

STANISŁAW MONIUSZKO ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN GDAŃSK

M.A. Michał Krężlewski

DOCTORAL THESIS

prepared within doctoral proceedings

in the field of *Arts*, artistic discipline: *Musical Arts*

Supervisor:

Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Stanisławski

Gdańsk 2025

ARTISTIC WORK

Engelbert Humperdinck – “Hänsel und Gretel”

Duration – 1 h 51 min

Performers:

Hänsel – Wiktoria Rudnicka

Gretel – Karolina Zielińska

Peter, Besenbinder (Father) – Maciej Mielewczyk

Gertrud, sein Weib (Mother) – Michalina Gogola

Die Knusperhexe (Witch) – Maria Pilachowska

Sandmännchen (Sand Fairy) – Daria Wasiluk

Taumännchen (Dew Fairy) – Monika Maciejewska

Children’s Choir of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk

Symphony Orchestra of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk

Production team:

Romuald Wicza-Pokojski – Director

Michał Krężlewski – Music Director

Katarzyna Zawistowska – Set and Costume Design

Maciej Iwańczyk – Lighting

Marcin Dąbrowski – Sound Direction

Agnieszka Długołęcka-Kuraś – Children’s Chior Preparation, Baltic Opera

Piotr Mitelski – Assistant Music Director

Bogdan Theisebach – Production Manager

Marcelina Winczewska-Lipka – Production Coordinator

Ewa Marciniak – Content Supervisor

Michał Lewandowski – Recording

Recording made on 8 November 2024 at the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk

DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTISTIC WORK

**E. Humperdinck – „Hänsel und Gretel”
From Score to Premiere.**

Table of contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Stage of work on the score	7
2.1 Cultural and historical context	7
2.2 Analysis of the linguistic layer	8
2.3 Preparation of the score in terms of formal layout	9
Formal structure of the overture	10
ACT I	10
ACT II	11
ACT III	12
2.4 Analysis of the score from the standpoint of conducting technique	14
Overture	14
Act I	14
Act II	15
Act III.....	16
3. Stage of rehearsals with soloists	18
3.1 Work on preparing the soloists' parts at the piano	18
3.2 Ensemble rehearsals.....	19
3.3 Stage rehearsals – working on the symbiosis of the musical and scenic layers ..	20
4. Stage of rehearsals with the orchestra	21
5. Description of work during full run-throughs on stage in premiere week	22
6. Summary	23
7. Author's own translation of the libretto text	24
8. Bibliography	56
1. Musical materials (primary sources)	56
2. Secondary literature	56
3. Concert / theatre programmes and brochures	56
Attachments.....	57

1. Introduction

The present description of the artistic work concerns the audio-video recording of Engelbert Humperdinck's opera "Hänsel und Gretel", made on 8 November 2024 at the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk.

The performance was created as a collaboration between the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk and the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk. The cast consisted of students of the Academy's Vocal-Acting Faculty:

Hänsel (Jaś) – Wiktoria Rudnicka

Gretel (Małgosia) – Karolina Zielińska

Peter, Besenbinder (Father) – Maciej Mielewczyk

Gertrud, sein Weib (Mother) – Michalina Gogola

Sandmännchen (Sandman) – Daria Wasiluk

Taumännchen (Dew Fairy) – Monika Maciejewska

Die Knusperhexe (Witch) – Maria Pilachowska

Children's Chorus of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk

Symphony Orchestra of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk

The production team for the performance was:

Romuald Wicza-Pokojski – director

Michał Krężlewski – musical direction

Katarzyna Zawistowska – set and costumes

Maciej Iwańczyk – lighting

Marcin Dąbrowski – sound direction

Agnieszka Długołęcka-Kuraś – children's chorus preparation

Piotr Mitelski – assistant musical director

Bogdan Theisebach – production management

Marcelina Winczewska-Lipka – production coordinator

Ewa Marciniec – artistic supervision

The staging of "Hänsel und Gretel" was the third consecutive opera I had the opportunity to bring to the stage as musical director in cooperation with the Vocal-Acting Faculty of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk, and the second to be presented on the stage of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk within that cooperation. The idea for this particular work arose from discussions with Professor Ewa Marciniec, then head of the Department of Vocal Studies, who initiated and conceived the project. The opera provides an excellent field for the development of young voices and can also serve as a perfect starting point for work on German repertoire.

In my case, this was the second premiere of an opera from the German operatic circle – the first had been Ludwig van Beethoven's opera *"Fidelio"*,

which was performed under my musical direction on 10 September 2021 at the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk.

I mention this fact deliberately, because it was precisely the work on *"Fidelio"* that provided me with the practical experience indispensable for staging the specific repertoire that comes from the cultural sphere of German opera.

Undoubtedly, the foundations of this particular relationship between word and sound have their beginnings in the Protestant tradition, and their genesis can already be traced in the splendid music of Heinrich Schütz, while the most expressive and brought-to-absolute-perfection manifestation of this bond is visible in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

It is remarkable how, in Florestan's aria in Beethoven's opera, quotations from Bach's Johannes-Passion can be heard.

Wagner, who stands on a completely different pole of the meaning and sense of music than Schütz, Bach and Beethoven, literally draws certain rhetorical figures taken from the works of Bach and Beethoven.

Humperdinck, as the author of many piano reductions of Richard Wagner's operas, was naturally under his influence, at least as regards the colouristic palette of the orchestration and the inspiration of the Wagnerian formal structure.

Nevertheless, *"Hänsel und Gretel"* is, for all that, a thoroughly original work, which secured Engelbert Humperdinck everlasting remembrance in the history of music.

I will describe and support with arguments both the specificity of German music and the originality of *"Hänsel und Gretel"* in the next chapter, which will present my view of this work.

In the present text there will then follow descriptions of the successive stages leading to the stage realisation of the opera *"Hänsel und Gretel"* – from the beginning of work on the score, through the rehearsal stages, right up to the premiere itself.

2. Stage of work on the score

2.1 Cultural and historical context

Any interaction with a musical work should begin with an exploration of the historical and cultural context in which that work was created. In the case of “Hänsel und Gretel”, an extremely important fact is Engelbert Humperdinck’s close artistic relationship with Richard Wagner. The two composers met in 1880 in Naplesⁱ. Wagner invited Humperdinck to work as an assistant on the production of “*Parsifal*” presented in Bayreuth in 1882.

Humperdinck’s duties included, among other things, preparing music materials and working with the singer-soloists. There is evidence that Humperdinck also produced the piano reduction of “*Parsifal*”. It is likewise assumed that he made piano reductions of “*Der Ring des Nibelungen*” — although in that case his contribution concerned only selected fragments. Humperdinck’s close relationship with Richard Wagner is further confirmed by the fact that he was the personal music teacher of Wagner’s son, Siegfried.

The influence of Wagner’s music is visible in “Hänsel und Gretel” above all in the orchestration and the handling of orchestral colour. There are many chorale-like passages written for the brass section (echoes of the first scene of “*Parsifal*” can be heard here), and in the instrumental passage that follows the “Abendsegen” (Evening Blessing)

in the second act one can hear an analogy to the long, unending phrases from the overture to “*Parsifal*”.

The very subject of the opera “Hänsel und Gretel” fits into the paradigm of German opera of the second half of the nineteenth century because of its fairy-tale quality and the intertwining of religious motifs with elements of pagan culture. Humperdinck employs quotations from folk and traditional music (for instance, in the first scene of the opera, in Hänsel and Gretel’s duet “Suse, liebe Suse...”), something that Wagner also does — for example, in his use of the “Dresdner Amen” motif to symbolise the Holy Grail in “*Parsifal*”. My constant recourse to analogies with “*Parsifal*” is not accidental, because it was while working on that Wagner’s masterpiece that Humperdinck spent the most time.

When analysing the cultural and historical aspect of the creation of the opera “Hänsel und Gretel”, one must mention Engelbert Humperdinck’s profound religiosity. In the

music, this fact is reflected in the circumstance that precisely the “Abendsegen” becomes the central dramaturgical point of the entire opera. The overture begins with that melodic material, the same motif forms the central part of the second act, and the same theme brings the entire work to a close.

Several other pieces of information likewise had a significant impact on my point of view regarding the interpretation of “Hänsel und Gretel”. Naturally, these pieces of information are transported by me entirely subjectively onto the score and give Humperdinck’s music an additional symbolic meaning.

The first such piece of information is the fact that the libretto was written by Adelheid Wette, Engelbert Humperdinck’s sisterⁱⁱ. The situation in which siblings worked together to paint with sound and word the story of a brother-and-sister relationship lends “Hänsel und Gretel” extraordinary significance.

The second piece of information that very strongly influences one’s perception of the work from the performer’s standpoint is that the conductor of the première of “Hänsel und Gretel” in Weimar, on 23 December 1893, was Richard Strauss, who had already composed, among other things, “*Don Juan*” and “*Tod und Verklärung*”. Two years after the première of “Hänsel und Gretel” Strauss composed the tone poem “*Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*”. It is worth noting with what reverence and passion Richard Strauss approached the music of Engelbert Humperdinck, which, despite its beauty, was nevertheless less innovative than Strauss’s tone poems.

The première date of 23 December is also not without significance, because in the tradition of German opera houses the work is still performed chiefly during the Christmas season. The elements I have just described, which might at first glance appear to belong to the category of popular knowledge, have a very significant impact on the process of perceiving the work, and hence on the process of interpretation.

2.2 Analysis of the linguistic layer

As far as the process of preparing operatic works is concerned, my first step has always been an analysis of the linguistic layer – in simpler terms, getting to know the content of the work on many planes. First of all, becoming acquainted with the main content of the work, that is, the textual sphere that appears in the principal current of the dramaturgy – the stage action. I understand the term “main content of the work” as the verbal part assigned to the characters appearing in the given opera, to the chorus, and sometimes also to a narrator.

The second of the elements of the linguistic layer are the stage directions, scenographic indications and information concerning stage movement, which do not constitute the main current of the action but shape its stage environment.

An indispensable element of an opera conductor's work is a perfect knowledge of the content of the work. This is significant when it comes to understanding what constitutes the quintessence of the operatic work – namely the inseparable symbiosis of dramaturgy and music. For the purpose of systematising certain concepts we divide the operatic work into elements so as to discuss chosen issues from up close and in detail. This also occurs in the present work. One must nevertheless remember that the operatic work is exceptional not because it combines dramatic theatre and music, but precisely because it is an inseparable whole of the mutual interpenetration and interaction of music and word.

In "Hänsel und Gretel" the entire spoken text is written in German. The tempo and expressive indications are likewise written in German (with a few exceptions where Italian markings appear, for instance, six bars before No. 4 and in No. 4 the indications *ritardando*, *a tempo*, *Tempo* can be seen). The indications concerning dynamics and articulation in this work occur exclusively in Italian.

When analysing the German text in relation to the three categories – main narrative, stage directions and musical layer – I encountered no linguistic difficulties. The text is very comprehensible and contains no archaisms or incomprehensible idioms.

The first, and extremely demanding, step from the performer's standpoint was to prepare my own translation of the entire libretto. Bearing in mind the preparatory work involving young soloists – students of the Vocal-Acting Faculty of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk – I was aware that good linguistic preparation, as well as the ability to outline the appropriate semantic context and to develop sensitivity to expressive nuances arising from the subtle indications contained in the text, would be crucial in that collaboration.

2.3 Preparation of the score in terms of formal layout

We naturally begin the formal analysis of the score by defining the structure of form in the overture. There are times when an overture merely outlines the expressive characteristics of a work and contains no musical theme borrowed from the opera itself – as in the overture to "*Le nozze di Figaro*" by W. A. Mozart or "*Il barbiere di Siviglia*" by G. Rossini. In the other case the overture is constructed as the quintessence of the most important musical structures of the entire work. Such is the case with

“Hänsel und Gretel” by E. Humperdinck. A tried-and-tested scheme for carrying out formal analysis is the analytical path from the general to the specific. The first conclusion that suggests itself after reading the score of the overture is the fact that there is no other musical material in it that we do not hear during the course of the whole opera.

Formal structure of the overture

ABCA¹C¹A², where:

- A – the “*Abendsegen*” theme from the end of the second scene;
- B – the “*Das Knusperhäuschen*” theme from the beginning of Act III, as well as the melodic theme of the Witch’s first entrance in the work and the subsequent lines of Hänsel and Gretel “*Der Wind, Der Wind...*” (No. 135);
- C – a combination of themes from Act III: No. 204 (“*Die Englein habens im Traum gesagt...*”) and the musical material from No. 205;
- A¹ – a variation treatment of A; dialogue with material C (No. 205), this time in C major, enriched with chromatic passages in the second violins and cellos; then modulation to A major, followed by diminution and continuous modulations;
- C¹ – theme C in the reverse order (first No. 205, then No. 204); the melody of 204 is modified and combined with material A in the wind instruments;
- A² – a sort of coda to the overture: theme A with modulatory changes and the first motivic member of A in diminution in the second violins and violas.

ACT I

The first theme Humperdinck uses here is the melody taken from the popular children’s song “Suse, liebe Suse...”. In bar 6 after No. 3 new material appears with Hänsel’s words “Ach kam’ doch die Mutter...”, which at No. 4 passes into a melody alluding to the *Abendsegen* (Gretel: “Wen die Not auf’s Höchste steigt...”). Then the composer introduces a link (“Ja wohl, das klingt recht schön und glatt...”), after which the “Suse, liebe Suse...” theme returns.

From No. 6 a new theme appears (“Griesgram hinaus...”); the next link begins two bars before No. 8. In bar 6 after No. 8 the original “Suse, liebe Suse...” theme comes back. The marking *Etwas schneller* (three bars before No. 10) initiates a three-and-a-half-bar link, after which the “Suse, liebe Suse...” theme leads through minor keys. At No. 13 two bars of introduction refer to the beginning of No. 6, and in the third bar new material appears (“Brüderchen, komm tanz mit mir.”). From No. 15 the motif develops,

maintaining continuity of thought from No. 13. The entire structure up to the end of the duet (No. 26) is based on the interweaving of the previously introduced themes and their modulatory development.

At No. 26 a new scene begins and thus new musical material. The entrance of the worried Mother is initiated by a D-flat major chord with a seventh in the bass. No. 27 illustrates the frightened, apologising children (the chief “Suse, liebe Suse...” motif). After five bars the Mother’s monologue follows, illustrated by the rhythm ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪. From No. 33 the musical layer calms – the Mother falls asleep.

At No. 34 the Father appears with the theme “Rallalala, rallalala...”, which will return in the finale of Act III. The theme dominates in the Mother and Father duet up to No. 50. In that number a D-major chord, after a sudden modulation from E-flat major, signifies the Father’s astonishment at the children’s absence from home. The fragment up to the second bar before No. 54 is a lively conversation between the parents.

No. 54: two five-bar groups

- 3 bars *Ein wenig zurückhaltend* (the Father’s tale about the Witch; chords: B major, E minor, e-minor⁶, B major, A-flat minor, E-flat major, A-flat major / then: C minor, F minor⁶, f-minor⁶, C minor, B major, e-minor⁶, B major)
- 2 bars *Wieder schneller* (the Mother’s fright; A-flat major → B major – G major – E major)

In No. 55 a march-like motif appears (a foreshadowing of the introduction to Act II “Hexenritt”), which in No. 56 passes into 6/8 metre. Tension and texture build up until the culmination at the end of Act I.

ACT II

Because in the staged version described there was no break between Acts I and II, variant B of the ending was performed, moving *attacca* into the “Hexenritt”. In No. 61 the motif from bar 3 after No. 55 returns – this time fortissimo.

In No. 62 (flutes, oboes, first and second violins) the “Witch’s Flight” motif appears (it will return in Act III, No. 169). “Hexenritt” is built mainly on the juxtaposition of these two themes. From No. 65 (*Ein wenig ruhiger*) calm ensues; from the fifth bar after No. 65 a new figure in horns, trumpets and violins heralds the next scene (it will also appear in the sixth bar after No. 76). From No. 67 *Etwas zurückhaltend* leads into a silence concluded by cello and viola solos.

The “Forest Scene” begins with Gretel’s song “Ein Männlein steht im Walde...”. The marking *Etwas lebhafter als vorher* (bar 7 after No. 69) introduces Hänsel. In No. 70 a leitmotif appears that narrates until No. 78. In bar 6 after No. 71 we hear the cuckoo motif (a descending third). From No. 78 the musical layer changes: in the cor anglaise and first bassoon a melody appears subjected to diminution, forming the structure up to No. 90. Between Nos. 78 and 90 the composer combines the “Witch’s Motif” (first flute, clarinets) with the motif from bar 5 before No. 65. In No. 90, with the character Sandmännchen, a new theme appears, whose variations will develop instrumentally in No. 95. In No. 92 the main theme enters – the *Abendsegen* (one of the most beautiful duets of Hänsel and Gretel).

From No. 95 an extended instrumental passage develops:

- the *Abendsegen* motif;
- the motif from bar 5 before No. 65;
- the motif from No. 78 (a phrase in the manner of the Parsifal overture, first violins, bar 3 after No. 95);
- a new motif of descending quavers in the strings (Angels);
- the motif from Sandmännchen’s aria (becoming a form-shaping motif).

From No. 101 up to the end of Act II the *Abendsegen* dominates once again.

ACT III

The beginning of Act III opens with the motif *Das Knusperhäuschen*, which had sounded in the overture and has already been mentioned. Up to No. 110 the entire formal structure is shaped by that very motif. From No. 110 the composer introduces different melodic material, likewise known from the overture, from the end of Act III (No. 204, *Die Englein habens im Traum gesagt...*).

The same motif will also appear as the guiding element in Taumännchen’s aria from No. 113. The opening of Taumännchen’s aria, in which she introduces herself, is identical with the melodic material from the beginning of Sandmännchen’s aria, but this time both the tempo and the texture change. In No. 116, in the first clarinet part, the theme known from No. 78 is heard. The principal musical idea of this passage is the “Taumännchen theme” from No. 113. Up to the marking *Mäßig bewegt* in the fifth bar after No. 118, significant elements are the motifs initiated by the quaver triplet figure (quaver, two semiquavers, quaver) and the leap of a fifth followed by a chromatically saturated descending line. An example of such a motif can be found in the first clarinet part (six bars before No. 117) and in the first flute part (two bars before No. 117). This structure is important in that from No. 120 it becomes the main form-building material up to No. 122.

From No. 122 the tonal centre becomes the key of A flat major. The use of precisely this key at the point where Hänsel tells of his dream involving the Angels is not accidental. Citing Pauer's words: "the key of A flat major is pervaded with feeling and rich in dream-like beauty."¹

In No. 125 new musical material appears, hitherto unheard, which depicts the "gingerbread house" that emerges in the action. The entire passage is set in 6/8 metre. The dotted-rhythm motif from No. 133 will be used again by the composer during the Witch's scene later in Act III.

The Witch's first entrance at No. 135 is based on melody already familiar from the overture and from the instrumental passage earlier described, which bears the name *Das Knusperhäuschen*. Six bars before No. 136 we encounter the motif, likewise sounded in the overture, based on the words "*Der Wind, der Wind...*". Up to No. 146 the musical motifs previously described are shown in various configurations. A new melody appears at No. 146 to the Witch's words "Komm, kleine Mäuslein...". This motif will gain increasing importance and become ever more present in the musical layer. Attention should also be drawn to the motif of repeated quavers imitating the Witch's laughter, which appears for the first time two bars before No. 141. The composer will return to it frequently and this motif will also be significant for shaping the musical dramaturgy.

At No. 144 the theme "Suse, liebe Suse" returns for a moment. Humperdinck employs a new musical idea from the fourth bar after No. 151. In the passage in which the Witch casts a spell on the children, the chordal motifs in the trombone parts, performed *piano*, create a *misterioso* character, while the semiquaver triplets in the remaining instruments, marked *crescendo* and *fp*, introduce an atmosphere of horror. From No. 157 another new musical motif appears, set in 9/8 metre. It, too, will be used many times later in Act III.

In the remainder of the act, up to No. 169, the composer makes use of the motivic material already described. At No. 169 the "Hexenritt" motif, known from the introduction to Act II, returns. After the Witch's aria there follows a frequent alternation of the themes already employed. New material is introduced at No. 191 by the "Knusperwaltzer", although it is hard to resist the impression that the "Knusperwaltzer" motifs are strikingly similar to the main motif of "Hexenritt", only presented here in 3/4 metre.

The entrance of the children's chorus at No. 200 is based on a motif shown in diminution from the "Abendsegen", used as an accompaniment layer. In the principal layer there appears a melodic theme already known from the overture (earlier described as the

¹ Ernst Pauer - "The elements of the beautiful in music", Novello and company, London, 1923, page 25

theme taken from No. 205), but this time it functions as the initiation of the theme that will be extensively exploited in the coda of the work. As a counterweight to this theme Humperdinck places a melody sung by Hänsel “Die Englein haben im Traum gesagt...” (No. 204), already repeatedly described. The dominance of these motifs is interrupted – eight bars before No. 207 – only by the Father’s entrance with his characteristic theme “Rallalala, rallalala...” known from Act I. The use of the motif from No. 205 then recurs. In bar 5 after No. 208 a melody derived from “Hexenritt” appears; at No. 209 a new melody illustrates the joy of the reunited family. In No. 211 the theme “Abendsegen” appears for the last time, now in monumental guise. The work ends with the joyful theme from No. 209.

2.4 Analysis of the score from the standpoint of conducting technique

Overture

The opening section of the overture must be conducted in a four-beat pattern, as is indicated by the initial tempo marking “Ruhige, nicht zu langsame Bewegung” and the metronome indication: a crotchet equals 69 beats per minute. Throughout the entire opening passage attention must be paid to showing a legato articulation and all the dynamic changes the composer deploys along the way.

From letter D (“Munter”) we switch to conducting in a two-beat pattern, which is indicated by the composer’s annotation at the word “Munter” – the half-note should be at the tempo of the earlier crotchet, thus *Doppio movimento*. The rest of the overture is conducted in two beats with slight exceptions.

One such exception occurs two bars before letter Q. I employed a four-beat pattern here to secure a more confident and clearer *ritardando* in the piccolo, cello and viola parts and a secure execution of the *pizzicato* in the last bar before letter Q. From letter Q I return to the two-beat pattern up to the end of the overture, setting apart the last two crotchets in the fourth bar from the end.

Act I

The beginning of Act I is conducted in a two-beat pattern up to the fourth bar before No. 9, where we change to a three-beat pattern. Any *rit.* markings inserted by the composer in this passage do not require subdivision. From No. 9 we return to the two-beat pattern, which remains until the end of the duet. I should also describe the variant I employed for

the fermata that appears two bars before No. 25. In that bar we hold the hand on the second crotchet, and the cut-off serves as an impulse for the last quaver of the bar, which should be played *a tempo*. The second scene (the Mother's entrance) is likewise conducted entirely in the two-beat pattern. The third scene (the Father's entrance) ought to be conducted in a four-beat pattern.

In the fifth bar after No. 35 I subdivided the first beat—above which the annotation *rit.* appears—into quavers, and from the second beat of that bar I returned to the four-beat pattern. An identical situation occurred in the fourth bar before No. 37. In the second bar after No. 38 I likewise subdivided the last three quavers before the fermata. I began the third bar after No. 38 in the four-beat pattern and subdivided the last beat into quavers. In the fourth bar after No. 38 the last two quavers marked with fermatas were executed “in motion”, *colla parte* with the soloist, and for the last semiquaver of the bar I gave an upbeat “from the point”, returning to the four-beat pattern.

In the third bar after No. 40 one should—as written—move to the four-beat pattern; at No. 41 to the four-beat pattern; and at No. 42 once again to the three-beat pattern. From No. 44 the four-beat pattern returns. In the last bar before No. 45, taking into account the *rit.* marking, it was necessary to subdivide the last two quavers of the bar. From No. 45 the four-beat pattern returns. In the last bar before No. 45 I subdivided the second half of the bar with a quaver beat to realise the *ritard.*. In the second bar after No. 46 I subdivided the last beat into quavers, despite no such suggestion in the score; I wanted the Father's entrance in the third bar after No. 46 to be introduced with a slowing. Next, from the indication *Zeitmaß wie zuvor*, one continues conducting in the four-beat pattern.

From that point the pattern does not change up to No. 56; one must, however, observe all tempo changes occurring along the way. From No. 56 (6/8 metre) we conduct in a two-beat pattern, and this pattern remains until the end of the duet.

Act II

“*Hexenritt*” should be conducted in a four-beat pattern. From No. 68, at the start of the first scene of Act II, the four-beat pattern also applies. In the eleventh bar after No. 68 I subdivided the first three quavers owing to the *rit.* located there. From the second quaver of the second crotchet beat of that bar the four-beat pattern resumes. All bars after No. 69 written in 3/2 metre I conducted in a divided three-beat pattern. The remaining bars in 4/4 metre were conducted in the four-beat pattern.

The rest of the duet, up to No. 90, is conducted in the four-beat pattern with observance of all tempo changes therein. The off-stage chorus entry at No. 85 should likewise be conducted clearly in the four-beat pattern.

The first entrance of Sandmännchen is marked *Dasselbe Zeitmaß* (the same tempo) and here too the four-beat conducting pattern applies. In the opening section of this aria, where fermatas occur, one must give the soloist time for a free breath and allow her to execute the entrance on the last crotchet of the bar freely.

In the last bar before No. 91 I subdivided the last beat into quavers to give the soloist time to breathe before No. 91. The entire remaining passage – to the end of Act II, through the duet and the instrumental section – should be conducted in the four-beat pattern.

Act III

The initial passage of Act III I conducted in a four-beat pattern. From No. 110 the marking *Das Zeitmaß merklich beschleunigen* forces a switch to conducting in a two-beat pattern. The entire Taumännchen aria up to No. 115 is conducted “in two”. From No. 115 I moved to the four-beat pattern to realise the annotation *ritenuto*. The whole subsequent extended section up to No. 125 is kept in four beats.

From No. 125 (6/8 metre) one should conduct in a two-beat pattern up to No. 143. On the way there are changes to 2/4 metre, but this does not affect the conducting pattern. At No. 143 the 9/8 metre should be conducted in a three-beat pattern, after which from No. 144 we return to the two-beat pattern. Only at No. 157 does the three-beat pattern appear again. At No. 158 we return to two beats. From No. 160 the three-beat pattern reappears once more. The sixth bar after No. 161 must be conducted in two beats. From the fourth bar after No. 163 one should conduct in three beats. In the fifth bar after No. 164 we change to the two-beat pattern; after five bars we return to three beats, then from No. 165 the two-beat pattern applies. Three bars before No. 166 one should switch to conducting “in three”. From No. 168 one should again conduct in two beats. The switch to a three-beat pattern occurs only at No. 184.

In the third bar after No. 185 we change to a two-beat pattern; it is worth noting that despite the absence of any *meno mosso* annotation it is advisable to render the first two bars below tempo to give the Witch time to articulate the text, which is difficult to pronounce and densely written. From the last bar before No. 186 we move to the three-beat conducting pattern. From the third bar after No. 186 the two-beat pattern applies again. In the last bar before No. 187 the three-beat pattern returns, and from the third bar after No. 187 we go back to conducting in two beats and keep this pattern until the second bar before No. 191.

I conducted the last bar before No. 191 in a three-beat pattern, subdividing the last beat into three quavers because of the *poco rit.* written by the composer there. From No. 191 the *Knusperwaltzer* is executed in a one-beat pattern. Because of the fermatas in the last bar before No. 192 I conducted the last two bars before that number in a three-beat pattern, while the last crotchet in that bar, in the first and second violins and violas, was executed *a tempo* after an upbeat equal to the value of the entire bar in the waltz. Thereafter, up to the end of the *Knusperwaltzer*, the one-beat pattern applies.

The fourth scene from No. 200 must be conducted in a four-beat pattern. In the second bar after No. 202 the marking *Allmählich beschleunigend bis doppelt so rasch als zuvor* appears. Here I executed a gradual accelerando, and halfway through the fifth bar after No. 202 I switched to the two-beat pattern. In the seventh bar after No. 205 the three-beat pattern applies, and in the second bar before No. 206 the two-beat pattern returns. The marking *Etwas zurückhaltend*, which the composer places eight bars before No. 207, must be conducted in four beats, and from the middle of the second bar before No. 207 one should return to the two-beat pattern.

Up to and including the eighth bar after No. 210 the two-beat pattern applies; from the ninth bar after No. 210 I employed the four-beat pattern in order to realise the *riten.* written there by the composer. From No. 211 the two-beat pattern returns. The last two bars before No. 212 I conducted in a four-beat pattern. The final passage of the work—from No. 212—I conducted in two beats.

3. Stage of rehearsals with soloists

3.1 Work on preparing the soloists' parts at the piano

I began work on preparing the parts with a group of students from the Vocal-Acting Faculty of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk in October 2023.

We worked every Monday, and our sessions lasted three clock hours.

In the first stage of these preparations I essentially acted as répétiteur myself, playing the piano reduction.

At this very stage I adopted the following work-organisation strategy:

- In a given passage I first asked for the spoken text to be read; I immediately corrected any possible errors.
- Once the student had mastered the spoken text, I asked them to speak that text in the rhythm appropriate to the given passage.
- When the second stage had been mastered, we began work on the melodic line.

Because of the large group of students who took an active part in the preparations for “Hänsel und Gretel”, such work lasted about two months.

From December 2023 we were accompanied by a pianist, an experienced operatic répétiteur with whom I had had the pleasure of collaborating many times not only in the academic field but also at the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk – Liana Krasyun-Korunna.

I value working with Liana Krasyun-Korunna exceedingly for her great musical sensitivity and for her alertness in working with the conductor.

In the course of three weeks in December we managed to bring the vocal material of “Hänsel und Gretel” to a level that enabled auditions to be held.

By the level described I understand the precise realisation of the musical text, correct pronunciation in German, and – most importantly – an understanding of the semantic contexts arising directly from the word itself as well as those flowing from the musical layer.

On 20 December 2023 we held the auditions. The panel consisted of:

- Professor Ewa Marciniak – then Head of the Department of Vocal Studies
- Romuald Wicza-Pokojski – stage director of the production
- Michał Krężlewski – musical director

Through the auditions we selected the cast of soloists, which I have included in the introduction.

3.2 Ensemble rehearsals

Because “Hänsel und Gretel” is predominantly an ensemble opera, it was important to conduct a sufficient number of rehearsals in which the young soloists could get to know one another in this musical matter and understand the interactions that occur between them.

We began this part of the work in January 2024. During the rehearsals we created various casting variants, which gave me the opportunity to see which singers matched best in terms of voice and personality.

Of course, even at this stage of the preparatory work we had to pay attention to basic elements such as:

- Correct pronunciation in German
- Appropriate intonation
- Dynamics and articulation
- Rhythm

It is also important to build a joint *crescendo* four bars before No. 93.

The passage of No. 93 itself, built on the principle of motivic imitation between Hänsel’s and Gretel’s parts, is likewise interesting.

Here it was extremely important to unify the young soloists’ perception of building musical tension.

3.3 Stage rehearsals – working on the symbiosis of the musical and scenic layers

The score of “Hänsel und Gretel” is a work perfectly constructed in terms of dramaturgy, and an accurate reading of it gives a complete picture of how the director should shape the stage space.

We began the stage rehearsals in the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year, that is, in mid-February 2024, still without set elements and using only basic props.

The director – Romuald Wicza-Pokojski – presented a coherent, clear vision of Humperdinck’s work, perfectly corresponding with the musical layer.

At this preparatory stage before the première of “Hänsel und Gretel” the creative team placed emphasis on fusing stage movement with music. Among the passages we worked on very intensively at that time were:

- The first duet of Hänsel and Gretel from Act I, where stage movement and the intensity of prop use required repeated run-throughs to become organic and natural.
- The Mother and Father duet from Act I, focusing on handling props and dense choreography.
- The moment of throwing the Witch into the oven, which had to agree precisely with the music, namely with the beginning of bar 2 after No. 190.

This stage-rehearsal phase was crowned with a staged performance accompanied by piano in June 2024.

4. Stage of rehearsals with the orchestra

Rehearsals with the Symphony Orchestra of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk took place between 26 October and 7 November 2024.

During the first four days we went through the reading stage of the work and practised the most difficult spots. Examples include:

- The passage in Act I from the Father's entrance to "Hexenritt". The principal difficulty here was the tempo changes and the increased modulation to flat keys, uncomfortable for the string quintet.
- The Hänsel and Gretel duet from Act II (from No. 79) owing to the need to establish the correct proportions between the thematic planes.
- The passage in Act III from No. 154 to the "Knusperwaltzer", because of the extensive modulation to flat keys and the metric-rhythmic complexities.

My work with the orchestra also consisted of explaining the plot of the work and the dramaturgical context when working on selected passages. I also marked the solo lines, which in my opinion greatly helped the ensemble to prepare properly for the musical rehearsals with the soloists.

The so-called "sitting rehearsals" with the soloists went extraordinarily well, despite their first encounter with the orchestral texture; the soloists realised the previously agreed assumptions.

At this point in the preparations for the première I worked mainly with the orchestra on bringing the dynamic volume down in many passages. In fact, my demands concerned observing the dynamics written by Humperdinck, who had perfectly planned in his score the proportions between the soloist and the orchestra.

5. Description of work during full run-throughs on stage in premiere week

We began the stage run-throughs with three casts on Tuesday, 5 November 2024. We had one rehearsal per day on 5, 6 and 7 November. These rehearsals took place with the full set, costumes and all props in place. One element that required special attention was the amplification of all off-stage sung passages.

During premiere week I had the opportunity for the first time to conduct the Opera Children's Chorus with the orchestra (previous rehearsals had involved piano). This situation also required adjustments as regards the balance between the chorus, the orchestra and the soloists.

A novelty, not arising from the score, was the introduction of a narrator – Radosław Smużny – who recited text by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski, the stage director. The narrator appeared at three points:

- for the first time between the overture and the first scene of Act I;
- a second entrance in the closing passage of the Hexenritt, when he announced the action of Act II;
- a third entrance in the opening instrumental passage of Act III, likewise introducing the action of that act.

From my point of view this device was very good and very interesting, aimed primarily at the youngest members of the audience.

After many months of preparation, the run-throughs on the stage of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk proceeded smoothly and without problems. The three different casts proved themselves very well in the conditions of an opera stage, even though for many of the soloists it was in fact an operatic debut. The result of the work of all ensembles, the creative team and the organisers is the subject of this description – the audio-video recording.

6. Summary

Working with Engelbert Humperdinck's score of Hänsel und Gretel at every stage described above was a fantastic experience for me. From the first contact with the text of this work it was striking how excellent a piece I had the privilege to engage with. The melodic, harmonic and instrumental richness and the illustrative character of the music in conjunction with the word, together with the craftsmanship of the orchestration, made the preparatory process a great pleasure for me.

For me, Humperdinck's Hänsel und Gretel is not just a fairy-tale. It is a story of poverty, abandonment, love and a multidimensional study of the struggle between good and evil, a work we perceive on many levels of consciousness.

One must unreservedly agree with the observation used by Richard Strauss in a letter to Engelbert Humperdinck written a few days after he had conducted the première in Weimar:

*"Your work delighted me. It is a true masterpiece. I have long seen no work of such significance. I admire the abundance of melody, the finesse and the polyphonic richness of the orchestration... everything is new, original, truly German."*²

I would like to thank all the ensembles, the creative team and the organisers whose contribution took me on this wonderful journey through the supernatural realm of Hänsel und Gretel.

² Gabriele Strauss — Lieber Collega! Richard Strauss im Briefwechsel mit zeitgenössischen Komponisten und Dirigenten. Bd. 1. Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1996. ISBN 3-89487-241-1, pp. 210 – 213.

7. Author's own translation of the libretto text

Daheim – at home.

A small, modest room. At the back a low door, next to it a small window with a view of the forest. On the left-hand side a stove with a chimney. Brooms of various sizes hang on the walls. Hänsel sits by the door binding brooms, Gretel – by the stove, darning a stocking; they sit facing each other.

GRETEL Suzy, dear Suzy, what rustles in the straw? The geese go barefoot because they have no shoes. The cobbler does have leather, but he lacks a last, so he can't make the goslings any shoes...

HÄNSEL *(interrupting)*

Well then they go barefoot!

GRETEL ...shoes!

HÄNSEL Eia-popeia, what misery! Who will give me three pfennigs for sugar and bread? I'll sell my bed and lie down in the straw: neither a feather will prick me nor a flea bite me...

GRETEL *(sadly)*

Ah, how hunger bites me!

HÄNSEL *(puts his work aside, stands)*

...a flea! Ah, if only Mother would finally come home!

GRETEL *(rises)*

Yes, I too can hardly endure the hunger any longer!

HÄNSEL

For weeks only dry bread – what misery, what hard fate!

GRETEL

Hush, Hänsel, remember what Father says when Mother loses heart: ‘When need is greatest, God will stretch out His hand to you.’

HÄNSEL

It sounds nice and smooth, but a man can’t eat words. Ah, Gretel, how long it has been since we ate something good – an egg-cake, buttered rolls... I have almost forgotten their taste. Ah, Gretel, I would like...

GRETEL (*covers his mouth*)

Hush, do not be gloomy!

GRETEL

Be patient, smile! That long face – brr, what a sight! You look like a walking grumbler! (*she takes up a broom*)

Grumbler, be gone, out of the cottage! I’ll teach you not to burden the heart, not to multiply cares, not to stifle joy. Grumbler, grumbler, surly cur, gloomy, hang-dog face, be off, begone, wretched creature!

HÄNSEL (*seizing another broom*)

Grumbler, be gone!

GRETEL

Grumbler, be gone!

HÄNSEL

I can stand it no longer!

GRETEL

Out of the house!

HÄNSEL

Always me...

GRETEL

Though your belly growls, lose not your courage, don't grumble, drive hunger away!

HÄNSEL

Hunger torments me till I'd like to gnaw a dish-cloth! I lose hope, I can't bear it!
Grumbler...

BOTH

Grumbler, grumbler, surly cat, with a hang-dog face, be off from here...

GRETEL ...

you wretch!

HÄNSEL

You wretch!

GRETEL

All right then! If you stop whining, I'll tell you a secret.

HÄNSEL

A secret? Sounds interesting!

GRETEL

Look into the pot: milk – our neighbour gave it to us today. When Mother comes home she'll cook us delicious rice-pudding.

HÄNSEL (*brightening, jumps*)

Rice-pudding! Hurrah! Where there's rice, there's Hänsel!

HÄNSEL

The cream is so thick – but delicious!

(licks his finger)

HÄNSEL

Oh dear, I could lick the whole pot clean!

GRETEL

Snacking? Aren't you ashamed?

(slaps his hands)

GRETEL

Hands off, little glutton! And now quickly back to work! We have to finish before Mother comes home. You know, lazybones get punished!

HÄNSEL *(hands in pockets)*

Work? I don't feel like it. Always work – enough! I want to dance and have some fun!

GRETEL

Dance? Gladly! Let's sing the song Auntie taught us – a cheerful dancing refrain!

GRETEL

Brother, come, dance with me, give me both your hands. A step to the right, a step to the left, a round turn – easy as pie!

Hänsel tries, a little clumsily.

HÄNSEL

Me, dance? Sister, I can't. Show the steps so I can learn too.

GRETEL

With the feet: tap tap tap, with the hands: clap clap clap, a step right, a step left, turn around – it's simple!

HÄNSEL

Tap tap... ...turn – simple!

GRETEL

You're doing great! I didn't think you'd catch on so quickly. Look at Hänsel – what a dancer he is!

GRETEL

With the head: nick-nick-nick, with the finger: tick-tick-tick, once right, once left, turn in a circle – that's easy!

HÄNSEL

With the head... ...in a circle – easy!

GRETEL

Brother, watch what Gretel does now! Let's link arms and step together.

(she grabs Hänsel by the arm)

GRETEL

Come on!

HÄNSEL

I love dancing and having fun, I hate being alone.

BOTH

We're no fans of sadness and tears, we want to be merry! We love dancing... and so on!

GRETEL *(releases Hänsel, dances around him)*

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

(gently pushes him)

GRETEL

Turn around, dear Hänsel, now turn around, dear Johann!

HÄNSEL

Go away, go away, I'm proud Johann! I don't dance with little girls, that's too childish!

GRETEL

Go then, proud Johann, go, silly Johann, I'll catch you anyway!

(dances around him again)

GRETEL

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

(nudges him lightly)

GRETEL

Now, turn around, dear Hänsel!

HÄNSEL *(circles Gretel)*

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la... Oh, sister Gretel, there's a hole in your stocking!

GRETEL

Oh, brother Hänsel, teasing me again?

GRETEL

I don't dance with rascals, that would be silly!

HÄNSEL

Don't be angry, dear sister, I'll make you laugh anyway!

(they dance around each other as before)

GRETEL *(joyfully)*

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la... Turn around...

HÄNSEL

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

BOTH

Dance gaily, hey then, briskly, spare no fun!

GRETEL

And though the stocking already has a hole...

HÄNSEL

And though the shoe isn't the freshest either...

GRETEL

Mother will knit a new one!

HÄNSEL

And the cobbler will patch my shoe again!

HÄNSEL

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

GRETEL

Turn in a circle...

HÄNSEL

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

They clasp hands, whirl faster and faster until they lose balance and fall on top of each other. At this moment the door opens: Mother stands in the doorway. The children spring up from the floor.

MUTTER

Oho!

GRETEL

Mother!

HÄNSEL

Good heavens, Mother!

MUTTER

What kind of circus is this?! Is this supposed to be work – howling and singing? Dancing as at a fair while Father and I toil from dawn till night!

She hits Hänsel on the nape.

MUTTER

Take that! Show me what you've done.

She turns to Gretel.

MUTTER

What? The stocking still unfinished?

MUTTER

And you, little rascal, in so many hours you haven't even bound those few brooms?

MUTTER

Idlers! I'll fetch the stick this instant and give your lazy backs a thrashing!

In her zeal she chases the children, knocks over the pot of milk; it crashes to the floor.

MUTTER

Jesu Maria! And the pot smashed as well!

(weeps)

MUTTER

How am I to feed you now?

She looks at the milk on her skirt; Hänsel snickers.

MUTTER

What?! You scamp, you're still laughing?!

With the stick she rushes at Hänsel; the boy runs out through the open door.

MUTTER

Just wait till Father gets home!

Suddenly she snatches a basket from the wall, thrusts it into Gretel's hands.

MUTTER

March to the forest! Pick strawberries – fill the basket, understand? If you come back with an empty basket I'll smack you so hard you'll stick to the wall!

The children run out to the forest. Mother sinks exhausted onto a chair.

MUTTER

And now my good pot in pieces... Blind zeal always ends in disaster.

She wrings her hands.

MUTTER

God, send money!

(sobs)

MUTTER

I've nothing to live on, not a crumb to feed the family! Not a drop in the jug, not a crumb in the cupboard, for ages only water to drink...

She lays her head on her hand.

MUTTER

I'm tired... dead tired... God, send money...

She lays her head on her arm and falls asleep.

VATER's voice (from afar)

VATER

Ra-la-la-la, ra-la-la-la, hey, dear wife, I'm here! I bring fortune and glory!

(closer)

VATER

Ah, we poor folks, every day the same: a great hole in the pouch, an even greater one in the belly. Ra-la-la-la, ra-la-la-la, hunger is the best cook!

Father's head appears in the window; he enters with unsteady step carrying a large wicker basket on his back.

VATER

You rich folk may feast, while we, with nothing to put in our mouths, the whole week, seven long days, gnaw on a single old bone! Ra-la-la-la...

VATER

Yes, yes – hunger cooks superbly, provided only he issues orders; but what good is a cook when there's nothing in the pot? Ra-la-la-la...

VATER

Caraway is my favourite liqueur!

He staggers playfully to his sleeping wife and slaps her loudly on the cheek.

VATER

Look, woman, what I've brought!

MUTTER

Ho-ho! Who wakes me in my own house with bacon and 'ra-la-la-la'?

VATER

Come now! That's the belly growling – the beast Hunger, believe me! Ra-la-la-la... Hunger is a nasty beast, it bites and scratches!

MUTTER

Well, well! That beast seems already well ‘pickled’, eh?

VATER

Aah... the day was jolly today, right, dear wife?

(tries to kiss her)

MUTTER *(pushes him away angrily)*

I can’t stand tavern frolics, you know that!

VATER

As you wish!

He turns to the basket.

VATER

Let’s see, then, what we’ll have for supper today.

MUTTER

The menu is exceptionally modest: empty plates, an empty pantry, a hole in the pocket!

VATER

Ra-la-la-la, ra-la-la-la, hey, woman, I’m still here and I bring fortune and glory!

He pulls the contents from the basket.

VATER

Look, mother – how do you like this food?

MUTTER *(helping him unpack, increasingly astonished)*

My goodness! Bacon and butter... flour, sausages... fourteen eggs – (those are terribly expensive now!) beans, onions and – oh heavens! – even a quarter-pound of coffee!

Father turns the basket upside-down; a heap of potatoes rolls across the floor. He grabs his wife by the arm and begins whirling her round the room.

VATER

Ra-la-la-la, ra-la-la-la, ra-la-la-la, hop-sa-sa! Tonight we’ll celebrate to the full!

MUTTER

Ra-la-la-la...

BOTH

Ra-la-la-la...

VATER

And now, woman, listen how it was!

He sits on the bench; Mother meanwhile unpacks the groceries, lights the fire in the stove, breaks the eggs into a pan.

VATER

On the far side of the Great Forest grand festivities are being prepared: fair, wedding, jubilee, fireworks and a great Te Deum! My business is just blooming, so rejoice, wife! Whoever wants to celebrate in style must sweep, scrub and polish, so I set up my stall and went from house to house: "Brooms, brooms! Good brushes, cobweb-catchers!" And imagine – I sold everything in one go, at the best price! Quickly then, give me pot and pan!

He sweeps tinware from the shelf, which clatters onto the floor.

VATER

A bowl, a kettle, a jug – vivat roasting-pan!

MUTTER

Vivat roasting-pan...

BOTH

...long live the broom-maker!

Father lifts the bottle of caraway liqueur to his lips, but suddenly freezes.

VATER

Wait – where are the children? Gretel? Hänsel?!

MUTTER *(shrugs helplessly)*

Who knows... I only know the pot went to shards.

VATER

What? Our new pot?!

MUTTER

And the porridge spilled all over the room!

VATER (*pounds the table*)

Damn it! More mischief?!

MUTTER

Plenty of mischief, zero work. From afar I heard screams, they were jumping like wild colts – it made my head spin!

VATER

And in anger...

MUTTER

...and in anger I smashed...

VATER

...you smashed...

BOTH

...the pot!

They burst out laughing. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

VATER (*Mother still giggles*)

Come now, shrew, don't be cross – such 'angry pots' are mere trifles!

VATER

But tell me – where have the youngsters gone?

MUTTER (*sarcastically*)

Oh, perhaps to the Ilsenstein!

VATER (*horrified, snatches a broom from the wall*)

To the Ilsenstein?! Are you crazy?!

MUTTER (*contemptuously*)

Put that broom back.

Father obediently lowers the broom and wrings his hands.

VATER

If they strayed into that forest, on a night without moon or stars...

MUTTER

Heavens above!

VATER

You know that gloomy haunted spot – the lair of the wicked one!

MUTTER (*shocked*) ‘

The wicked one’? Whom do you mean?

VATER

The Knusperhexe!

MUTTER

The Knusperhexe?!

Father grabs the broom again.

MUTTER

And what do you plan to do with that broom?

VATER

A broom, a broom – what’s it for? Witches fly on brooms! An age-old witch lives deep in the forest, with power straight from the devil. At midnight, when none keep watch, she flies out on the hunt: out the chimney, astride the broom – a dreadful sight – over mountains and chasms, through mist and storm, she rushes, she rushes... that’s how witches fly!

MUTTER

Terrible! And this Knusperhexe?

VATER

By day, alas, in her crunch-crunch cottage she lures children with the smell of sweet pastry. No sooner does a child nibble at the gingerbread than she grabs it in a flash, thrusts it into an oven heated white-hot, and when the crust is nicely browned, she pulls out... gingerbread children!

MUTTER

And those gingerbread children?

VATER

The witch devours them!

MUTTER

The witch?!

VATER

The witch!

Mother wrings her hands.

MUTTER

Horror! Save them, heavens – my children! I can bear this no longer!

She rushes out of the cottage.

VATER

Hey, woman, wait! Take me along – we'll ride... on a witch's chase together!

He grabs the bottle of caraway liqueur and hurries after her.

Interlude

Music: "Hexenritt" (Witch's Ride).

SECOND SCENE

In the forest

A deep wood. In the background rises the rock "Ilsestein", surrounded by dense firs. To the right a huge fir-tree; beneath it Gretel sits on a mossy root, weaving a garland of wild roses; beside her lies a bunch of flowers. To the left, behind bushes, Hänsel is gathering strawberries. Evening light.

GRETEL

(softly humming while plaiting the garland)

In the wood stands a little man – silent, without a word, hidden all in a little purple cloak. Who may it be, pray tell, that stands so lone and still in a cloak of crimson velvet?

GRETEL

That little man forever stands on one foot and wears upon his head a tiny cap of black. Who may it be, pray tell, that stands so on one foot in his little black hood?

She lifts the garland, inspecting it from all sides.

GRETEL

...in his little black hood!

HÄNSEL *(leaps from the bushes, waving his basket triumphantly)*

Hurrah! My basket brim-full of strawberries! Mother will be proud of me!

GRETEL *(rises)*

My garland is ready too – it has never turned out so pretty!

She tries to place it on Hänsel's head.

GRETEL

Come, let's look for some fresh berries!

HÄNSEL *(pertly)*

A garland isn't for a boy – that's girls' stuff!

He sets the wreath on her head.

HÄNSEL

Hey, Gretel, fair Queen of the Forest!

GRETEL

Since I have a crown, hand me the sceptre – that bouquet!

HÄNSEL (*hands her the flowers and the basket of strawberries, kneeling in playful homage*)

Queen with sceptre and basket... only don't nibble!

The call of a cuckoo is heard.

HÄNSEL

Cuckoo, egg-gulping bird!

GRETEL (*mischievously eats one berry*)

Cuckoo, strawberry-sip!

HÄNSEL

Let's do as the cuckoo does when it peeps into other nests! Cuckoo, eater of eggs!

Dusk deepens.

GRETEL

Cuckoo, strawberry-sip...

HÄNSEL

...You abandon your own fledglings!

GRETEL

Cuckoo, gulp-gulp!

HÄNSEL

...You drain others' eggs! Cuckoo, slurp-slurp!

The children, getting wild, jostle over the berries; finally Hänsel tips the whole basket into his mouth.

GRETEL (*horrified*)

Hänsel, what have you done! You ate them all! Mother will skin us – she's not joking today!

HÄNSEL

Don't exaggerate – you were nibbling too!

HÄNSEL

In this darkness? Under beeches, among brambles? You can hardly see leaves, let alone berries. It's getting quite dark around!

GRETEL

Ah, Hänsel – what have we done! Silly of us to sit here so long.

The cuckoo is heard again, nearer this time.

HÄNSEL

Do you hear the rustling in the branches? Do you know what the forest says? "Children, children, are you not afraid?"

HÄNSEL (*looks about uneasily, lowers voice*)

Gretel... I don't recognize the way home!

GRETEL (terrified)

O God! What are you saying – we're lost?

HÄNSEL (*straightens bravely*)

What a coward you are! I'm a boy – I fear nothing!

GRETEL

But Hänsel, something bad is sure to happen to us!

HÄNSEL

Oh, Gretel, have some sense!

GRETEL

Look – what glimmers there in the dark?

HÄNSEL

Only birches in white shirts.

GRETEL

And there – something in the swamp is baring its teeth at us?

HÄNSEL (*stammering*)

T-t-that... that's only a gleaming willow trunk.

GRETEL

What a strange face it makes... do you see?

HÄNSEL

I'll tweak your nose in a moment, you tease!

GRETEL (*fearfully*)

Look! A light – coming closer...

HÄNSEL

It's only a will-o'-the-wisp, hopping to and fro. Courage, Gretel! I'll shout aloud.

He steps deeper into the forest and calls cupping his hands.

HÄNSEL

Who's there?!

VOICES (from the direction of the Ilsenstein)

VOICES

He's there!... He's there!

The children cower in terror.

GRETEL (*timidly*)

Hallo... is anyone here?

VOICES

Yes! Yes!

The children cling to each other.

GRETEL *(weeping)*

Did you hear? Someone answered softly! Hänsel, someone is near! I'm afraid... Oh, if only we were home! The forest looks ghostly!

HÄNSEL

Hold tight, Gretel. I'm keeping you close.

Thick mist veils the background.

GRETEL

White misty women are coming! Look – they wave, they threaten!... They want to touch us!

She screams and hides behind Hänsel under the fir.

GRETEL

Father! Mother!

The mist parts: a little grey man with a sack becomes visible.

HÄNSEL

Look, Gretel – a little man!

GRETEL

Ah!

The little grey man approaches friendly; the children calm down.

SANDMÄNNCHEN *(sprinkling their eyes)*

I am the little Sandmännchen, pst! I think no evil, pst! I love you, children, pst! From my sack two handfuls of sand I give to tired eyes, they'll close of themselves, you'll fall into blissful sleep. And when you sleep quite sweetly, the stars will light in heaven, and angels will bring the loveliest dreams... Sleep, dream, dear children!

He disappears.

HÄNSEL *(half-asleep)*

Sandmännchen was here...

GRETEL

Let us pray.

They kneel and fold their hands.

HÄNSEL, GRETEL

When night has come at last,

a circle of fourteen angels:

two stand at my head,

two stand at my feet,

two on my right side,

two on my left side,

two who will cover me,

two who will wake me,

two who will guide me

to paradise gardens!

They sink onto the moss and fall asleep, nestled together. Darkness. From the mist a luminous ladder forms; in pairs fourteen angels in bright garments descend and surround the children according to the prayer, the last pair remaining as guardian angels. The angels clasp hands and dance in a solemn circle. The scene is flooded with light. The curtain falls slowly.

THIRD SCENE

The Gingerbread House – morning

Stage and mist as at the end of the Second Scene; the angels have vanished. At dawn TAUMÄNNCHEN appears and shakes a bell-flower, sprinkling dew over the sleeping children.

TAUMÄNNCHEN

I am the little Dew Fairy, pst! I travel with the sun, pst! From sunrise to sunset I know who is lazy, who is diligent, pst!

Kling-klang! With a golden ray I slip into your eyes, with cool dew I wake all that sleeps.
And whoever rises early finds gold – so get up, sleepers, the day is laughing already!

Taumännchen hums and disappears. Gretel rubs her eyes and rises; Hänsel turns onto the other side.

GRETEL

Where am I? Am I dreaming? No — I'm lying under the fir-tree! High in the branches something whispers, birds sing their morning 'good day.'

Good morning, dear sparrows!

And you, lazybones, time to get up! Ti-re-li-re-li, it's time to rise!

HÄNSEL *(jumping up)*

Ki-ke-ri-ki! Still early! But I heard the lark — morning has come!

HÄNSEL

I feel great, I haven't slept so well in ages.

GRETEL

And you know? Under that fir-tree I had a wonderful dream...

HÄNSEL *(thoughtfully)*

I dreamed something too.

GRETEL

I heard angel choirs, light, rosy clouds, and then — a golden ladder down which angels came with little golden wings...

HÄNSEL *(breaking in eagerly)*

There were fourteen of them!

GRETEL *(astonished)*

You saw it too?

HÄNSEL

Sure — it was marvelous! And they went away... there!

The last veil of mist parts. In the rays of the rising sun the Gingerbread House gleams. At left a stove, at right a large cage, the whole surrounded by a fence of gingerbread figures.

GRETEL (*holds Hänsel back*)

Stop!

HÄNSEL (*stunned*)

What a wonder! I've never seen such a thing!

They stare as if enchanted.

GRETEL

How it smells... look at those cakes...

BOTH

...a house built of cake, a roof of pancakes, windows shining like sugar, raisins along the cornice, and all around — a gingerbread fence!

HÄNSEL

Quiet, nothing moves. Let's go closer!

GRETEL (*horrified*)

Have you lost your senses? You don't know who lives there!

HÄNSEL

But the house smiles at us! The angels have sent it to us!

GRETEL

Perhaps you're right...

HÄNSEL

It invites us — let's nibble a little piece.

BOTH

Come, let's crunch like two little mice!

Hand in hand they run, tiptoe to the house. After a moment's hesitation Hänsel breaks off a piece of cake from the right corner.

VOICE FROM THE HOUSE

Crunch-crunch, little nibblers, who is nibbling at my house walls?!

Hänsel, startled, drops the piece.

HÄNSEL

Did you hear that?

GRETEL *(uncertain)*

That... was the wind.

HÄNSEL

...the wind, child of heaven!

Gretel picks up the piece, tastes it.

GRETEL Hm!

HÄNSEL *(greedily)*

How does it taste?

GRETEL

Try yourself!

Hänsel keeps crunching, Gretel also nibbles at the house.

HÄNSEL *(hands on chest with delight)*

Hey!

BOTH

Hey!

BOTH

Oh tasty cake – one wants more! I feel as if I were already in heaven!

HÄNSEL

Ha, how tasty!

GRETEL

Too good to be true!

HÄNSEL

Sweet!

GRETEL

Delicious!

HÄNSEL

Ha...

GRETEL

How sweet!

HÄNSEL

...how yummy!

GRETEL

Maybe a confectioner himself lives inside!

HÄNSEL

Hey, Mr Baker, watch out! A mouse is gnawing a hole!

He breaks off a big piece of the wall.

VOICE FROM THE HOUSE

Crunch-crunch, little nibblers, who is nibbling at my house walls?

GRETEL, HÄNSEL (*innocently*)

The wind, the wind – the heavenly child!

Half of the door opens; the children do not notice. The Knusperhexe slips out silently and loops a noose around Hänsel's neck.

GRETEL

Wait, greedy little mouse, soon the cat will spring from the house!

HÄNSEL *(still chewing)*

I'm crunching, please don't disturb!

GRETEL *(snatches a piece from him)*

Not so quickly, Mr Wind!

HÄNSEL *(takes it back)*

The heavenly child takes what it finds!

They laugh "ha-ha-ha"; suddenly the witch's shrill cackle is heard.

KNUSPERHEXE *(cackling)*

Hi-hi-hi!

HÄNSEL *(terrified, tugs at the rope)*

Let go! Who are you? Let me go!

KNUSPERHEXE *(drawing them to her, stroking)*

My little angels... my plump boy! Come to visit me – how nice! So round and tasty!

HÄNSEL *(struggles)*

Get away, you nasty thing!

KNUSPERHEXE

Gently, darlings! I am Rosina Leckermaul – good, as innocent as a child! I love little children... yes, I love them... up to eating.

HÄNSEL

I don't like you! Go away!

KNUSPERHEXE *(laughs)*

What delicious morsels you are! Especially you, pretty girl! Come inside – chocolate, cakes, marzipan, creamy tarts, figs, almonds, dates – all yours!

HÄNSEL

I won't go with you, ugly!

GRETEL

You are far too kind!

KNUSPERHEXE

Look how clever they are! With me you'll feel as in heaven. Come, my little mice, into the house...

GRETEL

Say plainly – what do you plan to do with my brother?

KNUSPERHEXE

Feed him, fatten him with the finest delicacies so that he'll be soft and tender. And if he is not as meek as a lamb...

KNUSPERHEXE (*whispers in his ear*)

... a great 'joy' awaits him!

HÄNSEL

Speak loudly, not into my ear – what 'joy'?!

KNUSPERHEXE

Eh?

HÄNSEL

What great 'joy' awaits me?

KNUSPERHEXE

Oh, dear children, it will leave you breathless and speechless!

HÄNSEL

My eyes and ears are fine – I'll see to it nothing harms me!

HÄNSEL (*firmly, to Gretel*)

Gretel, don't believe those shiny words! Let's run away!

He tears off the noose, grabs Gretel; they dash forward, but the witch bars the way, brandishing a glowing wand.

KNUSPERHEXE

Stop!

(the light darkens)

KNUSPERHEXE

Hokus-pokus, cross and spell, whoever moves I crush to gel! Not a step ahead nor back – my gaze will freeze your neck!

The wand's orb flashes blindingly; Hänsel falls into a trance. The Witch leads him to the cage and slams the grate.

KNUSPERHEXE

Hokus-pokus, bonus jokus, children staring – eyes like posts! And now to the stable, dope!

The glow fades; daylight floods the scene again.

KNUSPERHEXE

Now, be good, little one. Hänsel will soon get fat – we'll stuff him with almonds and raisins. I'll fetch supplies, and you don't stir a whisker!

She wags her finger and disappears into the house.

GRETEL

Ah... how dreadful she is!

HÄNSEL *(whispers from the cage)*

Psst, Gretel! Be clever – watch everything. Pretend obedience, do whatever she says... hush, she's coming back!

The Witch returns, checks Gretel; she shoves a handful of raisins at Hänsel.

KNUSPERHEXE

There, little glutton, lick your chops!

She feeds him, then turns to Gretel, strokes her with a juniper twig.

KNUSPERHEXE

Hokus-pokus, juniper sprig, stiffness vanish – hop-sa!

Gretel regains movement.

KNUSPERHEXE

And now, run, dolly, lay the table: little bowls, little plates, knives, forks, a napkin for my beak! Quick and neat – or into the cage you go with brother!

Gretel disappears into the house. The Witch approaches the cage.

KNUSPERHEXE *(to the feigning-sleep Hänsel)*

Sleeping, scamp? See how the young can doze. Sleep, little lamb, soon you'll sleep forever... but first you, Gretel – you go to the oven!

She opens the furnace door; a dark-red glow lights her face.

KNUSPERHEXE

The dough is ready – the logs are roaring! I'll add another stick...

She rubs her hands.

KNUSPERHEXE

Gretel, we'll soon make of you a rosy roast in sugar and almonds! In my magic oven you'll turn into fragrant gingerbread! Hi-hi-hi-hi!

She falls into wild glee, grabs a broom, straddles it... She gallops around the stage.

KNUSPERHEXE

Galopp-lopp-lopp, my broom-stick nag, hur-hop, lazybones, wag! Hop-hop-hop! I love it so – in broad daylight I circle my hut to and fro! And at night, when none keep watch, I fly from the chimney to the sabbath! From five and six make seven, eight, nine is one, ten is none – so says the witch and flies till dawn!

With giant bounds she vanishes behind the house; returns, dismounts.

Whoa, broom – stay!

She hobbles to the cage, tickles Hänsel with the broom twig.

Up, rascal, show your little tongue!

HÄNSEL *(sticks out tongue)*

KNUSPERHEXE

Mmm, delicious! And now a finger...

Hänsel offers a stick.

KNUSPERHEXE

Ugh! Like a stick, horrid! Need to fatten you.

She calls.

KNUSPERHEXE

Gretel!

GRETEL *(from the door)*

I've brought the almonds!

She stands behind the Witch, murmurs a counter-spell.

GRETEL

Hokus-pokus, juniper sprig, body stiffness – be unrig!

KNUSPERHEXE *(turns)*

What's that you mutter, goose?

GRETEL *(flustered, louder)*

Enjoy, dear Hänsel!

KNUSPERHEXE

Hi-hi-hi! And you taste as well!

She pops a raisin into her mouth.

KNUSPERHEXE

Eat, birdie, or die!

She opens the oven; Hänsel signals Gretel.

HÄNSEL *(softly)*

Sister, be careful!

KNUSPERHEXE *(licking lips)*

My mouth waters for the sweet girl! Come, Gretel-sugar, crawl into the oven and see if the gingerbread is already brown.

GRETEL *(feigning clumsiness)*

Oh, I don't know how... Show me, please!

KNUSPERHEXE *(impatient, bending into the oven)*

Head first, it's childishly easy!

Hänsel grips Gretel's dress.

GRETEL

Show exactly – like this?

KNUSPERHEXE *(crawling in)*

That's enough... like so!

As the Witch inserts half her body, the children shove her – she falls wholly into the oven; they slam the door.

HÄNSEL, GRETEL

Now roast yourself, wicked woman!

They bolt the oven; flames burst, a brief, terrible scream of the Witch, then silence.

GRETEL, HÄNSEL *(mocking the spell)*

“Once you're in the oven – crack! The door – smack!” Now instead of Gretel you yourself are... the roast!

They fall into each other's arms.

BOTH

Yuch-hey! The Witch is dead, as dead as a mouse – trouble's fled! Yuch-hey! Silence like poppy-seed, and cakes – heaps indeed! The horror's over, the spell undone!

They clasp hands.

BOTH

Hey, let's rejoice – let's dance in firelight, feast in the gingerbread house!

They whirl in a waltz and approach the house. Hänsel darts inside; from an upper hatch he tosses down to Gretel apples, pears, oranges, gilt walnuts, sweets. Suddenly the Witch's oven shoots a flame; a bang – the oven collapses. Frightened, the siblings drop the goodies. Around them appear rows of gingerbread children whose crusts have just fallen away.

HÄNSEL

Look – so many children!

GRETEL

Where did they come from?

GINGERBREAD CHILDREN *(motionless, eyes closed)*

Delivered... free... forever free!

GRETEL

They sleep – and how beautifully they sing!

GINGERBREAD CHILDREN

Touch us that we may waken!

HÄNSEL *(timidly)*

You touch first... I'm afraid.

GRETEL

Let's stroke this pretty face.

She strokes one child – it opens its eyes and smiles. Others whisper entreatingly; Gretel passes from one to another. Hänsel snatches the juniper twig.

HÄNSEL

Hokus-pokus, juniper sprig, stiffness vanish – now!

The children awaken and surround the siblings.

GINGERBREAD CHILDREN

Thanks, thanks for all eternity!

All join hands and form a circle.

GINGERBREAD CHILDREN

The spell is broken, free and happy – let us dance around!

Singing and laughter ring out; the forest echoes. From offstage is heard the father's song:

VATER'S VOICE

Ra-la-la-la! Where are our children? Ra-la-la-la! Oh, here they are!

Father and Mother rush in; the children throw themselves into their arms.

ALL (*joyful hubbub*)

Father! Mother!

Two boys haul from the ruins of the oven a huge gingerbread in the shape of the Witch. A general outcry.

VATER

Look, what a wonder – the wicked witch has herself turned into brittle pastry!

CHORUS

See! Hard and crispy – that's the penalty for evil magic!

The gingerbread witch is carried back into the cottage.

VATER

Remember the judgment of heaven: evil will not endure long. When need is greatest, God stretches forth His hand!

ALL

When need is greatest – the Lord extends His hand!

The children dance in a merry round; the curtain falls.

8. Bibliography

1. Musical materials (primary sources)

1. Humperdinck, Engelbert. *Hänsel und Gretel: Märchenoper in drei Bildern* — full score. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1894.
2. Humperdinck, Engelbert. *Hänsel und Gretel: Klavierauszug* — piano reduction. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1894.

2. Secondary literature

1. Michalak, Tim; Ubber, Christian (eds.). *Engelbert Humperdinck – Ein biografisch-musikalisches Lesebuch*. Ahlen: Anno-Verlag, 2017. ISBN 978-3-939256-71-7.
2. Corvin, Matthias. *Märchenerzähler und Visionär. Der Komponist Engelbert Humperdinck*. Mainz: Schott Buch / BoD, 2021. ISBN 978-3-95983-619-7.
3. Pauer, Ernst. *The Elements of the Beautiful in Music*. London: Novello & Co., 1923, p. 25.
4. Strauss, Gabriele (ed.). “Lieber Collega!” *Richard Strauss im Briefwechsel mit zeitgenössischen Komponisten und Dirigenten*. Vol. 1. Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1996, pp. 210–213. ISBN 3-89487-241-1.
5. Kersting-Meuleman, Ann. “*Der Nachlass Engelbert Humperdincks in der Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main*.” Information brochure. Frankfurt a.M.: UB FFM, 2017.

3. Concert / theatre programmes and brochures

1. *recreation – Das Orchester. Hänsel und Gretel*. Concert programme, Stefaniensaal Graz, 16 Dec 2024. Graz: recreation, 2024.
2. English Touring Opera. *Hänsel and Gretel*. Programme, Theatre Royal Plymouth, 13 Nov 2011. London: ETO, 2011.
3. Theater Erfurt. *Hänsel und Gretel*. Programme booklet (revival), 27 Oct 2024. Erfurt: Theater Erfurt, 2024.

Attachments

a) Score link: <https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/805659>

b) Libretto link: <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/c/c5/IMSLP72483-PMLP11392-Humperdinck-Hansel%26Gretel.Le.pdf>

ⁱ Tim Michala Anno-Verlag, Ahlen 2017, 208 S., ISBN 978-3-939256-71-7 k und Christian Ubbel (Hrsg.) - „Engelbert Humperdinck – Ein biografisch – musikalisches Lesebuch”,

ⁱⁱ Matthias Corvin - „Märchenerzähler und Visionär. Der Komponist Engelbert Humperdinck”, Schott Buch / Books on Demand, Mainz 2021, ISBN: 978-3-95983-619-7