



# Hänsel und Gretel

Fairy-Tale Opera by **Engelbert Humperdinck**

10-19 November 2023

Jacksons Lane Theatre  
Highgate N6 5AA





# Our thanks ...

Thanks to the **Friends of HGO** who have continued to support HGO in this difficult period for the arts, and who make our achievements possible.

*Our special thanks to*

**Arts Society Greater London Area**

**The Maria Björnson Memorial Fund**

**The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust**

**The Fidelio Charitable Trust**

**The Golsoncott Foundation**

**The Boris Karloff Charitable Foundation**

**The Thistle Trust**

*for their support for this production*

# Welcome!

**HGO is thrilled and delighted to bring *Hansel and Gretel* to Jacksons Lane Theatre.**

Founded over 30 years ago, HGO is a registered charity, staging two full-scale opera productions a year. This uniquely enables young opera singers at the start of their career to experience singing repertory in first-rank productions before London audiences. We're sure you will enjoy the magic of tonight's production – and we'd love to know your thoughts on it – do [drop me a line here to let us know!](#)

With best regards

**David Conway**

Chair, HGO Trust

[Winners, 2023 Off-West-End Award for Opera Performance](#)

Registered charity no. 1168484



- [Follow us on Facebook](#)
- [Visit our website](#)
- [Become a Friend of HGO](#)
- [Join our emailing list](#)

# From HGO's Artistic Director Philip Sheffield

HGO is devoted to giving its audiences exceptionally rewarding and engaging performances, and to enable a significant milestone in young singers' careers. Over 150 young professionals applied to us for roles in *Hansel and Gretel*.

In the current febrile political and artistic climate the career path for young singers remains extremely challenging and uncertain. To progress they need to gain performance experience and to work with experienced, talented and inspiring stage directors and musical directors.

In addition they need to hone their skills working in original languages. Many young British singers are now needing to establish themselves abroad and singing in original languages is a key skill needed. This is part of the reason we have decided as a company to do operas like *The Cunning Vixen* in Czech and *Hansel and Gretel* in German. We engage language coaches to work with the singers to produce a thoroughly professional version of the operas we perform. We also view original language opera as better for the audiences as the music is written to specific metric rhythms ; given the high quality of surtitles today we view this as a more complete experience for both performers and audiences .

We very much hope that you enjoy our production and are able to celebrate the wonderful talent on display.

# Director's note

With a libretto written by his sister Adelheid and based on the Grimm brothers' fairytale, Engelbert Humperdinck composed *Hänsel und Gretel* in 1892, in the decade when Freud published his *Interpretation of Dreams*.

This opera resonates for children as much as for adults. Our production explores the many layers it entails. We travel down memory lane to reflect on childhood and its magic as well as on being a parent. We are taken to primordial, symbolic spaces – the family house, the uncanny forest, the witch's house – which can each be interpreted in different ways and open a wide range of emotions – love, fear, grief, joy.

In their bedroom, out of a few cardboard boxes, children have the power to create a whole world. Just like theatre. How far in time and space can our imagination take us, how do dreams and reality, past and present cross paths to shed new light on our adult lives? Come with us through the looking glass in search of lost childhood.

*Jeanne Pansard-Besson*



# Music director's note

It may come as no surprise that *Hansel and Gretel* has always been one of my very favourite operas. Humperdinck's 'one hit wonder' has remained a positive anomaly in his creative output and for good reason. From a musical standpoint the balance struck between the effective simplicity of folk inspired melody and the richly complex Wagnerian textures displayed in larger scale orchestral passages is astonishing - not only is nearly every melodic utterance one worthy of the phrase 'ear worm', it is also underpinned by delicious harmonic treatment giving a bed of sound which fills the listener with more than the sense of a 'good tune'.

The orchestral reduction by Jonathan Lyness, for 13 players, is a far cry from the full 75 piece orchestra the opera has traditionally required, yet I believe very little is lost; in fact the size of our venue at Jackson's Lane Theatre lends itself to just the right effect, drawing us into a more intimate and more magical world where we are inside the drama, not merely observing it.

As always at HGO we are dedicated to enable and support young singers at the start of their careers and I felt that this opera was particularly suited to that purpose. Sung in its original German, the difficulties of these roles are often underestimated and the tunefulness of the writing belies its challenges. I am

incredibly proud of the cast and creative team for what they have all brought to this production.

Over the past few weeks the team and I have had a great deal of enjoyment in finding the magic of detail and being able to treat Humperdinck's score as a chamber work rather than on the grander scale. *Hansel and Gretel* is a work which covers all musical bases from charming and delicate to hard edged and manipulative. Through the wide range of emotions displayed in this score we hope this evening to bring you into our special world and that you will enjoy the journey with us.

*Thomas Payne*



*At rehearsals*

# Once upon a time...

## *'Hansel and Gretel' and the fairy-tale opera genre*



Engelbert Humperdinck, c. 1880

*Hansel and Gretel* may be the best-known and most successful fairy-tale opera, but although its success took everyone (including its composer) by surprise, it did not come out of the blue.

By the time *Hansel and Gretel* was first staged in 1893, *Zauberoper* ('Magic operas'), typically of the *Singspiel* type with spoken dialogue, where the hero rescues a woman in peril with the assistance of supernatural aids, had been around on the German stage for a century or more – Mozart's *Magic*

*Flute* (1791) being a notable example. Other in this tradition include Weber's *Oberon* (1826) and Marschner's *Hans Heiling* (1833). You could even make a case for Wagner's *Siegfried* (1857) being a descendant of the genre.

The sensational reception of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Children's and Household Tales*, which included the first published version of *Hansel and Gretel*, did not however immediately feed into this trend. One obvious reason is that these stories, edited by the brothers directly from the oral traditions, were by no means as elegant as the tales which had entered the French tradition in the versions of Perrault, such as *Cinderella* or *Puss in Boots*. In their original versions of the 1812 edition, the stories of the Grimms, who initially sought to tell them as they received them, were often stark in their relation of child abuse and other horrors. The first version of *Hansel*



*and Gretel*, for example, has the parents deliberately attempting to starve the children in the forest. In their preface to the first edition, the brothers wrote “Wherever the tales still exist, they continue to live in such a way that nobody ponders whether they are good or bad, poetic or crude.” But on publication this turned out not to be the case: there were, for example, complaints from readers who had sometimes acquired them with the intent of reading them to their children and were horrified by the texts. Over subsequent editions (which the brothers revised well into the 1850s), the tales were frequently ‘watered down’ to meet with more sentimentalist and Christian values, which enabled them to take an honoured place in the traditions of German liberal nationalism and romanticism. The most popular of the tales now show “the triumph of the small and meek over the tall and powerful”, and that is the spirit in which the libretto of *Hansel and Gretel* was prepared.

Humperdinck was born in 1854, three years before the Grimms’s final edition. Although he was already writing music at the age of seven, his father directed him to study architecture – but with the support of Ferdinand Hiller, the director of the Cologne Conservatory, he was able to change course. While studying at Cologne, and later Munich, he heard, and was enchanted by, the operas of Wagner. In 1880, he met Wagner in Naples – in 1882 he was invited by Wagner to Venice to help conduct a performance of Wagner’s early C major Symphony. In 1889, when he had already commenced work on *Hansel and Gretel*, he gave private tuition to Wagner’s son Siegfried.

*Hansel and Gretel* began as the setting of four poems by Humperdinck’s sister Adelheid Wette (1890). These metamorphosed initially to a *Singspiel* of sixteen songs with piano accompaniment, which he gave to his future wife Hedwig as an engagement present; and finally in 1893, with the encouragement of Hugo Wolf, to the opera we know today.



Title page of Humperdinck's *The Seven Goslings* (1895)



The opera was given its premiere in Munich under the baton of Richard Strauss, and met with an immediate success, which spread with performances in Hamburg (conducted by Mahler), Vienna (attended by Brahms), and throughout Europe.

But for Humperdinck, this was to be a one-off. Partly this was a consequence of his declining health (and increasing deafness). His three later fairy-tale operas, *The Seven Goslings* (1897), *Königskinder* (*The Royal Children*) (1898) which experimented with the technique of *Sprechgesang* later developed by Schoenberg, and *Dornröschen* (1902), didn't hit the spot; although his later revision of *Königskinder* (1910) in more traditionally operatic style has proved its worth.

Nor, despite a spate of German fairy-tale operas following Humperdinck's success, did the genre ever take off. Amongst many forgotten names involved here, the two best-known were both pupils of Humperdinck: Siegfried Wagner, who wrote seven operas in this vein between 1899 and 1913, and the composer and conductor Leo Blech, whose *Aschenbrödel* (*Cinderella*) appeared in 1905. None of these works has survived in the repertoire.

Why then has *Hansel and Gretel* triumphed? Its success was partly a result of timing. By 1893, the Wagnerian school, with its reworkings of *Tristan* and *Parsifal*, was losing its shine with audiences, as were the initial shock and refreshment of Italian *verismo*: *Hansel and Gretel* offered something completely different, and its novelty was a virtue. Although some critics carped at the use of folk-music idioms, audiences immediately felt at home with the opera's lyricism and atmosphere.

And then of course, twenty years after its premiere, came the overwhelming impact of the First World War. The sentiment of fairy tale was no longer a 'natural' for opera composers. *Hansel and Gretel* is a sole survivor.

David Conway

# Synopsis

## 1 At home

In the house of the poor broom-maker Peter, his hungry children Hänsel and Gretel ignore the tasks set by their parents and dance and play instead. But their mother, Gertrud, on her return, is furious that they have neglected their duties. In her anger she sends them out to the forest to gather strawberries. Peter returns home drunk, but Gertrud's fury is assuaged by the food he brings with him – he has managed to sell all his brooms. As they celebrate, Peter asks where the children are, and when Gertrud says she has sent them to the forest, Peter is concerned – that is where the Witch lives, who lures children to a sticky end! Father and mother resolve to find them.

## 2. In the Forest

Playing in the forest at sunset, the children eat the strawberries that Hänsel has gathered, but when they realize there are none left, it is too dark to look for more. Worse, they realise they have lost the track, and they begin to feel frightened. The Sandman appears and promises to look after them; after their evening prayer they settle down to sleep.





*Title page of the first piano score*

### **3. The Witch's House.**

The Dew Fairy wakes the children, who now see with fascination the Witch's house. The Witch entraps them with her magic wand, making Hänsel a prisoner whilst getting Gretel to do the chores. Gretel manages to steal the wand, and secretly frees Hänsel so that, at the right moment, they can join forces and dispose of the Witch. With the help of the wand they enable the other children that the Witch has entrapped to return to life. Peter and Gertrud appear, delighted at finding Hänsel and Gretel, and all join in a final chorus.

# Hänsel und Gretel

Fairy-tale opera by Engelbert Humperdinck

Libretto by Adelheid Wette

## CAST (click on names for bios)

HÄNSEL	<a href="#">Rozanna Madylus</a> <a href="#">Alexandra Meier</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
GRETEL	<a href="#">Beren Fidan</a> <a href="#">Felicitas Wrede</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
GERTRUD, their mother / DIE KNUSPERHEXE (the NIBBLE-WITCH)	<a href="#">Sophie Patterson</a> <a href="#">Mae Heydorn</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
PETER, their father	<a href="#">Armand Rabot</a> <a href="#">Oskar McCarthy</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
SANDMÄNNCHEN (the SANDMAN)	<a href="#">Kitty Casey</a> <a href="#">Amelia Langley</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
TAUMÄNNCHEN (the DEW FAIRY)	<a href="#">Cerys Macallister</a> <a href="#">Marie Cayeux</a>	Nov 10, 12, 16, 18 Nov 11, 15, 17, 19
KÜCHENKINDER (*also YOUNG HANSEL AND GRETEL)	<i>All performances</i> <a href="#">Lola Ajala</a> <a href="#">Isabella Artemiou</a> <a href="#">Robert Berry-Roe</a> * <a href="#">Eleanor Ghassemi</a> * <a href="#">Ethan James</a> <a href="#">Robin Strelitz</a>	<a href="#">Louis Ajala</a> * <a href="#">Elizabeth Berry-Roe</a> <a href="#">Tianche Dong</a> <a href="#">Ceren Hazell</a> <a href="#">Polly Ostrovsky</a> * <a href="#">Sophia Sul Khanishvili</a>

## PRODUCTION TEAM

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR	<a href="#">Jeanne Pansard-Besson</a>
MUSIC DIRECTOR	<a href="#">Thomas Payne</a>
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	<a href="#">Finn Lacey</a>
PRODUCTION MANAGER	<a href="#">Sean Laing</a>
STAGE MANAGER	Amy Blower
SET and COSTUME DESIGN	<a href="#">Michelle Bradbury</a>
CHOREOGRAPHY	Simeon Qsyea
LIGHTING DESIGN	<a href="#">Sofia Alexiadiou</a>
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT	<a href="#">Alex Milne</a>
SURTITLE OPERATOR	Oscar Simms

## HGO ORCHESTRA

VIOLINS	Kristina Surma
	Ksenia Babets
VIOLA	Raisa Zapryanova
CELLO	Eddie Mead
DOUBLE-BASS	Chan Chiu Yung
HARP	Anna Cameli
FLUTE/PICCOLO	Sofia Castillo
OBOE /COR ANGLAIS	Izzy Cheeseman
CLARINETS	Connor Hargreaves
BASSOON	Hugh Wooley
HORN	Hannah Key
TRUMPET	Alex Brain
TIMPANI / PERCUSSION	Tony Lucas

Reduced orchestration by JONATHAN LYNESS

We are grateful to the Glyndebourne Festival for permission to adapt their English surtitles for the opera.

# Costume designs by Michelle Bradbury

The Dew Fairy



The Sandman





# Join Us



## We invite you to make a difference...

HGO IS THE REAL THING - a unique institution, advancing young singers and bringing high quality opera, fully staged with orchestra, to the community of North London at affordable ticket prices. We're increasing our involvement with schools and communities to bring the experience of opera to new audiences.

We're a charity - it's all organized on a voluntary basis and funded with the support of our Friends and benefactors.

Your support will help to keep us going and inspire us to ever higher standards and achievements. It means we can provide experience and training to our wonderful young singers, giving them the opportunity to launch their careers, and enables us to promote the wonderful experience of live opera to all sections of our community.

**BECOME A FRIEND AND HELP IT HAPPEN**  
**- click [here](#) for details and application form**  
**or email Friends Secretary Richard Hall**

HGO Trust Ltd (regd. charity 1168484)

 [@hgopera](#)



*Are you interested in the Arts?*

## **Discover The Arts Society**

Enjoy talks, walks and events on all aspects of the arts while supporting aspiring artists, artisans and performers.

For more information

<https://theartsociety.org/greater-london-area>

*Arts Society Greater London Area is delighted to support HGO  
for its 2023 season.*



**SHARED JOURNEY...**

**...JOINT EFFORT**

**To succeed, it's important to consider the support around you.**

**Sharing your journey with the right team can keep you on the right track.**

**We're pleased to support the team at HGO and their fantastic performances.**

BKL, Chartered Accountants and Tax Advisers  
Ian Saunderson, Partner  
ian.saunderson@bkl.co.uk  
020 8922 9367  
www.bkl.co.uk



# LEVERTON & SONS LTD

*Independent Family Funeral Directors since 1789*



## We proudly support HGO

We are your local funeral director in Hampstead and Muswell Hill

Hampstead - 181 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 4QS | 020 7586 4221 | [kathryn@levertons.co.uk](mailto:kathryn@levertons.co.uk)

Muswell Hill - 1 Denmark Terrace, Fortis Green N2 9HG | 020 8444 5753 | [deborah@levertons.co.uk](mailto:deborah@levertons.co.uk)

---

[www.levertons.co.uk](http://www.levertons.co.uk)

5 BRANCHES ACROSS NORTH LONDON



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™**  
We invest in people Standard





Highgate  
International  
Chamber Music  
Festival

**BRINGING  
TOGETHER  
WORLD-CLASS  
MUSICIANS**

Thursday      Sunday  
**23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>**

**NOVEMBER**

**2023**

**ST ANNE'S  
CHURCH  
HIGHGATE WEST HILL  
N6 6AP**

*"A week of stylish playing  
that shone a new light  
on familiar repertoire."  
- THE STRAD*

**chambermusicfestival.co.uk**





# The Fairy Queen

Opera by Henry Purcell

Jacksons Lane Theatre

19 - 28 April 2024

