



2010-11 HOT Season for Young People Teacher Guidebook



PHOTOMONTAGE BY CARA SCHNEIDER

Hansel and Gretel

Nashville Opera



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Dear Teachers,

Thank-you for taking the opportunity to introduce your students to opera! This guidebook contains lessons from the Nashville Opera director of *Hansel and Gretel*, Stuart Holt, and from TPAC Teaching Artist Sonya Robinson.

In addition, we have included a Sampler CD with short excerpts from the opera. We encourage you to check out the full CD from your library and to play the excerpts more than once for students. For every opera-goer, the more times you listen to a piece, the more you get out of it.

The Nashville Opera production of *Hansel and Gretel* will use a small ensemble of clarinet, french horn, viola, cello, and piano to accompany the singers. Both overtures have been cut to stay within school time constraints. The children's angel chorus will be included in this performance.

Helping your students to understand an art form that might be new to them, whether it is the expertise of the singing, musical motifs, or simply the passion of the music, will be worth the effort. Their appreciation and enjoyment of the performance will rise exponentially with advance preparation.

Enjoy!

TPAC Education

Table of Contents

Synopsis	pp.2-3
Composer and Librettist	page 4
Fairy tale Origins	page 5
Opera 101 and Sampler CD Contents	page 6
What to Listen For	page 7
Operatic Voices	page 8
A Brief History of Opera	page 9
Short Explorations	page 10
Happily Ever After the Performance	page 11
Costuming Exploration	page 12
Breathing Exploration	page 13
Vocal Line Explorations	pp.14-15
Leitmotif Explorations	pp. 16-17

Guidebook written
by Stuart Holt and Sonya Robinson
with additional editing by Lattie Brown

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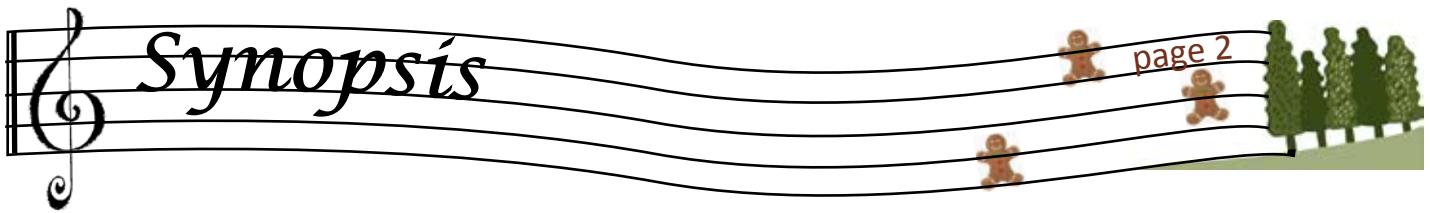
One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC's Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.



Jim Schmitz
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Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity.

They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.



ACT I

Scene 1: At home

Gretel sings to herself as she stitches a stocking while Hansel makes a broom. Hansel mocks her, and using the same tune, sings a song about how hungry his stomach is. He wishes their Mother would come home. Gretel tells him to be quiet and reminds him of what Father always says: "When past bearing is our grief, God the Lord will surely send relief!" Hansel complains that one can't eat words, and Gretel cheers him up by telling him a secret: a neighbor has given Mother a jug of milk, and tonight she'll make a rice pudding for them to eat! Hansel, excited, tastes the cream on the top of the milk. Gretel scolds him and tells him he should get back to work. Hansel says that he doesn't want to work, he'd rather dance! Gretel agrees, and they begin to dance around

Mother returns, and she is furious when she discovers that Hansel and Gretel have not been working. As she threatens to punish them, she knocks over the jug of milk. She sends Hansel and Gretel to the forest to look for strawberries. Alone, she expresses how sad she is that she cannot feed her children.

In the distance, Father is heard singing about his own hunger. He bursts into the house, filled with excitement, and kisses Mother roughly. She pushes him away and scolds him for being so excited. He surprises her by taking from his pack a feast: bacon, butter, flour, sausages, fourteen eggs, beans, onions, and a quarter pound of coffee! He explains that beyond the forest, it is almost festival time, and everyone is cleaning in preparation. He went from house to house and sold his brooms at the highest prices. As Father and Mother celebrate, he suddenly stops and asks about the children. Mother changes the subject to the broken jug, and after she finishes telling the story, he laughs, and asks again about the children. She tells him that they are in the Ilsestein forest looking for strawberries. Suddenly scared, Father tells her that the forest is home to the evil Gingerbread Witch. She lures children with cakes and sweets and then pushes them into her oven. They are then turned into gingerbread and once baked she eats them! Father and Mother rush to the forest to search for their children.



Scene 2: In the forest

As Gretel weaves a crown of flowers she sings to herself while Hansel searches for strawberries. As Gretel finishes her crown, Hansel fills his basket. Gretel tries to put the crown on Hansel, but, saying that boys don't play with things like these, he puts it on her head instead. He tells her that she looks like the Queen of the Wood. Gretel tells him that if that is the case, then he should give her a bouquet of flowers. He offers her the strawberries instead. They hear a cuckoo calling as they begin to eat the strawberries. With only a few strawberries left, they begin to fight over who can eat the rest. Finally, Hansel grabs the basket and dumps the leftovers in his mouth. Gretel scolds him and tells him that Mother will be upset. She tries to look for more, but it's too dark to see. Hansel tries to find the way back, but it seems they are lost. As the forest darkens, Hansel and Gretel become scared, and think they see something coming closer. Hansel calls out, "Who's there?" and a chorus of echoes calls back, "He's there!" Gretel calls, "Is someone there?" and the echoes reply, "There!" Hansel tries to comfort Gretel, as a little man walks out of the forest.

The little Sandman appears and tells the children that he loves them dearly, and has come to send them to sleep. He tosses grains of sand into the air, and as he leaves they begin to drift off to sleep, but first they must say their evening prayer, asking the angels to watch over them as they sleep. After they pray, they fall asleep on the forest floor. Soon, fourteen angels appear and arrange themselves around the children to protect them as they sleep.

ACT II

In the forest

The Dew Fairy comes to wake the children. She sprinkles dew on them and sings of the beauty of the morning and surrounding forest. As she leaves the children begin to stir, and Gretel wakes a sleepy Hansel. They quickly discover they both had a dream about angels protecting them as they slept.

Suddenly they notice behind them an enormous gingerbread house with an outdoor oven and a fence of gingerbread children. Unable to resist temptation, they take a little bit of the house to eat.

As the children nibble, a voice calls out, "Nibble, nibble, mousekin! Who's nibbling on my housekin?" Hansel and Gretel decide that the voice must have been the wind, and they begin to eat the house. As Hansel breaks off another piece of the house, the voice again calls out, "Nibble, nibble, mousekin! Who's nibbling on my housekin?" Hansel and Gretel ignore the voice, and continue eating. The witch comes out of the house and traps Hansel with a rope. As Hansel tries to escape, the witch explains that she is Rosina Daintymouth, and that she loves to feed children sweets. Hansel and Gretel are suspicious of the witch, so Hansel works at escaping from the rope so they can try and run away.

The witch takes out her wand and calls out, "Stop!" Hansel and Gretel are frozen on the spot where they stand. Using the wand, the witch leads Hansel away from the house and leaves him stiff and slow of movement. She tells Gretel to be a good girl and goes inside to get raisins and almonds to fatten Hansel. Hansel whispers to Gretel to pretend to obey the witch. The witch returns, and waving her wand, says, "Hocus pocus, elderbush! Rigid body loosens whoosh!" The witch uses her wand to release Gretel from her frozen state and tells her to go into the house and set the table. Hansel pretends to be asleep, and the witch, overcome with excitement, describes how she plans to cook and eat Gretel.

The witch wakes up Hansel and asks to see his finger. Instead of his finger, he puts out a bone. Disappointed that he is so thin, the witch calls for Gretel to bring out raisins and almonds. As the witch tries to feed Hansel, Gretel steals the wand from the witch's pocket. Waving it towards Hansel, Gretel whispers, "Hocus pocus, elderbush! Rigid body loosens whoosh!" As the witch turns around and wonders at the noise, Hansel discovers that he can move freely again.

The witch tells Gretel to peek inside the oven to see if the gingerbread is done. Hansel softly calls out for her to be careful. Gretel pretends that she doesn't know what the witch means. The witch tells her to lift herself a little bit and bend her head forward. Gretel says that she doesn't understand and asks the witch to demonstrate. The witch, frustrated, opens the oven and leans forward. Hansel comes to life, and he and Gretel shove the witch into the oven. They rejoice in beating the witch! The oven begins to crackle, and the flames burn fiercely, and with a loud crash it explodes.

Following the explosion, Hansel and Gretel realize the gingerbread children have turned back into children. They are asleep and unable to move, but they sing to Hansel and Gretel, asking to be touched. Hansel is afraid, but Gretel strokes one on the cheek. The child wakes up, but is still unable to move. Hansel and Gretel touch all the children, then using the witch's wand, call out the magic words, freeing the children from the spell.

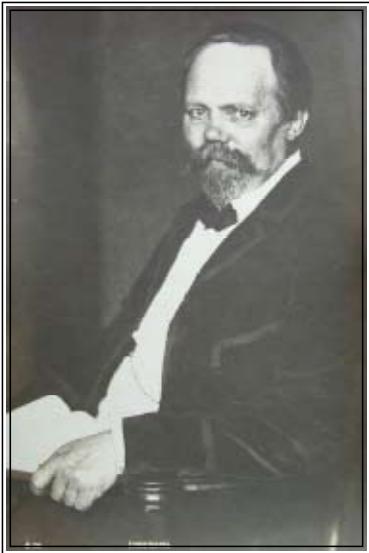
Father is heard in the distance, calling for Hansel and Gretel. He and Mother enter and hug Hansel and Gretel while the gingerbread children pull a gingerbread witch from the ruins of the oven. Father gathers the children around and tells them to look at this miracle.

He explains that "When past bearing is our grief,
God the Lord will surely send relief!"



Composer and Librettist

page 4



Meet the Composer

Full Name: Engelbert Humperdinck

Dates: 1854-1921

Nationality: German

Period/Style: Romantic

Humperdinck was born in Siegburg, Germany in 1854. At the age of seven, he produced his first musical composition, but his parents disapproved of a career in music and encouraged him to go into architecture. Thankfully, he disregarded his parents and began taking lessons at the Cologne Conservatory in 1872. He showed tremendous promise winning top prizes in Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich, and Berlin. These enabled him to travel to Italy where he became acquainted with Richard Wagner. Wagner invited him to Bayreuth and in 1880-81, Humperdinck assisted preparing for the premiere of *Parsifal*. He also served as the music tutor for Wagner's son Siegfried. He would remain a close friend of Wagner's until the composer's death in 1883.

Humperdinck was awarded the Meyerbeer Prize in Berlin soon after this stint at Bayreuth. He again traveled to Italy, France, and Spain. He spent two years teaching music theory at the Gran Teatre del Liceu Conservatory in Barcelona before returning to Cologne in 1887. In 1890, he was appointed professor of harmony at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt. He would teach there for six years and also compose *Hansel and Gretel* during this time. Then in 1900, Humperdinck was appointed director of the Akademische Meislerschule in Berlin. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Berlin in 1910. He continued teaching another 10 years and died on September 27, 1921 just after his 68th birthday.

Meet the Librettist

Full Name: Adelheid Humperdinck Wette

Dates: 1858-1916

Nationality: German

Born four years after Engelbert, Adelheid Humperdinck began collaborating with her brother at a young age. She had always written verses and asked her brother to set them to music.

Hansel and Gretel would be the first of many collaborations for Adelheid and Engelbert. She would provide the text for many of his songs for solo voice.



Fairy tale Origins

page 5

From Fairytale to Opera

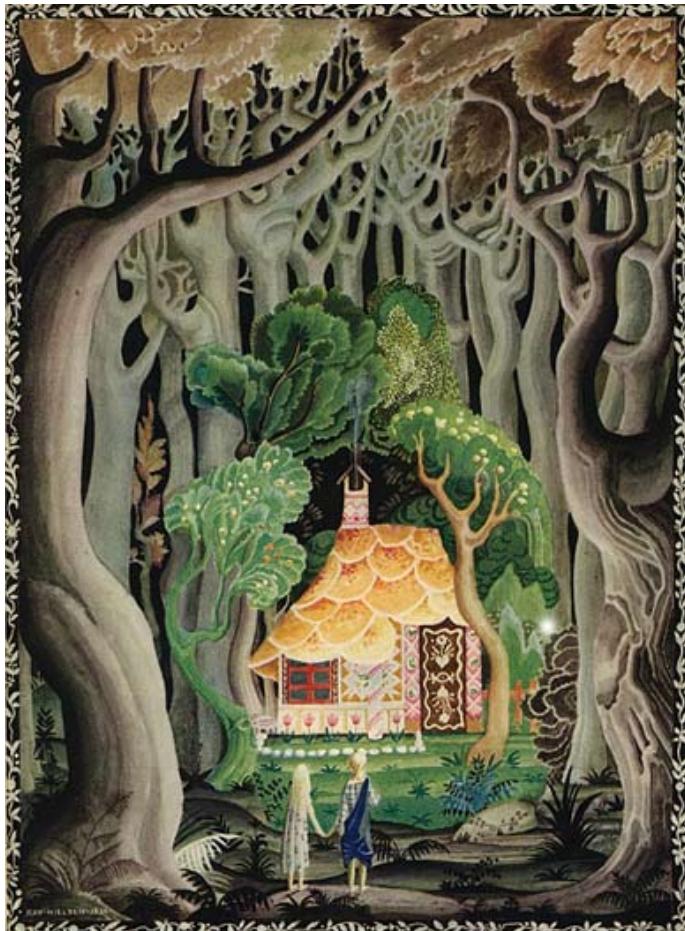
The journey of *Hansel and Gretel* began with Humperdinck's own sister, Adelheid Wette. She read the Brothers Grimm version of the story to her daughters, Isolde and Gudrun, and immediately the girls wanted to perform the piece. Adelheid asked Engelbert to write four songs for the production she planned. The nursery-festival play was a great success, and their friends and family felt that it should be expanded into a larger production. Even Humperdinck's fellow composer and friend, Hugo Wolf, felt that it should be developed into a full opera.

Work began immediately with Adelheid becoming the librettist. She based her text on the *Brothers Grimm collection of Nursery and Household Tales*. This was the first of many editions supervised by the Grimms themselves and was published in Berlin in 1812. The Brothers had collected the tales from people in their village. The actual story of *Hansel and Gretel* began as *Little Brother and Little Sister*. It was told to Wilhelm Grimm by Dorothea Wild, who, years later, would become his wife.

Two years later the "family headache" as Humperdinck called it, was completed. The piece was ready for the opera house and in 1893 would take the stage at Weimer. This performance was conducted under the baton of the 29-year old Richard Strauss. Unfortunately, the premiere was a disaster. Flu swept through the orchestra, the singer who was to perform the role of Hansel, sprained her ankle, forcing the singer performing Gretel to take over and a new Gretel had to be found, and the overture never arrived for opening night.

However two weeks later the piece moved to Munich, and it was a smashing success. The rise of *Hansel and Gretel* to operatic popularity was swift and sure. The piece was translated into more than a dozen languages, and productions in the Orient featured gingerbread houses decorated with bananas and exotic fruits. Hansel and Gretel's artistic success was perhaps best summed up by Richard Strauss, upon receiving Humperdinck's score: "Truly, this is a masterpiece...It is a long time since I have been so impressed with any work. What heart-warming humor, what charm and simplicity of melodic line, what a triumph of form overall."

In 1923, *Hansel and Gretel* became the first full opera broadcast from a European opera house, and on Christmas Day, 1931 the Metropolitan Opera used it to introduce their celebrated Saturday matinee broadcasts.



Opera 101

page 6

Step 1~Know the story!

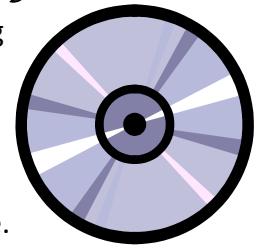
In opera, it is important to know as much as possible about what is going on beforehand, including the ending. Listen to the music as much as you can ; know it in advance. Once the music, the voices, the setting, the lights, and the dramatic staging come together at the performance, audience members will be able to fit all the elements seamlessly together into the plot which becomes a springboard for the real power of opera.

Step 2~Experience the music!

Composers use many tools to communicate with music. They create melodies that evoke a variety of emotions. They use tempos (how slow or fast) and dynamics (how loud or soft) and rhythms (the frequency and pattern of beat.) They choose particular instruments to add color to the music they have written. Think of instrument choice as a type of painting for your ears! The term "soundscape" is often used in describing the music of an opera, and it can set the atmosphere, give information about characters, and the plot. What is it telling you?

Hansel and Gretel CD Sampler

These are excerpts from a live recording of the opera in Sydney, Australia. Some vocal translations from the German are slightly different from those used in the Nashville Opera performance, but the music is the same.



- 1---Overture
- 2---"Hansel, up and dance with me" (Nashville Opera's "Let us dance a step or two")
- 3---"Tra la la la"
- 4---"Now I lay me down to sleep" (The Angel's Prayer)
- 5---"Nibble,nibble Mouse-y, who's nibbling at my house-y?"
- 6---"And now my whisk, you must be brisk" (The Broomstick Song, (Nashville Opera's "Then hop,hop, hop")
- 7---Witch's Leitmotif One
- 8---Witch's Leitmotif Two

Step 3 ~Understand the singers!

Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their enormous breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! BUT, the reason that their voices are prized is that they can express so much emotion on a grand scale.

Step 4~Plunge in!

This is the most important step. Everything about opera is over-the-top, on the edge, enormous in every way. It's an art form that thrives on its intensity and passion. Opera stories portray people at their most extreme, and the singers and the music communicate in ways that words alone cannot. You have to let go, allow yourself to stop thinking and analyzing and simply FEEL THE EMOTION!

What to Listen for



Act I

♪ “Overture” – This features three extremely recognizable tunes – the Angel’s Prayer, the Dew Fairy’s aria and the release of the frozen Gingerbread Children. You hear each of the themes presented individually and then mixed and combined.

[For this performance, the Overture will be cut for time considerations, but we have included the selection on your CD, as it includes many of the musical themes of the opera.]

Scene 1

♪ “Let us dance a step or two” – This scene features three different sections. The first is the introductory “Let us dance a step or two”, then the second section “With your foot you tap tap tap..” which gives way to the third section, a chorus of “Tra la la”. It is a great scene that captures the childish innocence of Hansel and Gretel.



♪ “Tra la la la” – Peter describes the hunger his family suffers and how hard it is to have enough food to survive.



♪ “The gobbling ogress” – Peter tells his wife about the witch who lives deep in the forest. By night she rides her broom over hill and dale but by day she lures children with the temptation of magic sweets. Once in her care she bakes them in an oven, making them gingerbread children! Perfect to eat!

Scene 2

♪ “Sandman’s Song” – This simple song sets up the magic and beauty that is the end of Act I.



♪ “Angel’s Prayer” – This duet is probably one of the most well known pieces in the opera. The children ask fourteen angels to keep watch over them as they sleep.

♪ “Dream Pantomime” – This orchestral interlude accompanies the arrival of the fourteen Guardian Angels. It builds from a quiet introduction into a full wash of musical sound.

Act II

♪ “Dew Fairy’s Song” – This song awakens Hansel and Gretel with a winding melody. It rises to a peak just as she exits to sprinkle dew elsewhere.



♪ “Then hop, hop, hop...” – Also known as “The Broomstick Song”, this selection has the witch celebrating her life and ability to ride through the forest on her broomstick!

♪ “Hurrah! Now the oven has a roast!” – This duet for Hansel and Gretel is a triumph of good over evil. They rejoice as the Witch bakes in the oven!

♪ “We’re saved, we’re free” – The Gingerbread Children have returned to their human state, but are still frozen. They beg Hansel and Gretel to free them completely!



Operatic Voices

All classical singers fall into one of the basic categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his or her voice-type; it is something he or she is born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his or her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

Women

Soprano: This is the highest female voice and has a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high, bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos.

The roles of Gretel, Gertrude/Witch, Sandman and Dew Fairy are sopranos.

Mezzo-Soprano: Also called a mezzo; this is the middle female voice and has a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. Mezzo-Sopranos also often serve as the friend or sidekick to the soprano. The mezzo-soprano's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it.

The role of Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* is written for a mezzo.

Contralto: This is the lowest female voice and has a voice similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare – some believe they don't exist at all! There are no contraltos in *Hansel and Gretel*.

Men

Countertenor: This is the highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic, unstaged and accompanied by a choir. The Messiah is an example of an oratorio.) The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice, and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There is no counter-tenor in *Hansel and Gretel*.

Tenor: This is usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the C above. There is no tenor role in *Hansel and Gretel*.

Baritone: This is the middle male voice and is close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. The range is from the G an octave and a half below middle C to the G above. **Peter, the father in *Hansel and Gretel*, is a baritone.**

Bass: This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C down to the F an octave and a fourth below. There is not a bass in *Hansel and Gretel*.

A Brief History of Opera



page 9

Opera has had a history of almost 400 years. In that time, it has exhibited many different genres and styles. The earliest form of opera existed as a medieval church pageant that included soloists, choirs, instrumental interludes, sets, and costumes. In the 13th and 14th centuries, these pageants evolved into morality plays portraying biblical stories in a mix of Latin and spoken European languages. In Italy, pageants and descendants of the morality plays began to serve non-religious purposes. It became a fashion in northern Italian courts to display sumptuously mounted verse plays that included choruses and ballets. Their subjects included the Greek myths, which later became the basis for several of the earliest operas.

In 1570, Count Bardi hosted an informal academy at his palace in Florence called the Camerata at which literature, science, and the arts were discussed and new music was performed. The first true opera, *Dafne*, written by Jacopo Peri, came from the Camerata in 1598. *Dafne* became the first opera of the Baroque Period which lasted from the end of the 16th century to 1750. Baroque opera combined many different arts: music, drama, and poetry, as well as dancing and highly elaborate set designs. The early Florentine operas were court entertainments put on to celebrate royal weddings and for general entertainment.

But an important step was taken in 1637 with the opening of the first public opera theater. First in Venice and then throughout Italy, opera soon became the leading form of entertainment. By the end of the century, seven opera houses in Venice fulfilled much the same function as movie theaters in a comparable modern city.

The common form for the Baroque opera made use of Recitative and Aria to deliver the plot and provide an audience with beautiful melodies. Recitative tells the plot of the opera. The character sings notes that are may not be as melodic, but are still musical. Recitative allows the audience to hear the text clearly, thereby understanding the storyline of the opera. The Aria is usually where the singer is allowed to express their big feelings about the situation. Usually, Arias are beautiful melodies portraying the mood of the character. Normally, composers write Recitative before Arias allowing the audience to understand the plot of the opera first and then learn how the character feels about their current situation. Baroque opera called for professional, showy, singers who could sing incredibly high and fast, stressing solid technique and ability. The principle type of Italian Baroque opera was *Opera Seria*, or serious opera. The plots, mostly derived from ancient history, were designed to stir up powerful emotions, such as passion, rage, grief, and triumph.

Hansel and Gretel is a nineteenth century opera.

The early 18th century through early 19th century gave rise to the Classical Period in opera. During this period of Enlightenment, composers wished to create operas that portrayed real people in real situations. Thanks to Pergolesi, Rousseau, and Mozart, *Opera Buffa*, or comic opera became the norm. This type of opera dealt not with Roman emperors and their idealized noble sentiments, but with contemporary middle and lower class figures expressing everyday feelings in a relatively vivid and natural way. Although these operas were humorous, it was this "natural" lifelike quality of comedy that appealed to audiences of the Enlightenment.

Widely popular with the general public, opera in the nineteenth century was being produced in every country in Europe.

Richard Wagner was, after Beethoven, the most influential of all nineteenth century composers and the father of the Romantic Period.

Romantic composers believed that they must transcend all artistic barriers. The idea of combining music with poetry and other forms of literature, and even with philosophy, made perfect sense to Romantic composers and their audiences. In terms of opera, Wagner is famous for his novel concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or the "complete work of art" where all the arts (including music, poetry, and visual spectacle) are fused together in his operas. He also is famous for developing the *Leitmotif*, where he created "themes" for the characters, emotions, and objects that existed in his opera. He was able to use this musical devise as a way to foreshadow an event or give the audience added insight into the mind of his characters.

Although the repertory of most opera houses today are still made up largely of works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, twentieth century composers continue to write in every style. Opera also became the basis for the American Musical Theater, proving to be the main source of entertainment seen on a stage of the 21st century.

Short Explorations

page 10

Literature Activities

1. Talk about conflict. Stories generally have some conflict that needs to be fought out and resolved. What characters have conflicts with each other in this opera? What happens in the end?
2. Identify character types in *Hansel and Gretel*. Is there a “bad guy”, “a hero”, “a love interest” etc.?
3. Character discussion: Which characters are fully developed? (which characters do we know the most about?) Are there major changes that affect the character’s growth and over the course of the story? What are each of the characters’ strengths and weaknesses? How do the characters differ from each other?

Individual Creative Writing Activities

1. New Endings: Read the synopsis for the opera *Hansel and Gretel*. Quickly brainstorm at least five new endings for the story. Choose a favorite and write it as a “What Really Happened” essay.
2. Write a modern version of *Hansel and Gretel* that takes place in a location you’re familiar with. What would be different?
3. Tell the story from one character’s point of view. What would that character be thinking throughout the story? How would their ideas change the perception of the story?
4. Revisit the characters... Imagine that 5 years have passed. What are each of the characters doing now? Did the Gingerbread Children get back to their families? What did Mother and Father think of Hansel and Gretel’s journey? Ask students to write an autobiography as if they were one of the characters.



Questions for Discussion

- When you think of opera, what do you think of first? Why?
- Is the subject of this opera relevant to your life? How?
- Is it easy to be an opera singer? Why or why not?
- How long has opera been around?
- How has opera changed?
- If you could see into the future, what will opera be like in one hundred years?
- How many people are involved in putting together a production?
- What sorts of careers are involved with opera production?

Happily Ever After the Performance

page 11

Follow-up Activities

1. If opera is a completely new art form to your students, this first exposure may have been quite different from what they expected. Discuss how their responses differ from their expectations.
2. If some students have previous experience with opera, talk about how they felt returning to the art form and how seeing opera for a second (or third) time compared with the first.
3. Discuss how the main characters in *Hansel and Gretel* change over the course of the action. What do they learn about themselves and each other?
4. Offer extra credit for students who undertake an opera-related project (e.g., writing a review of the next opera televised on Public Television, collecting magazine or newspaper clippings about a famous opera singer to share with the class, etc.).
5. Divide the students into groups and have them list at least three things that they learned. Have them list questions that they have regarding the performance.
6. Put on your own play (with or without music) using the students in your school.
Use an existing script or make up your own. You could even devise a simple narrative around songs your students already know. Encourage participation in a variety of ways: performing, making costumes, painting scenery, ushering (greeting audience members), ticket sales, marketing, etc.
7. Pick a well-known opera to study (e.g., Puccini's *La Bohème* has a great story and many beautiful melodies). Over a period of time, read the plot of the opera to your students, one "chapter" (or "scene") at a time. When you have read the whole story, play a recording of excerpts (available at your public library or music retailer) for students and help them identify the music that goes with different characters and parts of the narrative. Have students act out parts of the stories using the recorded music as a soundtrack.



Costuming Exploration

page 12

Introduction

The Costume Designer makes choices for each character that will be instrumental in creating the opera's visual effect on the audience and their understanding of the character. Costumes can also be helpful to the singer as they imagine, create, and perform their character.

Activity

There are several fanciful characters in *Hansel and Gretel*.

The Sandman who appears in the forest to help Hansel and Gretel to sleep, the Dew Fairy who helps them to wake, and of course, the Witch.

The Costume Designer must decide how to dress each character to best serve their personality as well as their function and the overall look of the opera.

1. Divide students into groups of three or four and assign each group a character. Read the synopsis on pages 2-3 to find out more.
2. Ask students to imagine a personality for each character, listing at least five adjectives to describe their inside self, and five to describe their outside self. Clothes can be a powerful expression of personality. If this character were standing in front of the class right now, how would he or she be dressed? Encourage students to think of more than one possibility.
3. Ask students to write a description of the costume they would design for their assigned character. Students should concentrate on style, fabric, and colors, dividing up some of those decisions between group members. What does this character wear on their feet? Does he or she have something on their head? Are they carrying any personal props? (Remember the costume MUST allow the singers to breathe freely for their singing.)
4. Ask students to make a costume "rendering". This simple sketch can be a stick figure with the general outline of the costume in pencil, adding crayon touches to show color choices. Students can write notes and descriptions around the sketch, almost like a costume "map" rather than a drawing.
5. Post the designs in class, and after the performance, encourage students to compare and contrast their ideas to the ones chosen by Nashville Opera.



Breathing Exploration

page 13

Breathe like Singers

The power of opera singers' breath control is formidable. They must be able sing very complicated musical passages, to sustain long notes, and to project their voices without microphones. They work all the time on their abdominal muscles, particularly the diaphragm, which runs along the bottom of the ribcage.

♪ Pay attention to your breathing. What part of your body is moving? Place your hands on your stomach just below your ribcage and try to push them out slightly as you breathe in.

♪ Keep your hands in place, take a breath in, and say "ha!" You should feel your diaphragm jump under your hands.

♪ Try to fill your lungs with the biggest breath you can and let it out as slowly as you can, with a hissing sound.

♪ Try it again, but this time, while you are hissing, have a partner count how long you can make the hissing sound or (harder) how long you can make the sound "ahhh." If you were to practice this every day, you would build the muscle and be able to make sound for longer periods of time.

Every once in a while during the performance, try to pay attention to which passages you think require the most breath control of the singers.





Vocal line Exploration

Introduction

In an opera, the part of the music that the singers perform is called the vocal line. The characters' vocal lines in *Hansel and Gretel* are distinctive. Sometimes you will hear a folk-like melody and sometimes you will not.

Often, Humperdinck has composed the vocal line in a way that reflects the meaning of the text. In these moments, the vocal line might be described as dramatic expression rather than conventional melody. The sounds may seem to reflect the inflection of natural speech, or the varied emotions behind the words rather than a tune you can hum along to.

In this activity, students will explore the ways that the singers' vocal lines in *Hansel and Gretel* mirror the inflection of speech and the meaning of the text.

Lesson Starter

1. Gather the students in a circle, and ask them to warm-up with a “roll” that allows both physical and vocal expression. They should start by leaning over to touch the floor, and then slowly roll up one vertebrae at a time.
2. After a couple of rolls, up and down, ask the students to add their voices to the roll by making a sound like a big “sigh,” going from low to high. They should start with a low note when they are leaning over, and “roll” up to a group high note, when they are reaching above their heads (not screaming.)
3. On the way up, they will slide through a scale of many notes, or pitches. The physical action gives them a connection to how the sound of pitches “feel” when they are high or low and moving up a scale.

Activity

1. Introduce a word to the group, and ask them to think about it – how they want to say it aloud. (possible words: holidays, candy, nervous, punishment, happiness, anxiety, oversimplify)
2. Go around the circle and take turns saying the word. If necessary, encourage students to say the word in a way that tells us something about the meaning of the word.
3. Stop a few times and notice the choices that different people are making. How are the statements of the word different? (accent/stress, “place” in the voice, volume, speed/tempo)
4. Choose one person’s expression of that word and examine how the word sounds. Are some parts of it higher than others? Are there places where it seems to “dip” down lower?
5. Ask the group to find a place (or sequence of places) for this word on the sliding pitch scale from your warm-up roll. They can use their bodies to show where a part of the word falls, adding the matching pitch to that part of the word.
6. After a couple of experiments, ask the group to remember the sounds they made on their “roll”. Have the group quickly choose a pitch or set of pitches for one word. (Don’t think about it too long!) They have just “composed” music for one word of a libretto. Go through this process with several words.

Activity

- As a class or in groups, give the students entire phrases to try composing. These can be simple sentences or complex phrases, depending on the age level.
- Encourage them to say the lines first to find different kinds of inflection (where the stresses and tones fall.)
- Ask students to turn the inflection into pitches. (If they get stuck, they can find the beginning pitch from their “roll”.) They obviously can jump around with pitches; they do not have to slide up and down throughout the phrase. You may want to use text excerpts from stories they have studied in class or phrases such as the following from the libretto of *Hansel and Gretel*:

- ♪ “Just wait till your father gets home!”
- ♪ “Some dreadful thing may come. What’s glimmering there in the darkness?”
- ♪ “And by day, they say, she stalks around, with a crinching, crunching, munching sound.”
- ♪ “Nibble, nibble Mouse-y, who’s nibbling at my house-y?”
- ♪ “Come with me my precious. I’ll give you sweets so delicious.”
- ♪ “We’re freed forevermore!”

Reflection

- ♪ As the students perform their phrases, ask the audience members to comment on what stands out about the words now that they are musical.
- ♪ Besides pitch, what does the audience notice about the way the text was set to music?
- ♪ Ask the student composers to comment on their process. Discuss their choices in composing vocal lines.



Further reflection

- ♪ Listen to Selection 5, “Nibble, nibble Mouse-y, who’s nibbling at my house-y?” on the Sampler CD.
- Selection 6 on the CD
- ♪ Compare and contrast the witch’s vocal line and Hansel’s and Gretel’s vocal lines.
- ♪ What effect does the shape of a line (the way it goes up or down, or stays the same) have on presentation of the text?
- ♪ Why might the composer have made the choices he did with these vocal lines?

Leitmotif Exploration

page 16

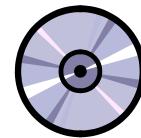
Introduction

By the time Engelbert Humperdinck was composing, German Romantic opera gave the orchestra a far greater role in depicting the story than in earlier times and other regions. Humperdinck's mentor, Richard Wagner (1813-83), had perfected the use of *leitmotif*, or leading motive, as a cohesive device in opera.

Each *leitmotif* is a short musical phrase specifically associated with a character, idea, object, or event in the story. A *leitmotif* appears frequently throughout an opera, changing somewhat to fit what is happening in the story.

In Act I of *Hansel and Gretel*, Peter (the father) sings about the “Gobbling Ogress” that lives in the woods and captures children. Throughout his song we hear the witch’s *leitmotif* – a musical phrase associated with her sneaking personality and her broomstick. At the end of Act II when the children have triumphed over evil and pushed her into her oven, they are reunited with their mother and father. We hear the witch’s *leitmotif* again, but the melody is presented in a different key, with some musical ornamentation that changes it somewhat (perhaps indicating triumph over the character.)

Listen to the two examples on the CD and compare the same progression of notes expressed very differently. There are many ways a *leitmotif* can be used. Sometimes it is introduced in the music of the orchestra long before the character or idea has even appeared in the text of the vocal music.



Selections
7 and 8
on the CD

At times the characters may be singing about one concept, seemingly unaware of the other musical references appearing in the orchestral use of *leitmotif*, providing a kind of operatic irony. This technique emphasizes the many layers of action and emotion in the opera at any given point.

Activity

1. Explore several “cousins” to *leitmotif* within our culture. These might include commercial jingles, the theme motif of a movie character (the Wicked Witch of the West or Luke Skywalker,) a pop song associated with a film or television show, etc. Tchaikovsky’s *Peter and the Wolf* offers familiar and varying examples, too.
2. In smaller groups, ask students to experiment with adjusting or “morphing” these musical phrases through several different versions. They can try altering the tempo (speeding up or slowing down), the pitch (making the phrase higher or lower), or the dynamics (making the phrase quiet or loud.)
3. Older students can also try vocal contrasts (more or less voices on the melody), tonal contrasts (scratchy voices, nasal voices, etc.), or they can experiment with a minor or major key (making the same melody sound happy or sad will generally accomplish this.) The melody should be recognizable, but its presentation should change.

Example: Though it is a seventies reference, most students know the two note theme from *Jaws*. What effect do you get if you change the presentation of that theme, humming it with a high pitch and a fast tempo?

Activity

1. Choose a character from a story you are studying, and ask students to develop a short musical phrase (just a few notes) to identify them. This must have a melodic element – sound effects are not enough.
2. Encourage students to create an arrangement of notes that does not sound like a melody they know. Once they have picked their *leitmotif*, ask them to adjust it to reflect how this *leitmotif* would sound if the character is:

Sneaking
Angry
Content
Sleepy
Hungry
Frightened

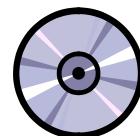
What kinds of things were done to a *leitmotif* to adjust it? How did this change affect the audience? What are other ways that this musical idea be expressed?



HANSEL AND GRETEL.

For older students:

1. Although the preludes to each act won't be played in the performance we see, they are a good teaching tool in order to identify some of the *leitmotifs* and become familiar with unique melodies associated with *Hansel and Gretel*.
2. As a class, outline or story board some of the important elements of this version of the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel*. (Refer to the synopsis on pages 2-3) These might include characters, events, places, or themes and ideas.
3. Listen together to the Overture and try to assign musical phrases in the orchestration to some of the elements you outlined. What clues in the music lead you to these conclusions?
4. After the performance: Discuss any instances of *leitmotif* that the students may have noticed. What do the students feel was the purpose and power of using *leitmotif* in this opera? Did it help with their understanding of the piece? Was it even noticeable?



Selection 1
on the CD



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