

# **The Carpenter and the Oniroku**

## **Libretto**

**Mark Morris**

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## Cast

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**The Carpenter**          tenor

**The Oniroku**          bass-baritone

**Chorus of children**

## Instrumentation

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Synthesizer/piano

Large bell

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*The bank beside the river. Rear of stage right, a little Japanese bell-building, with bell. Stage centre, a small hillside. Between the audience and the hillside, a river. Stage left, crossing the river, a bridge, though at the beginning of the opera the bridge (or a substantial section of it) is covered*

*In the general playing area, hidden somewhere, is the Oniroku.*

*The children are lounging around on the ground near the river, rather listless, looking a little grumpy. They are not saying anything.*

*The first sound that is heard is the great bell being struck.*

*After a couple of tolls of the bell, the children join in a humming chorus. The chorus line is lyrical but a bit subdued, depressed.*

**Chorus:** Lu... (*repeated – wordless syllable*)

### **Entry of the Carpenter**

*Percussion over the end of the wordless chorus, turns into a march. The Carpenter enters.*

**Carpenter:** Well, look at you all,  
So down, so sad.  
And such a lovely day,  
Such a lovely day.  
Why so glum? And what are you all  
Doing here?

### **(Chorus #2 – We want to cross the river)**

**Chorus:** We want to cross the river and reach the other side  
But it can't be done though we've tried, tried, tried.  
None of us can swim and the water's far too deep  
So there's nothing much to do but to stay here and sleep.  
We tried to find a boat but there isn't one around  
So that's why we're sitting on this hard, hard ground.

All the things we want to see are on the other shore.  
This side there's nothing. Over there there's so much more -  
There's singing and there's dancing, there are flowers, there is food.  
And we are stuck here, we wish we could

get over the river and reach the other side.  
But we can't go back and we can't get across  
It can't be done, though we've tried, tried, tried.

**Carpenter:** I can do it.

**Chorus:** YOU?!

**Carpenter:** Yes, me. I'm your man.

**(Carpenter aria #1)**

*(lyrically, expansively, but rather pompously)*

I am a carpenter, the best in all the land  
And what I build are bridges, lovely, lovely bridges.

Wooden bridges.  
Graceful bridges.  
Sturdy bridges.  
Trestle bridges.  
Bridges with cantilevers  
Bridges with ropes  
Bridges suspended  
Bridges segmented  
cable-stayed  
and side-sparred  
bridges of every kind.  
I build bridges, where the flowing of the arch  
does a little dance in the mirror of the waves –

**Chorus:** *(getting a bit fed up with this list, and interrupting the Carpenter before he gets even more lyrical)*

So you can make us a bridge?

**Carpenter:** Yes.

**Chorus:** And we can get across?

**Carpenter:** Of course.  
*(looking around and indicating)*  
Look all around you. Lots and lots of trees.  
Chop, chop, chop, and we'll soon have them down.  
Saw them up and plane them smooth,  
Cut them into planks and bang in the nails  
Hammer, hammer, hammer,  
and we'll soon have a bridge.

**A single voice from the chorus:**

How long will this take you?

**Carpenter:** Let me see now...

Let me see...

*He walks down to the river's edge. During the following he used his hands to work out the spaces in front of his eyes, like a surveyor or a photographer working out the image.*

Like this...

And this...

A little here...

A little there...

*(emphatically)*

No, it can't be done.

**Chorus:** WHAT?!

**Carpenter:** Quite impossible!

**Chorus:** You promised us a bridge!

**(Carpenter aria # 2, with Chorus)**

**Carpenter/Chorus (alternating, Chorus in italics, spoken, fast):**

The river is too deep

*Use-less*

The water runs too fast

*Hope-less*

There are too many rocks

*Rub-bish*

The banks are made of sand

*Calls himself a carpenter*

The quality of wood

*Couldn't make a spoon*

Would never take the strain

*What an idiot*

I simply have to tell you

*What a fool*

And tell you once again

No-one

No-one

No-one, in the whole wide world

Could make a bridge that's strong enough  
for *this* river!

*Suddenly there is a single booming stroke from the bell in the bell house, and at the same time some sort of subterranean sound from percussion or synth.*

*The Oniroku appears from the tree, and steps forward.*

**Chorus:** Ahhhhh.....

**Oniroku:** *(all on a single note line, slow, ominous)*

I will build the bridge.

**Carpenter:** You! Ha!  
It can't be done.

**Oniroku:** *(as above) Ignoring the Carpenter*  
And I will build it now.  
*(now more melodious, but still slow)*  
The long, long ordeal  
of these good people  
will come to an end  
will come to an end  
(turning to the Chorus)  
you will reach the other side  
you will reach the other side.

**Chorus:** Ahhhh...

**Oniroku:** *Turning to the Carpenter (still slow)*  
But first, you must promise  
That if I build it as I've said  
You will pay me *(gradually building in the following)*  
You will pay me  
You will pay me  
the price  
the prize  
I ask you for.

**Carpenter:** And what is that?

**Oniroku:** *(very slow, serious)*  
Either  
You will tell me my name  
Or  
you will let me take  
take away  
take away with me  
take - your eyeballs.

**Carpenter:** You can't be serious!

**(Chorus #3 – He is! He is!)**

**Chorus:** He is! He is!  
Go on! Go on!  
You've got to say yes!  
You've got to say yes!

You promised us a bridge  
    But you can't build it!  
You said we'll get across  
    But you can't do it!

You've got to say yes!  
You've got to say yes!

Do you want to leave us  
    Sitting here for ever?  
Do you want to see us  
    Shrivel up and die?

You've got to say yes!  
You've got to say yes!

You told us you could do it  
    You raised our hopes so high!  
You said you'd set us free  
    A lie, lie, lie!

You've got to say yes!  
You've got to say yes!

What's a little eyeball  
    An eyeball or two  
If it let's us cross the river  
    Once and for all!

Go on! Go on!  
Say yes! Say yes!

**Carpenter:** O, very well.  
He can't build it  
Anyway.

**Chorus:** Yeah!

*The Oniroku bows to the Carpenter in a slow dignified fashion. He turns to the river, and raises his arms out to it. The Great Bell sounds. Magic music. The cover is slowly pulled back from the bridge.*

*Silence*

**Chorus:** *(A little stunned)*      *sigh Ahhhhhhh....*

**Oniroku:** *(to the children) (slow, dignified)*

There is your bridge.

*The children slowly stand up (continued during the following) [Sam – you will need a few bars between the above and the Oniroku singing again to let the first children stand]*

Before you can cross, he must keep  
His side of the bargain.  
*(to Carpenter, slowly, stately)*  
Say my name  
Or give up your eyes.

*The Carpenter looks wildly from the Oniroku to the children and back again.*

Say my name  
Or give up your eyes.

**Carpenter:** *(floundering)*

You are – *(musical stutter)*  
are –  
are –  
Hideaki, Your Shining Brightness.

**Onoriku:** No.

**Carpenter:** Hideo, O Splendid Man!

**Onoriku:** No.

**Carpenter:** Hikaru, your Radiance –

**Oniroku:** No.

**Carpenter:** How am I supposed to know...

**Oniroku:** So you must pay the price  
and these good people  
Can go on their way.

*He moves forward towards the Carpenter. As he does so, the children start to press forward behind the Carpenter. Continuous build-up sequence.*

**Chorus:** *Menacing, building up. They edge closer during the following.*

The bridge is built  
We want to cross  
You gave your word  
We want to cross  
Say his name  
Or give up your eyes  
Say his name  
Or give up your eyes.

**Carpenter:** No!



**Chorus:** *(now to Oniroku)*

Start with the left  
We want to cross  
Then the right  
We want to cross  
If he can't guess  
Then take out his eyes  
If he can't guess  
Then take out his eyes!

**Carpenter:** *(climax of this sequence) To Oniroku*

You – You - DEMON!  
You ONI!

*Instant complete silence. The Oniroku stands stock still. The children stand stock still.*

*(triumphant)* That's it.  
That's your name.  
Oni!

**Oniroku:** Not exactly...

**Carpenter:** *(thinking – singing – fast) During the following the Oniroku edges back towards the tree where he came from.*

No – not the first one  
He's from the sky  
The second demon  
He's from the earth *(now counting on his fingers)*  
The third rides the wind  
And the fourth, darkness.  
The fifth is of stone  
And the sixth...  
and the sixth... *(he can't remember)*  
and the sixth...  
is of...  
is of...

**Children:** *(a shout)*

WATER!

**Carpenter:** That's it!  
The river demon!  
The sixth demon!  
Your name is  
ONIROKU!

*There is a huge sound. Firework if possible. The Oniroku disappears into the tree.*

**End sequence:**

The Carpenter says “you see, I told you I could do it” and leads the children down to the bridge and across, and up the path.

As they march, the Carpenter sings a repeated song, with the children providing a repeated chorus, to the following words:

**Children:**      Road is now clear,  
                      it will take us over river.  
                      Path is before us  
                      We will follow where it leads to.