

Colorado State University

UPCOMING EVENTS

VIRTUOSO SERIES CONCERT: Nuevo Historias
With CSU Faculty Peter Sommer, Saxophone and Jazz Compadres
11/9 • Organ Recital Hall • 7:30 pm

MEDIEVAL MUSIC RECITAL
11/101 • Organ Recital Hall • 7:00pm • FREE

GRADUATE STRING QUARTET
Zinnia Quartet
11/11 • Organ Recital Hall • 7:30 pm

DANCE: Fall Dance Concert
11/13 • University Dance Theatre • 7:30 pm
11/14 • University Dance Theatre • 2:00 & 7:30 pm

VIRTUOSO SERIES CONCERT: Faculty Chamber Ensemble
11/16 • Organ Recital Hall • 7:30 pm

JAZZ ENSEMBLES CONCERT
Jazz Ensembles I and II play the Music of Colorado Composers
11/17 • Griffin Concert Hall • 7:30 pm

event calendar • e-newsletter registration

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HANSEL AND GRETEL

a children's opera, by ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK



November 6, 13, & 14, 2015 • 7:30pm
Sunday, November 8, 2015 • 2:00pm

GRIFFIN CONCERT HALL, UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Presented by The Charles and Reta Ralph Opera Center

HANSEL AND GRETEL

by ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK

Stage Director Tiffany Blake

Conductors Mariusz Smolij (11/6 and 11/8)
Adam A Torres (11/13 and 11/14)

Repetiteur, Chorus Master and Music Director Christopher Reed

Scenic Designer Zhanna Gurvich

Properties Master Lauren Coghlan

Lighting Designer Tristan LeMaster

Costume Designer Maile Speetjens

Hair/Makeup Designer Kristen Borkovec

Production Stage Manager Laurel Wiley

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(* = deceased)

PROGRAM NOTE

Hänsel und Gretel, a delightful children’s tale set in the mystical German forest of Ilsenstein, is Engelbert Humperdinck’s first opera. As many readers of the traditional Grimm Brothers fairytales know, the libretto is the story of a brother and sister who get lost in the woods. The pair stumbles upon a cottage made entirely of gingerbread, and the siblings are eventually spellbound by its occupant, the Knusperhexe (Nibblewitch), who has an appetite for small children.

Hänsel und Gretel was originally written as a favor to the composer’s sister, Adelheid Wette, who requested Humperdinck write four songs to accompany the story for her children to perform. This idle project eventually lengthened into a singspiel (a light opera with spoken dialogue) dedicated to Humperdinck’s new fiancée, and finally blossomed into the full-blown opera we know today. Premiered in 1893 in Berlin with conductor Richard Strauss at the podium, the work quickly became an international hit, and is now frequently performed in English in the United States. Today, however, you will be hearing the opera in its original German with English subtitles. Playful twists abound: while the witch is traditionally played by a mezzo-soprano, the role is embodied by a tenor for this performance.

Though this fairytale is sweet, it holds great depth of meaning. On the surface, the plot is simple, but Humperdinck’s music heightens and advances the storyline to a level of great complexity. This can be attributed in great part to the composer’s association with another exceptionally notable composer of the romantic era, Richard Wagner. Wagner was Humperdinck’s mentor, and their close-knit relationship shows prominently in Humperdinck’s operatic masterpiece. Years before working on *Hänsel und Gretel*, the younger composer collaborated closely with the operatic master on *Parsifal*. Humperdinck was Wagner’s “closest assistant,” even being trusted to write new material for *Parsifal*’s premiere performance. Similarities between *Parsifal* and *Hänsel und Gretel* are abundant. Humperdinck’s borrowed techniques include using rhythmic variations for foreshadowing, relying on reoccurring musical motives that tie the storyline and the music closely together, and adhering to traditional German nationalistic opera idioms such as forest settings, mystical qualities, and lessons of morality.

A facet of *Hänsel und Gretel* that firmly places it in the hearts of both adults and children is the use of traditional German folk tunes, which is also prevalent throughout the opera. Gretel sings “Suse, liebe suse,” a popular German nursery rhyme, to open Act One. If you have children with you, prompt them to listen for melodies they recognize, and to think of where they may have heard them before. These playful themes encourage listeners not to take Humperdinck too seriously. *Hänsel und Gretel* was written for the enjoyment of its audiences and was meant to entertain all ages, so sit back and enjoy as you are enticed to nibble on this musical delight!

~ Program notes by Liesl Bryant

SYNOPSIS

Act I

Hansel and Gretel are left at home to do their chores. Hansel complains about how hungry he is, and Gretel cheers him up by telling him a secret: A neighbor has given their mother a jug of milk, and tonight she’ll make a rice pudding for them to eat! Their work is forgotten as they begin to dance and sing.

When their Mother returns, she is furious to find their chores undone. She threatens to beat them, and in her anger, she knocks over the jug of milk. She sends the children to the forest to look for strawberries. Alone, she expresses her sorrow and frustration that she is unable to feed her children, and asks God for help.

Peter, Hansel and Gretel’s father, bursts into the house, roaring drunk, and kisses mother roughly. She pushes him away and scolds him for being drunk. He surprises her by taking from his pack a feast: vegetables, butter, flour, sausages, eggs, and even coffee! He explains to her that he successfully sold all of his brooms at the highest prices. Mother tells him of the the broken jug, and he helps her to find the humor in the situation. He asks where the children are, and she tells him that they are in the Ilsenstein forest. Horrified, father tells her that the evil Gingerbread Witch dwells in the forest, luring children with cakes and sweets and turning them into gingerbread. Father and mother rush to the forest to search for their children.

Act II

Gretel and Hansel play and gather strawberries in the woods. Listening to a cuckoo bird, they eat the berries, pretending to be little birds themselves. Realizing the basket is empty, Gretel scolds Hansel and tries to look for more, but it’s too dark for her to see. Hansel tries to find the way back, but he cannot. As the forest darkens, Hansel and Gretel become scared.

The Sandman and woodland creatures come to protect the children and lull them to sleep. The children sing their nightly prayer and then they fall asleep on the forest floor.

Act III

The Dew Fairy comes to wake the children. Gretel wakes first, and revels in the beauty of the forest and the birdsong. She wakes the sleepy Hansel and they talk about their mutual dream, of angels protecting them as they slept.

Suddenly they notice glorious gingerbread house!. Unable to resist temptation, they take a little bit of the house and nibble on it. As the children nibble, a voice calls out, and Hansel and Gretel decide that the voice must have been the wind, and they begin to eat the house. The witch comes out of the house and captures Hansel. The witch introduces herself as a friend to children, but Hansel and Gretel are suspicious and try to run away.Using her magic wand, the witch stops them and forces Gretel to tie Hansel to a tree. The witch feeds Hansel in order to fatten him before eating him.

The witch prepares her BBQ to roast the children. She wakes Hansel and asks him show her his finger. He puts out a stick instead. She feels it, and believing him too thin, calls for Gretel to bring out raisins and almonds to feed Hansel. As the witch tries to feed Hansel, Gretel steals the wand from the witch’s pocket and frees Hansel from the witches’ spell.

The witch tells Gretel to peek inside the oven to see if it is hot enough. Hansel softly calls out to her to be careful. Gretel pretends that she doesn’t know what the witch means, and asks the witch to demonstrate. The witch leans into the BBQ and the children spring into action, shoving her into the BBQ.

The gingerbread children appear, asking to be touched. Hansel is afraid, but Gretel strokes one on the cheek, and she wakes. Hansel takes the witch’s wand and, waving it, calls out the magic words, completely freeing the children from the spell. The gingerbread children celebrate and thank Hansel and Gretel.

Father is heard in the distance, calling for Hansel and Gretel. He and mother enter and embrace Hansel and Gretel. Meanwhile, the gingerbread children pull the head of the gingerbread witch from the BBQ. Father explains that this is heaven’s punishment for evil deeds and reminds them, “When the need is greatest, God the Lord puts out His hand.”

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