

Act 2, Interlude: "Dream Pantomime"

- During this orchestral section of the opera, right after the "Evening Prayer," the fourteen angels come out and surround Hansel and Gretel to protect them.
- LISTENING GUIDE
- The word "Pantomime" in this case refers to a piece where no words are used to convey the story – only the instrumental music and gestures by the actors on stage.
- Just listening to this music, what do you hear in the orchestra? How does it make you feel?
- If you were the stage director, what would you ask the angels to do during this section?

Act 3, Aria: "So hopp hopp hopp, galopp lopp lopp"

- After initially meeting the witch, in this aria she reveals her true intentions of eating the children.
- How is this music different from what you have heard so far?
- Does the witch sound happy? Excited? Insane? Upset?

Spotify Playlist for Listening Guide examples:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6aStPBdVmdRdN7dn6W9mQN?si=8ddcb4096d4b4726>

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Activity #1 – Write a Fan Letter

Write a letter to one or more of the performers from *Hansel and Gretel*. What did you like most? What did the music sound like? Did the singers use props or costumes to help tell the story? Who was your favorite performer? If you prefer, draw your favorite part of the performance. Give the letter or the drawing to your teacher to send back to the New Orleans Opera.

Activity #2 – Design the Set

Imagine you are the set designer for *Hansel and Gretel*. Create your vision below for each scene where the opera takes place and draw each one as you imagine them: Hansel and Gretel's Home, The Deep, Dark Forest, and The Witch's Cottage.

Activity #3 – Review the Show!

Reviews of performances are important to every opera company. They help the company know how the performance was enjoyed by audiences, and get other people excited about coming to see the show! Pretend you are an opera critic. Think about the performance you just saw of *Hansel and Gretel* and write your thoughts like you might see in the newspaper or an online review. Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. You might want to focus on one part of the opera that you particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review, and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance! Below are some tips to get you started. To write your own review, you can focus on two different elements – what you saw and what you heard.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This study guide was compiled from the following sources:

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Hansel and Gretel

EDUCATIONAL STUDY GUIDE



THE BASICS

Hansel and Gretel (Hänsel und Gretel)

Premiered on December 23, 1893, at the Hoftheater in Weimar, Germany

Music: Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Libretto: Adelheid Wette (1858-1916)

Based on the Brothers Grimm fairytale *Hansel and Gretel*

CHARACTERS

| Name | Description | Voice Type |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| Gretel | Hansel's sister | Soprano |
| Hansel | Gretel's brother | Mezzo-Soprano |
| Angelica Petiffour | A witch | Mezzo-Soprano or Tenor |
| Gertrude | Hansel and Gretel's mother | Mezzo Soprano |
| Peter | Hansel and Gretel's father | Baritone |
| Sandman | Mythical character who puts people to sleep | Soprano |
| Dew Fairy | Mythical character who welcomes the morning | Soprano |
| Children and Angels | | Chorus |

SYNOPSIS

Act I

In the house of a broom-maker deep in a German forest, Hansel and Gretel have been left by their parents, who are off in town. The children are supposed to be at work, making socks and brooms; instead, Gretel recites a nursery rhyme, which Hansel interrupts with complaints of hunger. Gretel teases her brother, calling him a complaining grump. She shows him a pitcher of milk hidden in the cupboard that their mother is saving for supper. To entertain her brother, Gretel teaches Hansel a folk dance. Suddenly Gertrude, their mother, comes home and angrily reproves them for playing when they should have been working. In her anger, the mother knocks over the pitcher of milk. When Hansel is caught grinning at this misfortune, his mother chases him out of the house and sends Gretel after him into the woods to find wild strawberries. She falls asleep just as the voice of her husband Peter is heard singing in the distance. Slightly tipsy when he arrives, he surprises Gertrude with all the food he has bought and tells her that he sold his brooms to a wedding party for the best price he has ever received. They celebrate their good fortune with a toast and he then asks where the children are. When Gertrude tells him that they have gone to the woods, he is horrified. He tells her about the Witch who lives there and who bakes children into bread. The two rush off to find Hansel and Gretel.

Act II

In a forest glade, Gretel sings another nursery rhyme and then begins making a wreath of wildflowers. Hansel picks the last of the wild strawberries. He offers his basket to Gretel, who eats one; as they start to leave, a cuckoo calls, and the children parrot the bird's call, eating strawberries all the while. As darkness falls, they realize they cannot refill the basket, and worse, that they are lost. Their fears multiply as they see visions of wild animals behind every tree. An old man appears, scattering gold sand and promising restful sleep. When the Sandman leaves, the two children kneel to say their prayers and quickly fall asleep. In their dream, Hansel and Gretel are surrounded by a host of children, who seem to have a message for them.

Act III

The Dew Fairy brings morning to the world of the forest. The children awake and find themselves still in the forest. They happen upon a magical house, filled with cakes and sweets. When Hansel breaks a piece off from the gingerbread house, they hear a voice from somewhere inside the dwelling. An old lady comes out and offers them desserts of all kinds; when they refuse her temptations, she puts a spell on them and locks Hansel in a cage. Gretel is released from the spell to help set the Witch's table. Gretel has overheard the Witch's plan to bake her, and while the Witch feeds Hansel to fatten him up, Gretel whispers the Witch's magic words, which break the spell on Hansel. Hungry for Gretel, the Witch calls her to the oven. Gretel cleverly asks the Witch to show her how to make the oven work. As the Witch leans in, Hansel and Gretel push her in and slam the door. The oven gets hotter and hotter until it explodes. Suddenly, the room is filled with other children. Hansel recites the Witch's spell and the children spring to life. As Peter and Gertrude rush in and embrace their children, a gingerbread cake of the Witch is found in the oven. Before eating, all join in giving thanks for their deliverance.

TROUSER & SKIRT ROLES

Throughout the history of opera, the roles of young, teenage boys have been portrayed on stage by female singers. Most young boys' voices are too quiet to be heard on an opera stage. So to achieve the desired sound, boy roles are often sung by mezzo-sopranos. Similarly, men have often played female roles onstage. In this production by NOOA, the role of the Witch will be sung by a tenor. This is possible because the range of a tenor can match that of a mezzo-soprano, or in some cases a soprano!

LIBRETTIST: Adelheid Wette

Adelheid Wette (Humperdinck) was born in Siegburg, Germany, on September 4th, 1858. The younger sister of the composer Engelbert Humperdinck, she contributed much to the family interest in folksong and fairytales, including occasionally writing texts for Humperdinck's musical settings. Adelheid's own libretto for Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* began in 1890 as a series of folksongs, four of which she asked her brother to set. Her skill in expanding these into a fully-fledged opera, while keeping the text's unpretentious character, was recognized as an important ingredient in the work's eventual success. In 1895 she collaborated with Humperdinck on another Grimms' fairy tale, *Die sieben Geislein* (The Seven Little Goats), but this work remained a series of domestic songs. Wette died in 1916.

Adelheid was one of the first female librettists (the person who writes the lyrics/story) in opera. Sadly, there have not been many female librettists or opera composers in the history of opera, but this is slowly changing. Thankfully, since 2013 Opera America has invested over \$1 million in operas written by women. American opera composer Missy Mazzoli had this to say:

"Women have been not encouraged to be part of this field in a million subtle ways and also in some very obvious ways. When people ask me about being a woman writing opera, the thing that I always try to say is that here is no history, really. The history of women writing opera started, like, five years ago ... That said, there is a responsibility that's been ignored to seek out these women. And, most important, to give women opportunities that are based on their potential, not on their past experience."

If you want to learn more about opportunities for women in opera through the Women's Opera Network, check out this website: <https://www.operaamerica.org/get-involved/affinity-groups/women-s-opera-network/>

LISTENING GUIDE

Act 1 Duet: "Little brother dance with me"

- To entertain and distract her brother, Gretel teaches her brother a folk dance.
- Pay specific attention to the dancing instructions Hansel and Gretel are giving each other.
- Listen to the way that the two voices interact with each other. Do they always sing the same part (unison)? Or do they sometimes sing two parts (harmony)? How do those two things change the feeling of the music?

Act 2, Duet: "Evening Prayer"

- Hansel and Gretel are saying their evening prayers before falling asleep in the forest.
- Below is the text of this duet:
"When at night I go to sleep
Fourteen angels watch do keep
Two stand here beside me
Two stand there to guide me
Two are on my right hand
Two are on my left hand
Two who come to wake me
Two more come to take me
Two more are there and light the path to heaven."
• Why do you think they might be praying these words at this point in the story?
• What feelings do you get from this music? Are you excited, angry, comforted, or something else? What specific elements of the music make you feel that certain way?