Shaking dry.)*

SLINGSBY: Where are you, Vi? *(Shaking dry.)*

VIOLET: *(Calls.)* Over here, Sling. *(Shaking dry.)*

LIONEL: I'm sleepy. I think it's naptime.

VIOLET: I think we could all use a little rest.

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* And a nap was just what the doctor ordered.

(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat fall into a deep sleep. As they sleep, the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò enters, delivers the punch line of a silly joke, and bursts out laughing.)

YONGHY-BONGHY-BÒ: *(Chuckling.)* I'm so funny, I crack me up! *(Sees the Travelers.)* Hey, wait a minute. I thought I planted potatoes. These are the weirdest carrots I've ever seen. Well, I suppose I could use them for fertilizer...or maybe... *(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat begin to stir.)* I don't think these are carrots. Hide! *(Runs away and hides in a location where he can spy on them.)*

VIOLET: *(Calls.)* Everybody here?

LIONEL: *(Counting heads.)* One, two, three, four –

VIOLET: *(Pointing to Lionel.)* Five.

LIONEL: And six, right?

CAT: We're all here, but where is *here*?

LIONEL: I don't know. Maybe we should ask the Narrator.

CAT: Good idea. *(To Narrator.)* Hello.

NARRATOR: Hello.

CAT: Where are we?

SLINGSBY: *(Before Narrator can answer.)* Through my careful calculations, it appears to be an island made of water surrounded by earth.

VIOLET: What?

SLINGSBY: And bordered by evanescent isthmuses with the great Gulf Stream running all around it.

CAT: *(To Narrator.)* Like I said, where are we?

NARRATOR: That's an easy one. We've landed on a circular sandbar.

CAT: *(Excited.)* Sand! All right! *(Begins to joyfully dig in the "sand.")*

QUANGLE-WANGLE: Oh, sure...

SLINGSBY: Why didn't I think of that?

LIONEL: I don't like this place. I want to go home.

VIOLET: Come on, now, Li. Let's see what we can find. There's sure to be a way back.

(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat start to "swim.")

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* After a long and exhausting swim...the three young people and their pets found themselves sleeping into the late afternoon. *(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat take a nap.)* They also realized that they hadn't eaten since breakfast that morning. *(Violet, Slingsby, Lionel, Quangle-Wangle, and Cat wake up. Hungry, they begin to look around for food.)* But their hunger subsided when they stumbled upon a grove of rare chocolate-drop bushes.

(Chocolate-Drop Bushes 1-3 enter along with other Plants.)

BUSHES 1-3: *(Chanting slowly, hypnotically.)* “We melt in your hands, not in your mouth.”

(Famished, Lionel lunges toward the Chocolate-Drop Bushes 1-3 and starts eating the chocolate chips/candies on them.)

VIOLET: *(To Lionel.)* Wait!

LIONEL: *(Looks down and sees melted chocolate on his hands.)*
Eeew! I’m a chocolate mess!

SLINGSBY: *(To others, examining Chocolate-Drop Bushes 1-3.)*
This melting is, no doubt, caused by the heat, which seems greater now than when we arrived.

VIOLET: It sure does. I’m broiling!

LIONEL: Me, too. I wish I had a glass of water or maybe a lemon fizz like we have back home.

(Lionel parts the branches of one of the Chocolate-Drop Bushes and comes face to face with the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.)

YONGHY-BONGHY-BÒ: Hello, little people. Please...don’t hurt me. I’m a friend.

VIOLET: Really? Who are you?

YONGHY-BONGHY-BÒ: Well, that’s a long story. You see, I’m the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò, the gardening manicurist for this island. You know...nails, plants. *(Jokes.)* ...“You bloom, I groom.” *(Laughs, tries to sell the joke. No one else laughs. Tending the Plants, continues.)* These are all my plants...each one different, thanks to nature. I love them. They’re all I have. I make sure they have enough water and sunshine. I guard them against root rot. Then I keep them happy by telling them jokes. I have a terrific sense of humor. Okay, Plants, listen to this one! *(Tells an old stale joke. Note: Edward Lear wrote many jokes so you may choose one of his jokes if desired. The Plants laugh/show amusement. To others, indicating Plants.)* See, what would they do without me? [END OF FREEVIEW]

The Yonghy Bonghy Bò.

Canto.

Piano

On the coast of Co - ro - man - del, where the ear - ly pump - kins grow, In the

5
 middle - le of the woods lived the Yon - ghy Bon - ghy Bò. Two old chairs and half a cand - le, One old

11
 jug with - out a hand - le, These were all his world - ly goods, In the middle - le of the woods, These were

17
 all the world - ly goods, of the Yon - ghy Bon - ghy Bò, of the Yon - ghy Bon - ghy Bò.

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The Pelicans

Canto.

King and Queen of the Pelicans we, No other birds so grand we see!

None but we have feet like fins with lovely leathery throats and chins,

Coru-piu sostenuto.

Ploff-skin, Pluff-skin, Pelican Jee! we think no birds so happy as wel

Plump-skin, Ploff-skin, Pelican Jill! We think to then, and we thought so still