

Alec Roth – GRETEL AND HANSEL – libretto by DAVID SULKIN

an opera for young people

commissioned by The Baylis Programme at English National Opera for its youth opera group "Live Culture"

first performed by Live Culture, ENO Ensemble, Alec Roth (conductor), David Sulkin (director), Young Vic Theatre, London, 18/19 June 1987

Gretel and Hansel is about lost children; about some of those who have suffered at the hands of adults and about those who have been forgotten. The music pays affectionate homage to Engelbert Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel* by incorporating several of its themes.

SYNOPSIS

Two children, lost in a forest, meet a witch. However, things are not quite what they seem, for this Gretel and Hansel are discontented run-aways; the forest is full of whispering trees who secretly love to dance and the witch is a rather glamorous charmer who has trouble with her domestic appliances. On hearing Gretel and Hansel's selfish complaints about life at home, the witch determines to teach them a lesson – perhaps a glimpse of real suffering will change their perspective on their own problems and make them realise how lucky they are. She pops them into her flying oven and casts a spell. The fairy-tale forest is magically transformed into an urban jungle, the trees turning into street-children. In a series of encounters Gretel and Hansel learn the true meaning of deprivation, cruelty, friendship and hope. Finally they are faced with the stark choice: engage with the reality around them or go back to the fairy-tale world. Gretel chooses detachment, but Hansel commits himself to defending the downtrodden Peggy, who is beaten and abused by her drunken father. In a moving finale the street children translate Peggy's suffering into a powerful plea for all lost and victimised children.

DURATION

ca. 55 minutes

FORCES REQUIRED

Gretel and Hansel was written for teenagers with little or no previous vocal or musical training, and is suitable for groups in or out of school, such as Youth Choirs or Youth Theatre Groups.

CHARACTERS:

HANSEL	Boy Soprano (B flat - e' flat)
GRETEL	Girl Soprano (B - g')
THE WITCH	Contralto (F - d')

CHORUS of Trees, Street Children and Jam

The following individual roles are taken by members of the Chorus:

RUTH, REM, BOY, AUDREY, MOLLY, ARCHIE 1 & 2, MINNIE 1 & 2, JACK, PEGGY, PEGGY'S SHADOW, PEGGY'S DAD, REPORTER

INSTRUMENTATION: Chamber Ensemble

2 Clarinets (2nd doubling Bass); 2 Horns; Harp;

1 Percussion (Marimba & Untuned); Viola; Cello; Double Bass

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Full Score; Vocal Score; Orchestral Parts

"Beautiful, funny, touching, sad and, finally, very moving, that was the ENO Baylis Programme and Basildon Towngate Theatre's production of Gretel and Hansel, an opera for today, in the Mirren Studio last week. With every seat sold for the opera's four performances, the 50 young people from all over South Essex, brilliantly directed by English National Opera's David Sulkin and conducted by Alec Roth, told of the cruelty of adults to children in this country over the centuries. But this was no dismal tale, for it had all the magic of a modern day fairy story, with talking and dancing trees in a magic wood and a contemporary Hansel and Gretel from a middle-class home . . . the final moments of the singing of the names of children in famous child abuse cases from the present right back to the Princes in the Tower was heart-rending. In fact on the opening night, there was a long shocked pause at the end, before tumultuous applause."

(Standard Recorder, Basildon, 24 November 1989)