

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK

HANSEL AND GRETEL

CONDUCTOR
Donald Runnicles

PRODUCTION
Richard Jones

SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER
John Macfarlane

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Jennifer Tipton

CHOREOGRAPHER
Linda Dobell

ENGLISH TRANSLATION
David Pountney

REVIVAL STAGE DIRECTOR
Eric Einhorn

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR DESIGNATE
Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Opera in three acts

Libretto by Adelheid Wette, based on
the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm

Friday, December 22, 2017
8:00–10:15 PM

The production of *Hansel and Gretel* was made possible by generous gifts from the **Gramma Fisher Foundation**, Marshalltown, Iowa; and **Karen and Kevin Kennedy**

Additional funding was received from Dr. Coco Lazaroff, and Joan Taub Ades and Alan M. Ades

This production was originally created for
Welsh National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago

The Metropolitan Opera

2017-18 SEASON

The 273rd Metropolitan Opera performance of
ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK'S

HANSEL AND GRETEL

CONDUCTOR
Donald Runnicles

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

GRETEL
Lisette Oropesa*

HANSEL
Tara Erraught

GERTRUDE
Dolora Zajick

PETER
Quinn Kelsey

THE SANDMAN
Rihab Chaieb**

THE DEW FAIRY
Hyesang Park**

THE WITCH
Gerhard Siegel

Intermission at
approximately
9:00PM

Friday, December 22, 2017, 8:00-10:15PM



Tara Erraught and
Lisette Oropesa
in the title roles
of Humperdinck's
Hansel and Gretel

Children's Chorus Director **Anthony Piccolo**
Musical Preparation **Gregory Buchalter, Carol Isaac, and
Jonathan C. Kelly**
Assistant Stage Director **J. Knighten Smit**
Met Titles **Michael Panayos**
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An Illustrated Synopsis of *Hansel and Gretel*



Hansel and Gretel are starving and can't concentrate on their chores. Instead, they dance around the kitchen to pass the time.



Their mother, Gertrude, returns and is furious that the children have neglected their duties. As a punishment, she sends the children to the haunted woods to pick strawberries.



The children's father, Peter, returns home in high spirits with a basket of food. When Gertrude confesses that she sent the children into the forest, Peter warns her of a witch there who roasts and eats children.



In the woods, Hansel and Gretel pick strawberries. They are unable to resist the fruit and eat them all in a frenzy.



When their bellies are full, they realize they are lost and become afraid of the strange sights and ghostly voices in the wood.



The Sandman appears and enchants Hansel and Gretel. He puts them to sleep and brings them safely to the land of dreams.



In a dream, 14 otherworldly creatures surround the children. They watch over them as they sleep and prepare a lavish feast for them to eat.



When they awaken, Hansel and Gretel follow a delicious smell to a huge Gingerbread House. They hear a sinister voice from inside but continue eating until they are drawn inside the house.



The Witch welcomes the children and feeds them sweets, talking of fattening them up. Hansel and Gretel don't trust the Witch, and when they try to run away, she freezes them with a magic spell.



The Witch makes Gretel assist her in the kitchen. Gretel is terrified when she finds the gingerbread bodies of other children. When the Witch isn't looking, Gretel releases Hansel.



The Witch asks Gretel to check the oven, but the children know that she really wants to roast Gretel. When the Witch opens the oven door, the children push her inside.



With the Witch dead, the gingerbread children return to life. Hansel and Gretel are reunited with their parents, and everyone gives thanks as they celebrate the Witch's demise.

Engelbert Humperdinck

Hansel and Gretel

Premiere: Court Theater, Weimar, 1893

Originally conceived as a small-scale vocal entertainment for children, *Hansel and Gretel* resonates with both adults and kids and has become one of the most successful fairy-tale operas ever created. The composer, Engelbert Humperdinck, was a protégé of Richard Wagner, and the opera's score is flavored with the sophisticated musical lessons he learned from his idol while maintaining a charm and a light touch that were entirely Humperdinck's own. The folk tale of the siblings who get lost in a dark forest and become captives of an old witch is a classic of German literature, made famous in the collected stories of the Brothers Grimm. The opera acknowledges the darker features present in the Brothers Grimm version yet presents them within a frame of grace and humor. Richard Strauss was delighted with Humperdinck's score and conducted the opera's world premiere. *Hansel and Gretel* has been internationally popular ever since and is one of the very few operas that can claim equal approval from such diverse and demanding critics as children and musicologists.

The Creators

Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921) was a German composer who began his career as an assistant to Richard Wagner at Bayreuth in a variety of capacities, including tutoring Wagner's son Siegfried. Humperdinck even composed a few measures of orchestral music for the world premiere of Wagner's *Parsifal* when extra time was needed for a scene change. *Hansel and Gretel* was Humperdinck's first complete opera and remains the foundation of his reputation. The world premiere of his opera *Königskinder* (also set in a fairy-tale world but featuring an original story) took place at the Met and was one of the sensations of the company's 1910–11 season. Humperdinck's sister Adelheid Wette (1858–1916) wrote the libretto for *Hansel and Gretel*, basing it on the version found in the Brothers Grimm collection of folk stories. Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm were German academics whose groundbreaking linguistic work revolutionized the understanding of language development. Today, they are best remembered for editing and publishing collections of folk tales. British director David Pountney (b. 1947), who provided the English translation for the Met's current production of *Hansel and Gretel*, has directed productions for many of Europe's leading opera houses and provided libretti for such composers as Sir Peter Maxwell Davis.

The Setting

The opera's three acts move from Hansel and Gretel's home to the dark forest to the Witch's gingerbread house deep in the forest. Put another way, the drama moves from the real, through the obscure, and into the unreal and fantastical. In this production by Richard Jones, which takes the idea of food as its dramatic focus, each act is set in a different kind of kitchen, informed by a unique theatrical style: a D.H. Lawrence-inspired setting in the first, a German Expressionist one in the second, and a Theater of the Absurd mood in the third.

The Music

The score of *Hansel and Gretel* combines accessible charm with subtle sophistication. Like Wagner, Humperdinck assigns musical themes to certain ideas and then transforms the themes according to new developments in the drama. The chirpy cuckoo in Act II is depicted by wind instruments, which become increasingly frightening as night descends on the children lost in the forest. The vocal parts also reflect this method. Unlike Wagner, however, Humperdinck uses separate songs (with real folk tunes among them) within his scheme. In Act I, Gretel tells her brother that God will provide for them, using a bouncy and naïve tune that suggests a prayer a child might learn by heart but not fully understand. In Act II, this becomes the children's beautiful and heartfelt prayer, which then triggers the magical dream sequence of guardian angels that closes the act. Similarly, Gretel's dance tune in Act I morphs into the father's solemn prayer of thanksgiving for a happy ending at the opera's finale. The music, like the children, seems to grow up over the course of the evening. The role of the Witch, written for a mezzo-soprano, is sometimes (as in the present production) sung by a tenor.

Met History

Hansel and Gretel had its Met premiere in 1905 with the composer present and was revived frequently during the holidays until 1916. A new production designed by Joseph Urban debuted in 1927. Perhaps the most memorable of these performances was on Christmas Day in 1931, when the opera was presented on the radio, inaugurating the Met's Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts, which continue to the present day. The company retired the Urban production in 1948, and *Hansel* was absent from the Met stage until a new production by Nathaniel Merrill opened in 1967, featuring Rosalind Elias and Teresa Stratas in the title roles. In following seasons, many memorable singers appeared in this popular production, including sopranos Judith Blegen and Dawn Upshaw and mezzo-sopranos Tatiana Troyanos, Frederica von Stade, and Jennifer Larmore. An especially diverse array of talent, from Louise Homer in the opera's first decade at the Met to the tenors Paul Franke, Andrea Velis, and Philip Langridge, have performed the role of the Witch. The current production originated at Welsh National Opera and was subsequently seen in Chicago and San Francisco before being revised and reworked for the Met, where it was first performed in 2007.

Program Note

In May of 1890, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* had its premiere in Rome. Two years later, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* followed in Milan. Separately, or in double harness—the Met first brought together *Cav* and *Pag* in 1893—these two pieces swept the opera houses of the world. Inflamed passions, violence, and verismo filled the lyric stage. And then, two days before Christmas 1893, there appeared an alternative: Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. As the influential music critic of the time, Eduard Hanslick, put it: "To the brutal miniatures, already becoming tiresome, the strongest possible contrast is—a children's fairy tale. On the one side we have criminals, suicides, betrayed lovers and couples; on the other, a little brother and sister whose only pain is hunger and whose greatest pleasure is a candy bar—no passion, no love story, no love intrigue. It is another world—and a better one." Ironically, as Hanslick realized, this innocent tale was composed by a musician under the spell of the arch-sorcerer Richard Wagner, who, Hanslick believed, had poisoned the pure fountains of lyric art. A thorough command of Wagner's technical apparatus underlies *Hansel and Gretel*. "The restless modulation ... the polyphonic texture of the accompaniment ... the refined orchestral effects—this is Richard Wagner to the core," wrote Hanslick.

In 1879 Humperdinck, a brilliant, prizewinning young musician of 25, met Wagner in Naples. Wagner invited him to Bayreuth to help in the preparation of *Parsifal*, and a few measures of that score have been ascribed to Humperdinck. (The transformation scene took slightly longer to stage than there was music for; the assistant devised some extra measures, and Wagner approved of them.) In 1880, he wrote an orchestral piece, *Humoreske*, which had a certain success. But he was not a prolific composer. After Bayreuth, he held various teaching posts, including two years as a professor of theory at the Barcelona Conservatory, and in 1890, Cosima Wagner engaged him to complete the musical education of her son Siegfried. That same year, Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette, asked him to compose some songs for a domestic entertainment she had written for her children to perform. With mock-Wagnerian pomposity, this little drawing-room play was presented as "A Nursery Dedicatory Festival Drama." (*Parsifal* had been a "Bühnenweihfestspiel"; *Hansel* was a "Kinderstuben-Weihfestspiel.")

Now Humperdinck was looking for an opera libretto, and it occurred to him that his sister's play could be expanded to provide one. Thus *Hansel and Gretel* came into being.

Fairy tales, as everyone knows, can be allegories of real life. Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* is a fairy tale, and so is Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. (Wagner's *Ring* cycle, for that matter, has episodes in common with *Puss in Boots* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.) The Grimm fairy tale on which *Hansel and Gretel* is based starts in a starkly realistic vein: "Times were hard. Work was scarce, and food prices were high." So, in order to have two mouths fewer to

feed, Hansel and Gretel are taken out into the woods and abandoned there. The gentle Adelheid Wette was shocked at such callous behavior and tried to soften it. In her version, the mother comes home after a tiring and profitless day. The children have been larking, not working. When, in a scuffle, the milk jug is broken and the only nourishment in the house is spilt, she drives them out into the forest to gather strawberries in a sudden, understandable burst of temper and despair. In its own way, this first scene is also very realistic, and there is more than a hint that the father, even though (or because!) his day has been profitable, has been drinking on the way home. Poverty, hunger, cares that have turned a mother's love to harshness—all is set for a domestic tragedy.

But then *Hansel and Gretel* becomes an epic. Food may be a recurrent preoccupation—for the parents, for the children, for the greedy old child-eating Witch—but the theme is the outwitting of an ogress by two resourceful and spirited children. The Witch, who has transformed her earlier little victims into gingerbread, is a homely descendant of the enchantress Circe in *The Odyssey*, who turned Odysseus's companions into swine, and of the enchantress Alcina in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, who turned her admirers into savage beasts. Many morals can be drawn from *Hansel and Gretel*—but not, perhaps, the one that is sung out, maestoso, in its closing pages: "When in need or dark despair, God will surely hear our prayer."

The broad chorale makes a superb and moving musical close to the work—but heaven has played no part in the rescue of Hansel and Gretel or their awakening of the spellbound children. They are saved by their own wits. In fact, heaven's role is distinctly ambiguous. At the close of the forest scene, the pious tots sing their evening prayer before settling down to sleep. Fourteen angels appear to keep watch over them, and Humperdinck clothes the Dream Pantomime in music of shining, ethereal beauty. But when day dawns, the angel sentries are gone. They were as a dream. The children are left to face the menace of the Witch.

Hansel and Gretel is a Wagnerian music drama with nursery subject matter. When the milk jug is broken, the orchestral climax could accompany the shattering of Wotan's spear. The Witch's Ride is like a Ride of the Valkyries, but with broomsticks for mounts instead of magic horses. The shining Dream Pantomime owes something to *Lohengrin*, and perhaps more to *Parsifal*. The finale, the awakening of the children, is in effect an apotheosis and redemption. There have been people disturbed by, and critical of, the application of Wagner's elaborate methods to so slight a tale. But most people have loved *Hansel and Gretel*—loved it as children, and loved it perhaps even more as adults. And they do so for two reasons. First, because they can still share in the realities of its emotions. (The forest terrors that scare Gretel, in the second scene, are kin to those that scare Mime in the *Ring*; anyone who has been alone

Program Note CONTINUED

in a forest at night must know them.) And second, because the music is so captivatingly beautiful. Humperdinck uses the same size orchestra as Wagner in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, but there is no heaviness in his handling of it—only richness, warmth, delicacy, and (to quote the critic Robin Legge) “once or twice, as in the twilit woodland scene with the cuckoo, a poetry more enchanting than anything of the kind ever achieved by Wagner.”

—Andrew Porter

The Cast



Donald Runnicles

CONDUCTOR (EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND)

THIS SEASON *Hansel and Gretel* at the Met; *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Lohengrin*, the world premiere of Aribert Reimann's *L'Invisible*, *Elektra*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and *Don Carlo* at Deutsche Oper Berlin; Wagner's *Ring* cycle at San Francisco Opera; and concert appearances in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe.

MET APPEARANCES *Peter Grimes*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Die Walküre*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Werther*, *Salome*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and *Lulu* (debut, 1988).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Since 2009, he has served as general music director of Deutsche Oper Berlin, where his most recent performances include Wagner's *Ring* cycle, *Death in Venice*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Tosca*, *Parsifal*, and *Così fan tutte*. He has been music director of the Grand Teton Music Festival since 2005 and principal guest conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 2001. Between 1992 and 2008, he was music director of San Francisco Opera, where he led the world premieres of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* and Susa's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. He was recently named conductor emeritus of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, having served as its chief conductor from 2009 to 2016.



Tara Erraught

MEZZO-SOPRANO (DUBLIN, IRELAND)

THIS SEASON Nicklausse/the Muse in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* for her debut and *Hansel and Gretel* at the Met; Carlotta in Richard Strauss's *Die Schwiigsame Frau*, Despina in *Così fan tutte*, the Second Esquire and a Flower Maiden in *Parsifal*, and Alcina in Haydn's *Orlando Paladino* at the Bavarian State Opera; Stéphane in *Roméo et Juliette* in Barcelona; and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Staatsoper Berlin.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Since 2010, she has been a resident principal soloist with the Bavarian State Opera, where her roles have included the title role of *La Cenerentola*, the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Kathleen Scott in the world premiere of Miroslav Srnka's *South Pole*, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito*, among many others. Recent performances include Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito* in concert in Baden-Baden, Siébel in *Faust* at the Salzburg Festival, and Cenerentola at Washington National Opera, the Vienna State Opera, and in Hamburg. She has also sung Rosina in Hamburg and at the Vienna State Opera, Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Glyndebourne Festival, and Kitty in the world premiere of Iain Bell's *A Harlot's Progress* in Vienna.



Lisette Oropesa

SOPRANO (NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA)

THIS SEASON Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* at the Met, Nannetta in *Falstaff* in concert in Paris, the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Covent Garden and in Madrid, Konstanze in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Bavarian State Opera, Euridice in *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Gilda in *Rigoletto* at LA Opera, and Violetta in *La Traviata* in Venice.

MET APPEARANCES More than 100 performances of 15 roles, including Sophie in *Werther*, Nannetta, Gilda, Miranda in *The Enchanted Island*, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Lisette in *La Rondine*, the Dew Fairy in *Hansel and Gretel*, and a Woman of Crete in *Idomeneo* (debut, 2006).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Norina in *Don Pasquale* at the Glyndebourne Festival; Gilda at the Paris Opera, Dutch National Opera, and in Rome and Madrid; Ophélie in *Hamlet* in Lausanne; Marie in *La Fille du Régiment* and Susanna at Washington National Opera; Hébé and Zima in Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* at the Bavarian State Opera; Violetta at Opera Philadelphia; Susanna at San Francisco Opera and New Orleans Opera; and Marie at Pittsburgh Opera. She is a graduate of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.



Dolora Zajick

MEZZO-SOPRANO (SALEM, OREGON)

THIS SEASON Gertrude in *Hansel and Gretel* and Azucena in *Il Trovatore* at the Met, Ulrica in *Un Ballo in Maschera* in Barcelona, and Rosa Mamai in Cilea's *L'Arlesiana* at Deutsche Oper Berlin.

MET APPEARANCES More than 250 performances, including as Mary in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Azucena (debut, 1988), Ulrica, Ježibaba in *Rusalka*, Amneris in *Aida*, the Countess in *The Queen of Spades*, Adalgisa in *Norma*, Eboli in *Don Carlo*, Elvira Griffiths in the world premiere of Tobias Picker's *An American Tragedy*, and Marfa in *Khovanshchina*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS She has appeared at many of the world's leading opera houses and festivals, including the Vienna State Opera, La Scala, Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and in Paris, Verona, and Orange, among others. Recent performances include Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* at the Dallas Opera, Ulrica in Rome and at San Francisco Opera, a performance of her composition *Roads to Zion* in Madrid, Verdi's Requiem in Bilbao and La Coruña, Azucena at Staatsoper Berlin and Opera San Antonio, and Madame de Croissy in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at Washington National Opera. In 2006, she founded the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices

The Cast CONTINUED



Quinn Kelsey

BARITONE (HONOLULU, HAWAII)

THIS SEASON Peter in *Hansel and Gretel*, Count di Luna in *Il Trovatore*, and Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Met; the title role of *Rigoletto* at Lyric Opera of Chicago; Rodrigo in *Don Carlo* at Washington National Opera; and Germont in *La Traviata* in Zurich.

MET APPEARANCES Marcello and Schaunard (debut, 2008) in *La Bohème*, Germont, and Monterone in *Rigoletto*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Amonasro in *Aida* in Orange; *Rigoletto* at the Hawaii Opera Theatre, San Francisco Opera, Paris Opera, and in Frankfurt and Zurich; Count di Luna and Germont at Covent Garden; and Enrico at Lyric Opera of Chicago and in Frankfurt. He has also sung Count di Luna at Lyric Opera of Chicago; Germont at the Canadian Opera Company, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and in concert in Seoul; *Rigoletto* at the Santa Fe Opera and English National Opera; the title role of *Falstaff* at Japan's Saito Kinen Festival; Sancho Panza in *Don Quichotte* at the Canadian Opera Company; and Guido di Montforte in *I Vespri Siciliani* in Frankfurt. He was the 2015 recipient of the Met's Beverly Sills Artist Award, established by Agnes Varis and Karl Leightman.



Gerhard Siegel

TENOR (TROSTBERG, GERMANY)

THIS SEASON The Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* at the Met, Herod in *Salome* in Zurich and at Staatsoper Berlin and the Hungarian State Opera, and Mime in Wagner's *Ring* cycle in Dresden.

MET APPEARANCES Herod, Mime (debut, 2004), and the Captain in *Wozzeck*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Midas in Richard Strauss's *Die Liebe der Danae* and the Captain at the Salzburg Festival; Herod at the Verbier Festival, Vienna State Opera, and in Stuttgart; Mime in Budapest, Tokyo, and Odense, Denmark; Tristan in *Tristan und Isolde* in Gelsenkirchen, Germany; and Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Vienna State Opera. He has also sung the Captain at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Covent Garden, the Paris Opera, and in Stuttgart and Madrid; the Monk in Schoenberg's *Die Jakobsleiter* in Berlin; the Prince/Manservant/Marquis in *Lulu* in Amsterdam; Mime at the Bayreuth Festival, Covent Garden, and in Barcelona and Cologne; the title role of *Lohengrin* in Augsburg; the title role of *Peter Grimes* in Munich; Shuisky in *Boris Godunov* at the Bavarian State Opera; Sellem in *The Rake's Progress* in Vienna; Max in *Der Freischütz* in Berlin; and Florestan in *Fidelio* in Granada.

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