

Ms Cheerilee walked down the streets, wondering what to do about a certain foal in her class. Sure, she didn't know the specifics, so she couldn't go to the princesses, at least not yet. She'd hoped that some time at the markets might help her think- they didn't do as much good as she was hoping for.

There had to be *some* kind of solution for the problem, but a pony singing caught her from her trance.

*Bring me my Bow of burning gold:*

*Bring me my arrows of desire*

*Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!*

*Bring me my chariot of fire!*

Peeking in the abandoned warehouse, she saw Onyx Star singing lyrics before scratching on a sheet of paper with a pencil and then singing the whole song.

Mesmerized, Ms Cheerilee sat back and watched through the crack in the door as the music stopped, started again, and Onyx began playing a rag-tag yovidaphone for a several moments before she heard a pair of beating drums.

Sure, they weren't *the best*, but Onyx wasn't exactly working with high-dollar equipment here.

"One... two... three... ..."

*And did those feet in ancient time*

*Walk upon England's mountains green:*

*And was the Holy Lamb of God,*

*On England's pleasant pastures seen!*

*And did the Countenance Divine,*

*Shine forth upon our clouded hills?*

*And was Jerusalem builded there,*

*Among those dark Satanic Mills?*

*Bring me my Bow of Burning Gold:*

*Bring me my Arrows of Desire:*

*Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!*

*Bring me my Chariot of Fire!*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,*

*Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:*

*Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green and pleasant land.*

"Sounds good, once more from the top," he muttered, starting the song from the beginning, "I hope I can make *something* out of this."

Cheerilee knew what she had to do, so she opened the camera on her phone and recorded the unicorn's performance before hurrying off to Twilight's castle.

"Yes, Ms Cheerilee?" Twilight greeted at the door.

"I have a very... *odd* predicament, and it involves a foal. I know they're not being abused, but I also know they need help and they *don't* want to ask for it."

"What is the foal's name?"

"Onyx Star, I only found about the *true* nature of his situation when I was walking home and heard singing," she said, playing the video for the princess and explaining everything in depth.

"Ms Cheerilee," Twilight said, eventually finding a solution, "I'll talk with the other princesses. He doesn't *want* our help, but he *needs* it *direly*. I can have Mayor Mare organize the annual talent show early and have the princesses come."

"Princess, I don't follow."

"Celestia and Luna can take Onyx to live with them at the castle after they 'stumble' on everything themselves," she said, writing a decree, "Until then, I want Onyx to know that he has a warm bed at night, wherever that may be."

"I can put him up in the schoolhouse some, but I'm worried it won't be enough."

"I'm glad you brought this to my attention," Twilight said with a smile as she bid Cheerilee farewell.

Cheerilee was *certainly* stretching herself thin over the next few weeks, coming to the school early and leaving late, all in the name of that one foal until one day, she was passing out flyers for a talent show held locally at the end of the day.

"Students, I know some of you get worried about being onstage, but I know some of you can do *exceptionally* well! As such, I'd appreciate it if you would all sign up," she said, glancing at Onyx, who was eyeing the flyer with scrutiny and hope.

Onyx had a *lot* to think about- it wasn't a competition, thankfully, but most things that ended in the word 'Show' involved dressing up to an extent that was, *generally*, unreachable for him. Day and night went by for two weeks until, the day of the event, he signed up with the sheet music in one hand and the lyrics in the other.

"Sweet Celestia, I hope this goes well," Onyx said, heading back to the abandoned building to practice the piece again.

Unbeknownst to Onyx, he had already gotten an audience, despite shaky sounds- there was *clearly* potential in this foal's work. The vast majority of Ponyville was aware of the performance and to listen at a distance, though a few had uploaded bits and clips to the internet. Still, it had been drumming its own attention as evident by the larger-than-usual seating area that was *still* too small.

Onyx, had arrived early, like the rest of the participants, but left to get a burger and soda to calm his nerves, like *most* sane ponies.

"I hope you'll do great!" Cheerilee said, stopping Onyx, as she held a yovidaphone.

"You say that about *everyone*."

"Well, I *especially* hope you'll do great," she said, hugging the foal.

"I've never sang in front of *this many* ponies before."

"Well, I didn't think you'd seen it before, but this showed up online one day," Cheerilee said, playing the video of a portion of one of Onyx's practices, shortly after the lyrics to the song had been written out. Along the wall next to the door was the lyrics, stanza by stanza, as the song progressed, "Creatures from all *over* seem to like it."

Onyx looked around. Sure enough, there were yaks, changelings, dragons, kirin, griffons, hypogriffs... *every* creature in the land, some with cameras and phones already out.

"My sweet lord..."

Through the entire show, Onyx had been eyeing his name on the list- not *quite* at the end, but close enough. Most creatures wouldn't stay for a talent show until the end *unless* they were looking for something very *right* or something very *wrong*. Only Onyx knew how much work went into making the music sound like, well, *music*. With what he had to work with, he could *still* tell that the timpanis were nothing more than a padded stick hitting a hollow door and most of the instruments either digitally recorded from various places online or convincing

autotunes of some of the more extreme things he was able to do with his voice. The only thing that *wasn't* fake was the snare drum and his voice.

Beating that thing was a dream come true.

“And for our next act, we have Onyx Star, singing an original composition that many believe is titled *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time*,” the announcer said.

Onyx had been looking for a way, *any way* to get out of this and now Cheerilee was giving him the go ahead gesture, holding the Yovidaphone out for him.

Eventually finding himself in the middle of the stage, with all eyes, cameras, phones, and the spotlight on him, he grabbed the microphone.

“This piece doesn’t have a name, but I guess you guys like it. I’ve been working on it for several moons.”

After a few moments of silence, the stage lights dimmed again and the first beat of the drum sounded with the low strings beginning their melody, for a few bars before he played with the most prominent line, some melody and some harmony, doing his best to match the swells, the rises and falls, of what he knew was fake until the snare took over with its charge beat before he sang again, this time over the swells of the music, almost as if the music was a story, dictated by low strings and a beat one could march to.

*And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England’s mountains green:  
And was the Holy Lamb of God,  
On England’s pleasant pastures seen!*

*And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded there,  
Among those dark Satanic Mills?*

The song only made it to the break between the verses but creatures were clapping as he, again, played with the melody, though he hid his confusion decently well- this was *probably* the most fun he’d ever had with the song.

*Bring me my Bow of Burning Gold:  
Bring me my Arrows of Desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of Fire!*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green and pleasant land.*

As soon as the music died down and Onyx opened his eyes, he saw no creature move- all eyes were fixed, uncomfortably, on him and the whole town was quiet enough that he could hear the fluids sloshing around in his body as he looked around.

“Oh crap,” he muttered, too quiet for even the microphone to pick up before the audience erupted in cheering.

Unsure of everything, he took a bow and exited, not to the right like the other ponies had, but to the left, as per the direction he was given that morning and watched the rest of the show while sitting next to Cheerilee and Mayor Mare before, after the last act, the lights over the stage all went off, before Mayor Mare made her way to the microphone.

“Thank you, everycreature, for attending the Annual Ponyville Talent Show Charity Fundraiser!” the announcer said as the spotlight came on, “Now, our esteemed mayor would like to say a few words about the donation this year.”

“Thank you,” she said, looking to the crowd, “As many of you know, our land isn’t perfect, but so few ponies are in desperate enough need to shy away from the rest of us. My original plan was for the donation to go to the local schoolhouse, but that changed when I became aware of a foal, by way of our local teacher, her keen eye, and sheer luck on everypony’s part that was involved. Ms Cheerilee has *always* done right by our children and town alike, and we thank her for all of the work she does. Still, she found a foal that fell between the cracks, unfortunately, and learned what drew most of you here this evening. Ms Cheerilee?”

Ms Cheerilee, with some coaxing, got Onyx to go onstage with her, an action that left the majority of the audience in minor disbelief at first, but quickly grew as she told the story.

“Onyx Star, the act that many of you likely came to see this evening, has lived in an abandoned building for most of his life. Only over the course of the past few weeks has this foal had a roof over his head. I would stay late and come in early to the school to make sure he was fed and had a meal. Onyx Star isn’t your ordinary pony, nor did he have an ordinary situation, so I had to get creative with how I handled it, and I have the princesses, mayor, and elements of harmony to thank for the help. Ever since I walked by that building and heard his song, after finding out that it was him, I knew that he was going to go far. Just from seeing him in my class, I was originally worried that he might not be able to make it after school, but

these last few weeks have showed me that he really needs a family to care for him. Onyx, would you like to speak?”

“Uhm, sure,” he said, “None of the instruments, except for one of the drums and the yovidaphone, in that song ever existed. Ponies, like everycreature, long ago, didn’t have what we have today, but they still did amazing things. Music puts me at one with existence, and it’s what got me through the time Discord got loose from his statue- his chaos couldn’t affect it for some reason, so I’ve always made music. Regular chaos can be bad, but musical chaos always turns into something better,” Onyx finished before stepping away from the microphone.

“Thank you, Onyx,” Mayor Mare said, “Over the past couple of weeks, I’ve found out that this young foal is in need of our help more than anycreature in Equestria. Like Ms Cheerilee said, he’s going to go far on his talents, so, as a result, I’m announcing the donation this year to go to the care and development of Onyx Star!”

With that, the entire town erupted in cheering. The already-full donation bins became even fuller as Cheerilee led Onyx offstage and he got his things.

“What just happened?” Onyx asked, still in shock.

“I know how you are about help, but I could see that you needed it. Your song was attracting everyone around before it went online. I just wish I could’ve given you a roof sooner, but the princesses would like to talk to you.”

“Me?”

“Yes,” Princess Celestia said, attracting the duos attention as she stood with the other princesses, “I would like to offer you the chance to come to Canterlot and study at my school for gifted ponies.”

“And if you want, we can make your music real in the Crystal empire,” Princess Cadence said, “If you’ll let us, that is.”

“Yak want pony to come perform in Yakyakistan!” a yak said, finding him.

“Maybe you could write something for the dragons,” Dragon Lord Ember said.

“Or even help out at the school of friendship,” Twilight suggested.

Onyx felt a strange compulsion that he’d never felt before, so he pulled Cheerilee off to the side, “Hold that thought? I *never* anticipated this.”

“Yes?” his teacher asked.

“Is it okay if I do this?”

“If your asking if it’s okay for you to miss school, well, you’ve already proven that you know everything I can teach you.”

“No, I mean... *can* I go?”

“Are you asking to be...?”

“I *have* stayed in the school for several weeks and you *have* been caring for me like one.”

“I’d be *glad* to be your mom!” Cheerilee said, hugging Onyx, “Of *course* you can go.”

“I’ll write back home,” Onyx said, flipping through the pages of the music, “*Mom.*”

“Have you made a decision?” Princess Luna said.

“I’d like to do *all* of that stuff,” Onyx said, giving the sheet music to the princesses, “I don’t know if they can read this, though.”

“Don’t worry,” Twilight said, flipping through the pages with her magic before producing a copy that looked as if it was a printed original and not scribbled-in notation, “We’ll take care of it.”

*Several Years Later, Ponyville*

Onyx Star, now with reason to smile and wealthy, was walking the streets of Ponyville. He wasn’t due to come back until the next moon, but decided to come a few weeks early because of the Crystal Royal Symphony coming to his hometown and playing *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time?* as their feature.

The markets had changed drastically, but he could still memorize all of the faces, if nothing else.

After deciding to come back home early, he had gotten Cheerilee to let him play for the class, something they all seemed to love, as well as some of the parents. Afterward, he treated the whole class to lunch before leaving to go to the public stage, where he saw one pony scolding harshly a snare drum player, likely not knowing how to play the thing himself.

“Excuse me,” Onyx said, “Is something wrong here?”

“No!” the conductor said, “We were about to-”

Onyx held two fingers up, ending the conductor’s speech, “What I *mean* is why are you getting onto that drummer?”

“We received word that you would be at the performance this evening, and Percussion Notes *can't* seem to get it right!”

“I got this,” Onyx said, going back to the drummer, who shied away as Onyx looked at the music and took the sticks, “Notes, there’s no right way to play this part, so you just have to feel it. You close your eyes when you play the charge, knowing you win if you’re true when you play. You find your true, hold onto it like it’s the end of the world, and you let it shine brighter than the sun- you let your soul out because it’s the sword-wielding warrior that leads you to your win,” he handed the sticks back, “Try it.”

Percussion Notes closed his eyes tightly, took a breath, and began playing the charge before stopping and looking at Onyx, “It worked!”

“When you play tonight, you don’t let them follow you or trample you because you’re the drummer, you put on the armor, wield the sword, and make it known that *you’re* the leader, not the guy at the front with the rulebook. He’s got the stick, but you’re the warrior. They can’t march, let alone fight, without your persistence and courage.”

The drummer looked at Onyx as he went back to the conductor, “Who’s the filly that’s hiding?”

“She’s some street rat child.”

“I want her in the front row with me tonight,” Onyx said, going over to her, despite the conductor’s protests.

“What’s your name?” he asked her as she hid.

“Mirror shine?”

“Where are your parents?”

“I don’t have any.”

Onyx knew what the only next step was as he helped her up, “Mirror Shine, I’ll be at that performance tonight, and I want you to see it from the best seats in the house with me.”

“Really?”

“I’ll set you in my lap if I have to.”

That night, the orchestra played without a hitch. First was *The Moon & The Sun* with Narration before a slow of the music, played by the drums and strings in the beginning of the feature, and a few words by an unknown speaker.

“The song that made the world learn to feel and almost didn’t happen has been the target of many’s searches. *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time?* was our answer to that quest. As the struggle ended, the life and music *truly* began,” the announcer said as the song began, though Onyx looked to the drummer as he closed his eyes and began playing his own charge for the others to march and fight to.

After the performance, the conductor brought the drummer to Onyx, stunned at what happened earlier.

“He’s *never* been able to play the charge right,” the conductor said, “What did you...?”

“He couldn’t play *my* charge right. Everyone has a different charge, and he needed to play his.”

“What about what was written?”

“That was *my* charge,” Onyx said, “This is the same music I scribbled down as a kid- *I* never knew anyone else would play it.”

“And *why* did you want her here?”

“She’s my new daughter,” Onyx explained, “And she’s gonna grow up to be *just* perfect, even if she’s not the best. Now,” he said, looking at Mirror Shine, “What do you want for dinner? Grandma’s got some leftover lunch *or* we can go eat in town.”

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“How can I grow up to be like you?”

“You find what you’re good at that makes you happy and you keep doing it.”

“Could we go to Hayburger?”

Onyx smiled and chuckled, helping an aging Cheerilee up and to Hayburger.