

STUDY GUIDE

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THE LITTLE OPERA COMPANY is excited to have you as our guest for this production of Ann Hodges' adaption of Englebert Humperdinck's opera, *Hansel and Gretel*. We have created this study guide for teachers to help their students make the most of this opera experience.

NEW TO OPERA?

To ensure that your trip to the theatre is problem free and enjoyable, we recommend that you review the following with your students before you arrive.

Theatres have certain rules for audience members. Two that you should know are:

- Using a camera or any type of recording equipment is not allowed. Flash cameras are especially distracting for the performers, so theatres ask that audience members do not take pictures during the performance.
- Unlike cinemas, theatres do not allow refreshments or snacks to be consumed in the seating area. Refreshments should be consumed in the lobby, before entering the theatre.

In addition to rules that theatres ask you to follow, there are some practices of etiquette that everyone who attends a live performance follows to show respect for the performers and each other:

- We show respect for fellow audience members and the performers on stage by not making any kind of noise during the performance. Most people understand this means not talking during a performance, but it also means that we don't whisper. Whispering can be heard by people close by, and if enough people whisper, the performers can even hear it. Besides talking and whispering, we also avoid other distracting noises like coughing, wristwatch alarms, unwrapping candy (which you recall is supposed to be consumed outside of the theatre), and cellular phones.
- We also remain seated for the entire performance, until the performers take their final bows. The exception to this rule is when there is an intermission. You will know when it is OK to leave your seat, when the house lights (i.e., the lights in the seating area) come back on.
- The exception to the rule about being quiet is when we applaud at the end of the show. We applaud the performers as a way of showing them how much we enjoyed the show. If you enjoyed the show, you can let them know by clapping loudly.

Finally, some words of advice, to help make the trip to the theatre a smooth one:

- You should always arrive at the theatre with time to get comfortably seated. Generally, twenty minutes prior to curtain time should provide plenty of time for even large groups to find seating.
- If you are attending with a large group, we recommend that you distribute tickets to your group prior to arriving at the theatre.

ABOUT THE OPERA YOU WILL BE SEEING . . .

With the understanding that opera is, within the family of performing arts, an art form that can ignite, like musical theatre, unrivaled passion and bring together a wealth of all the arts, the Little Opera Company (LOC) is presenting an adaptation of the opera *Hansel and Gretel*, by Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921). Utilizing an abridged English Libretto penned by Winnipeg's own Ann Hodges, the production will see the classic Grimm story sweep audiences into a transposed, yet enchanted, realm of fairy tales and Romantic machinations. The inclusion of a chorus made up of young people creates a connection with young audience members. Its dramatic content, beautiful folk-like melodies and allegorical life lessons performed in English will make it an accessible production and enhance the appreciation of young and mature audiences alike.

Hansel and Gretel is the seminal composition that brought Humperdinck to fame. Such stories signal the loss of childhood innocence and this classic journey through the woods (life) involves encounters with great good and great evil, but eventually the children must take their fate into their own hands. The story is a familiar fantasy relevant to old and young alike. Last Christmas Amore Opera, a New York City based chamber company presented their adaptation of this opera to sold-out houses. In like manner, Ms. Hodges' libretto has proven its staying power having been performed twice by Vancouver Opera (40,000 children per production) as well as being performed and toured by both Opera Lyra Ottawa, and Saskatoon Opera.

Hansel and Gretel is 70 minutes in length, a format that is a wonderful introduction for new opera audiences, but it also presents a tight and concentrated medium for storytelling. There is a question and answer segment after the performance.

Story: Hansel and Gretel (source ... <http://www.ivyjoy.com/fables/hansel.html>)

Once upon a time a very poor woodcutter lived in a tiny cottage in the forest with his two children, Hansel and Gretel. His second wife often ill-treated the children and was forever nagging the woodcutter.

"There is not enough food in the house for us all. There are too many mouths to feed! We must get rid of the two brats," she declared. And she kept on trying to persuade her husband to abandon his children in the forest.

"Take them miles from home, so far that they can never find their way back! Maybe someone will find them and give them a home." The downcast woodcutter didn't know what to do. Hansel who, one evening, had overheard his parents' conversation, comforted Gretel.

"Don't worry! If they do leave us in the forest, we'll find the way home," he said. And slipping out of the house he filled his pockets with little white pebbles, then went back to bed.

All night long, the woodcutter's wife harped on and on at her husband till, at dawn, he led Hansel and Gretel away into the forest. But as they went into the depths of the trees, Hansel dropped a little white pebble here and there on the mossy green ground. At a certain point, the two children found they really were alone: the woodcutter had plucked up enough courage to desert them, had mumbled an excuse and was gone.

Night fell but the woodcutter did not return. Gretel began to sob bitterly. Hansel too felt scared but he tried to hide his feelings and comfort his sister.

"Don't cry, trust me! I swear I'll take you home even if Father doesn't come back for us!" Luckily the moon was full that night and Hansel waited till its cold light filtered through the trees.

"Now give me your hand!" he said. "We'll get home safely, you'll see!" The tiny white pebbles gleamed in the moonlight, and the children found their way home. They crept through a half open window, without waking their parents. Cold, tired but thankful to be home again, they slipped into bed.

Next day, when their stepmother discovered that Hansel and Gretel had returned, she went into a rage. Stifling her anger in front of the children, she locked her bedroom door, reproaching her husband for failing to carry out her orders. The weak woodcutter protested, torn as he was between shame and fear of disobeying his cruel wife. The wicked stepmother kept Hansel and Gretel under lock and key all day with nothing for supper but a sip of water and some hard bread. All night, husband and wife quarreled, and when dawn came, the woodcutter led the children out into the forest.

Hansel, however, had not eaten his bread, and as he walked through the trees, he left a trail of crumbs behind him to mark the way. But the little boy had forgotten about the hungry birds that lived in the forest. When they saw him, they flew along behind and in no time at all, had eaten all the crumbs. Again, with a lame excuse, the woodcutter left his two children by themselves.

"I've left a trail, like last time!" Hansel whispered to Gretel, consolingly. But when night fell, they saw to their horror, that all the crumbs had gone.

"I'm frightened!" wept Gretel bitterly. "I'm cold and hungry and I want to go home!"

"Don't be afraid. I'm here to look after you!" Hansel tried to encourage his sister, but he too shivered when he glimpsed frightening shadows and evil eyes around them in the darkness. All night the two children huddled together for warmth at the foot of a large tree.

When dawn broke, they started to wander about the forest, seeking a path, but all hope soon faded. They were well and truly lost. On they walked and walked, till suddenly they came upon a strange cottage in the middle of a glade.

"This is chocolate!" gasped Hansel as he broke a lump of plaster from the wall.

"And this is icing!" exclaimed Gretel, putting another piece of wall in her mouth. Starving but delighted, the children began to eat pieces of candy broken off the cottage.

"Isn't this delicious?" said Gretel, with her mouth full. She had never tasted anything so nice.

"We'll stay here," Hansel declared, munching a bit of nougat. They were just about to try a piece of the biscuit door when it quietly swung open.

"Well, well!" said an old woman, peering out with a crafty look. "And haven't you children a sweet tooth?"

"Come in! Come in, you've nothing to fear!" went on the old woman. Unluckily for Hansel and Gretel, however, the sugar candy cottage belonged to an old witch, her trap for catching unwary victims. The two children had come to a really nasty place.

"You're nothing but skin and bones!" said the witch, locking Hansel into a cage. I shall fatten you up and eat you!"

"You can do the housework," she told Gretel grimly, "then I'll make a meal of you too!" As luck would have it, the witch had very bad eyesight, and when Gretel smeared butter on her glasses, she could see even less.

"Let me feel your finger!" said the witch to Hansel every day to check if he was getting any fatter. Now, Gretel had brought her brother a chicken bone, and when the witch went to touch his finger, Hansel held out the bone.

"You're still much too thin!" she complained. When will you become plump?" One day the witch grew tired of waiting.

"Light the oven," she told Gretel. "We're going to have a tasty roasted boy today!" A little later, hungry and impatient, she went on: "Run and see if the oven is hot enough." Gretel returned, whimpering: "I can't tell if it is hot enough or not." Angrily, the witch screamed at the little girl: "Useless child! All right, I'll see for myself." But when the witch bent down to peer inside the oven and check the heat, Gretel gave her a tremendous push and slammed the oven door shut. The witch had come to a fit and proper end. Gretel ran to set her brother free and they made quite sure that the oven door was tightly shut behind the witch. Indeed, just to be on the safe side, they fastened it firmly with a large padlock. Then they stayed for several days to eat some more of the house, till they discovered amongst the witch's belongings, a huge chocolate egg. Inside lay a casket of gold coins.

"The witch is now burnt to a cinder," said Hansel, "so we'll take this treasure with us." They filled a large basket with food and set off into the forest to search for the way home. This time, luck was with them, and on the second day, they saw their father come out of the house towards them, weeping.

"Your stepmother is dead. Come home with me now, my dear children!" The two children hugged the woodcutter.

"Promise you'll never ever desert us again," said Gretel, throwing her arms round her father's neck. Hansel opened the casket.

"Look, Father! We're rich now . . . You'll never have to chop wood again."

And they all lived happily together ever after.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER ([HTTP://WWW.NAXOS.COM/PERSON/ENGELBERT_HUMPERDINCK_24518/24518.HTM](http://www.naxos.com/person/Engelbert_Humperdinck_24518/24518.htm))

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK (1854 - 1921)

Humperdinck is generally known for his fairytale opera *Hänsel und Gretel*, a Christmas favourite, first staged in Weimar in 1893. His career brought early contact with Wagner and subsequently with his family as music tutor to Siegfried Wagner, the composer's son. He held various teaching positions of some distinction and enjoyed a fruitful collaboration in the theatre with Max Reinhardt, providing incidental music for a number of Shakespearean productions in Berlin. Although *Hänsel und Gretel* remains the best known of Humperdinck's operas, recent revivals abroad of *Die Königskinder* ('The King's Children'), another fairytale opera, suggest a renewal of popularity in this work. Yet another fairytale opera, *Dornröschen* ('Sleeping Beauty'), was first staged in 1902. *Die Marketenderin* ('The Canteen Woman') was completed in 1913. He also wrote incidental music for the theatre, including music for Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*.

THE LITTLE OPERA COMPANY

Since 1995, the Little Opera Company has had the privilege of producing operas showcasing the significant talents of local singers, musicians and artisans. Our productions have appealed to seasoned and novice audiences alike, in Winnipeg and, on occasion, to its surrounding communities. The journey over these past years has not always been easy, but from the response of our audience members and the success that a number of our performers have experienced, it has been worth the effort.

The Little Opera Company is a not-for-profit charitable organization, whose mission is the promotion of opera and the promotion of the talented artists that contribute to the production of opera in Winnipeg. Appealing to seasoned and novice audiences alike, our productions explore less known historic works and some of the rich twentieth century repertoire that is often more accessible to new audiences.

Our purpose is as much about developing artists as it is about staging operatic works. The Little Opera Company:

- develops emerging vocalists and instrumentalists, providing coaching and practical experience within the context of its productions
- provides opportunities for artists and artisans to advance their skills in the design of costumes, sets and lighting
- develops production personnel, by providing opportunities to assist in productions

The Little Opera Company offers its audience a unique opportunity to experience chamber opera in English, and to experience opera that engages individuals of diverse backgrounds. We are committed to selecting repertoire that not only provides accessible entertainment for individuals who are new to the genre, but that is also a refreshing and educational foray into realms of opera not frequently explored within our community.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON OPERA

Why Opera?

"To be completely and comprehensively educated means having a background in the arts. By introducing students to opera, we build and sustain cultural intelligence. ... Passing on knowledge and understanding about the power of opera to communicate universal themes, ideas and emotions ultimately enhances and betters our society. ... [Opera] stretches students and teachers in directions they never thought possible."

--Dr. Joseph Piro, New York City Public Schools

What is Opera? (from the Arizona Opera)

An opera is a musical drama or comedy where the actors sing rather than speak their lines. *Opera* is derived from the Italian word *opus*, which means "work of art".

An opera tells a story. It can come from many sources, including history, current events, the Bible, fairy tales, legends, literature and poetry. Opera can be funny, sad, scary, dramatic, mysterious, imaginary, or a combination of the above.

Opera is a combination of many art forms: singing, orchestral music, acting, dancing, mime, costumes, scenic design and painting, lighting, and makeup design.

The *Libretto* contains all of the words of an opera. The *Librettist* is the person who writes the words for the opera.

The *Composer* writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the *score*. The score should reflect the mood, events, and emotions of the characters in the story.

An opera is structured like a play, with acts, scenes, and a variety of vocal forms including *Arias* (solos), *Ensembles* (for 2 or more singers), and *Chorus* (for a large group of singers).

The Performers

The *Soprano* is the highest female voice. This is usually the heroine of the opera and most of the time she is in love with the tenor. A star soprano is often referred to as the "Prima Donna."

A *Mezzo-Soprano* is the second highest, or middle, female voice. The mezzo voice typically has a darker, warmer voice than the soprano.

Alto - also called *Contralto*, this is the lowest female voice. The alto often portrays an old woman, who can either be wise and good or an old witch.

Tenor - this is the highest male voice. The tenor is usually the hero of the opera and is generally in love with the soprano.

Baritone - this is the next lowest, or middle, male voice. The baritone is often a villain but can sometimes be a hero who sacrifices himself for the tenor and/or soprano. In a comedy, the Baritone is usually the one pulling all kinds of pranks. The Baritone is often in love with the soprano but usually loses her to the tenor.

Bass is the lowest of the male voices. He very often plays a wise old man or a comic character.

Supernumeraries (or "Supers") appear on stage in costume in non-singing and non-speaking roles.

The *Orchestra* is the group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. They play under the stage, in the orchestra pit, where they will be less likely to cover the singers' voices and detract attention from the performers on stage.

The *Chorus* is a group of singers who function as a unit on stage. Choruses can be for mixed voices, men only, women only, or children. They are usually featured in crowd scenes where they can represent townspeople, soldiers, pilgrims, etc.

Dancers are often included in an opera. They are usually part of large crowd scenes but can be featured in solo roles as well. Many operas include a ballet.

Opera Production

Where do you start if you want to put on a production of an opera? Usually the *General Director*, *Artistic Director* or *Music Director* will pick the repertoire. The performance is conceived by the Production Team, which consists of the *Production Manager*, *Music Director/Conductor*, *Stage Director*, *Choreographer*, *Scene Designer*, *Costume Designer*, and *Lighting Designer*. These people meet frequently to trade ideas and work together to ensure a cohesive interpretation of the piece, from a visual, dramatic, and musical standpoint.

The *Production Manager* oversees and coordinates the efforts of the Production Team, and manages the business aspects of the production.

The *Music Director* is responsible for the interpretation of the score. The Music Director is also usually the *Conductor*, who is responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance.

The *Stage Director* (sometimes simply called *Director*) is responsible for the overall look of the production. The *Choreographer* designs the movement for the dancers.

The *Costume Designer* designs and creates the clothes that the characters wear. They try to pick designs that reflect the characters and their significance in the story.

The *Scenic Designer* creates the ideas for the visual background of the production. He or she must create detailed blueprints and models of the sets and be sure that the scenery fits in the stage area.

The *Lighting Designer* creates a lighting plan that emphasizes the drama of the moment. Lighting design is an important visual element that contributes to the ambiance of the stage setting and affects the appearance of people, costumes and props on stage.

The *Stage Manager* runs the visual elements of a show during the performance. They are responsible for calling all of the cues for the performance to the crew. This means that they must follow hundreds of detailed notes in the score and tell the crew when to change lighting, scenery, sound effects, and raise or lower the curtain.

The *Crew* works behind the scenes and is responsible for setting up and running all of the equipment for a performance, including changing sets, props, running the lights, curtains, trap doors, sound effects, and assisting performers with costumes and makeup.

What makes an opera?

Opera is a musical form. The orchestra provides the overriding musical texture, while the singers are featured as soloists.

The *overture* is a piece of music played by the orchestra to begin the opera.

A *recitative* is the sung narrative which propels the action of the story.

An *aria* is a solo number for a singer. This comes from the Italian word meaning "tune" or "song". This is usually where the character expresses their feelings about a situation.

An *ensemble* is sung by two or more people. Two people singing is called a *duet*, three people singing is called a *trio*, four people are a *quartet*, and so on.

Choral scenes usually feature the principal and secondary cast members and the chorus. The sheer number of voices on stage is usually reserved for moments of high drama and spectacle. Dancers might also be featured in a big choral scene.

Operas are often performed in a foreign language (usually the language for which they were originally written). Even if you cannot understand the language, you can usually get a good idea of what is happening from the music and the actions of the characters. You will note however that The Little Opera Company's productions are sung in English.

Props, or "*Stage Properties*," are visual elements of the scene rather than actually being part of the set. Small props that are picked up and carried by performers are called "hand props." These can include fans, knives, candlesticks, books, magic lanterns, etc. Larger items, such as pieces of furniture or paintings, are called "set props."

Scenery or *sets* provide the visual background for the story. Sets can reflect the locale, historical circumstances of the plot, and reflect the overall interpretation and conception of the opera as determined by the production team. They are conceived by the Scene Designer and executed, or built, by the Technical Crew under the guidance of the Technical Director.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Activities for Language Arts and Drama Students

- Write a review of the performance. Some ideas for what you might write about could include:
 - What was your overall impression of the performance? How did it make you feel?
 - What made the performance special for you?
 - What would you have liked to have seen done differently?
 - Who were the major characters in the opera? Which were your favourites, and why?
- Share your review with the class. Your class can even assemble all the reviews in a package and send them to The Little Opera Company! (c/o 234 Yale Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, R3M 0L9).
- What do fairy tales or bedtime stories have in common with each other? Here are some ideas:
 - They happened a long time ago, far away.
 - There are good characters and bad characters. Some characters are children or talking animals or kings and queens.
 - There is a problem to solve, and sometimes there is a reward for the person who solves the problem.
 - Someone makes a plan to solve the problem.
 - Sometimes there is magic – in the problem or in the solution.
 - The bad characters get punished.
 - There is a “happily ever after” ending.

- There is usually a moral or lesson to the story.
- How did the Opera story differ from the one you know? Which one do you like the best? Why?
- Create a new story of your own, using some of the above ideas. What is the moral to your story?
- How would you tell the story from a different point of view? How would the Hansel tell the story? How would Gretel tell the story?
- Think about all of the people who work behind the scenes. Do you understand what they do? What do you think the opera would be like if there were no sets or special lighting or specially designed costumes?

Activities for Music Students

- Share your favourite moment of the opera and discuss how the music was important for that particular moment.
- Do you have a favourite song of your own (not from the opera) that you think would be appropriate for that moment, which you could share with the class?
- Find examples of music that make you happy, sad, angry and fearful. Share them with the class. How could this music be used artistically in opera, film, theatre and dance?

OPERA GLOSSARY

Accompanist: Someone (as a pianist) who plays an instrumental or vocal part designed to support or complement a melody.

Aria: A musical work usually found in an opera or oratorio, which generally dwells on a single emotional theme of one of the characters.

Baritone: A low male singing voice between tenor and bass.

Bass: 1. The lowest male singing voice, below baritone. 2. The lowest part in a piece of music. 3. The lowest instrument in a musical work. 4. In the violin family, the lowest instrument.

Comic Opera: An opera with light-natured music, comedy, and a happy ending, in contrast to grand opera.

Duet: A composition for two performers.

Falsetto: A high, light, artificial voice used to sing notes that are above the normal register.

Grand Opera: Opera on a large scale, usually entirely sung, in contrast to comic opera.

Harmony: The sound resulting from the simultaneous sounding of two or more tones consonant with each other.

Libretto: The text (lyrics and any spoken parts) of an opera or oratorio.

Lyric: The words to a song.

Melody: An arrangement of single tones in a meaningful sequence

Mezzo-soprano: A woman's voice with a range between that of the soprano and contralto.

Notation: Written music indicating pitch and rhythm.

Octave: An interval eight diatonic scale degrees above it. Two notes an octave apart have the same letter name, and form the most consonant interval possible.

Opera: A musical play, usually entirely sung, making use of costumes, staging, props, sets, and dramatic elements. Operas usually consist of two types of musical elements, the aria, which primarily expresses a single idea or theme, and the recitative which advances the story.

Operetta: A light opera.

Oratorio: Operatic works without staging, sets, or elaborate costumes that is usually performed in a more relaxed setting than a formal opera, and that usually has a religious theme.

Orchestration: The art of arranging, writing or scoring music for an orchestra.

Overture: The introductory music for an opera, ballet, or oratorio.

Quartet: A musical composition for four instruments or voices.

Recitative: A musical work usually found in an opera or oratorio, which mimics the patterns of speech, in order to advance the story.

Soprano: The highest female vocal range, above alto.

Staff: The five horizontal lines upon which music is written, usually including a clef, and having a time signature and key signature.

Tenor: 1. A high male voice between alto and baritone. 2. Instruments in the tenor range.

Time Signature: The numbers written on staff of any piece, indicating which type of note gets a single beat, and how many beats are in each measure.

