



Karajan

Humperdinck: Hänsel und Gretel



Hänsel und Gretel is often seen as the most child-friendly opera in the standard repertoire. As a musical fairy-tale it has all the right ingredients to delight a young audience: youthful protagonists who get into trouble with their mother (something all children can surely identify with!); a wicked witch who provides a suitable level of peril; and a happy ending with the family reunited and all the other children restored to life. Many opera houses in Europe and the USA deliberately schedule performances around Christmas time, and in fact this opera was chosen for the debut Saturday matinee broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera in New York on Christmas Day 1931.

In the summer of 1953 Walter Legge assembled an all-star cast for the very first studio recording of *Hänsel und Gretel*. Herbert von Karajan was chosen to conduct, continuing the relationship that Legge had forged with him during the recordings of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Die Zauberflöte* in 1950. Legge used the orchestra he had himself founded after the war. The Philharmonia lacked a permanent conductor but successfully enticed guest conductors such as Furtwängler and Toscanini to perform with them in London. Karajan conducted the orchestra regularly in the early 1950s and this recording clearly reflects the comfortable familiarity between them. Early reviews of the recording singled out the 'immense care' Karajan took with the score and the 'highest possible standard' of orchestral playing.

The siblings, Hänsel and Gretel, are sung by Elisabeth Grümmer and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. As a well-established operatic superstar Schwarzkopf has tended to headline all the issues of this opera, but to my mind the outstanding performance really comes from Grümmer. Grümmer's career was built around singing Mozart and lighter Wagnerian roles in the major opera houses of Germany and Austria. While Schwarzkopf gives us all the clarity, precision and insight anyone could want, Grümmer gives us youthful innocence as well as a very credible boyish boldness in her singing. It's a performance as Hänsel that surely has never been bettered on record. Although fans of Grümmer's art can listen to a number of her live recordings that have been released on CD, she made only a handful of studio recordings of complete operas and this one is surely the most memorable.

An excellent all-round cast provide fine support to Schwarzkopf and Grümmer. Maria von Ilosvay (Bayreuth's resident Erda and Waltraute during the 1950s) captures a mother's weariness to perfection and Josef Metternich is equally excellent as the father. Legge needed just five recording days to complete this recording in June and July 1953 and perhaps this helps it sustain a certain freshness. No section was over-rehearsed or over-recorded, indeed the prelude was famously recorded in just one take. The final result was instantly recognised as something very special with Opera Magazine describing it as 'highly rewarding operatic treat' that would 'give constant delight for many years to come.' Even when set against modern stereo versions this 1953 EMI classic remains the best studio recording of this charming opera.



PACO 162

hänsel elisabeth grümmer
gretel elisabeth schwarzkopf
mother maria von ilosvay
father josef metternich
witch else schürhoff
sandman anny felbermayer
dew-fairy anny felbermayer

philharmonia orchestra
choirs of loughton high school for girls
and bancroft's school

conducted by herbert von karajan

columbia studio recording, 1953

Pristine
XR

hänsel und gretel humperdinck



disc one

1. Overture (8:36)
2. Act I - Suse, liebe Suse (3:43)
3. So recht! (1:59)
4. Brüderchen, komm, tanz mit mir (3:38)
5. Holla! Himmel! Die Mutter! (1:40)
6. Marsch! Fort in den Wald! (2:30)
7. Ral la la la, ral la la la (5:30)
8. Drüben hinter'm Herrenwald (1:32)
9. Doch halt, wo bleiben die Kinder? (1:38)
10. Wenn sie sich verirrt (1:25)
11. Eine Hex', steinalt (2:42)
12. Hexenritt (4:23)
13. Act II - Ein Männlein steht im Walde (1:29)
14. Juchhe! Mein Erbelkörbchen ist voll (1:25)
15. Kuckuck, Kuckuck, Eierschluck! (3:24)
16. Gretel, ich weiß den Weg nicht me... (4:44)
17. Der kleine Sandmann bin ich (3:14)
18. Abends, will ich schlafen gehn (3:00)
19. Pantomime (6:34)

disc two

1. Act III - Vorspiel (2:23)
2. Der kleine Taumann heiß' ich (2:01)
3. Wo bin ich? Wach' ich? (5:48)
4. Bleib stehn! Bleib stehn! (0:42)
5. Wie duftet's von dorten (1:56)
6. Alles bleibt still (1:52)
7. Knusper, knusper Knäuschen (3:31)
8. Ich bin Rosine Leckermaul (4:17)
9. Halt! Hokuspokus, Hexenschuß! (1:24)
10. Nun, Gretel, sei vernünftig und ... (5:15)
11. Hurr hopp hopp hopp (1:44)
12. Auf! Wach auf, mein Jüngelchen (4:12)
13. Juchei! Nun ist die Hexe Tod (2:43)
14. Erlöst, befreit, für alle Zeit! (4:09)
15. Ei, da sind sie ja! Vater! Mutter! (2:22)

CAST

Hänsel - Elisabeth Grümmer
Gretel - Elisabeth Schwarzkopf
Gertud, Mother - Maria Von Ilosvay
Peter, a broom-maker, Father - Josef Metternich
the Witch - Else Schürhoff
The Sandman & The Dew-Fairy - Anny Felbermayer

The Philharmonia Orchestra
Choirs of Loughton High School For Girls, Essex &
Bancroft's School
Conducted by Herbert Von Karajan

BONUS TRACKS

ELISABETH GRÜMMER 1955 Aria Recordings

16. MOZART Le Nozze Di Figaro - Act 2 - Porgi amor (4:15)
17. MOZART Le Nozze Di Figaro - Act 3 - *Che soave zefiretto (2:48)
18. MOZART Le Nozze Di Figaro - Act 3 - Dove sono i bei momenti (6:44)
19. MOZART Così Fan Tutte - Act 1 - Temerari - Come scoglio (6:04)
20. MOZART Die Zauberflöte - Act 2 - Bald prangt, den Morgen zu verkünden (6:15)
21. STRAUSS Der Rosenkavalier - Act 3 - **Ist ein Traum, kann nicht wirklich sein (6:54)

Elisabeth Grümmer, soprano
with *Erna Berger and **Erika Köth, sopranos
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Wilhelm Schüchter

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on
a photograph of
Elisabeth Grümmer

Hänsel & Gretel
Rec. 27, 29, 30 June
and 1, 2 July 1953
Kingsway Hall, London

Mozart Arias
Rec. 7/10, 21/7, 21/12
1955

Strauss Aria
Rec. October 1955

Total duration:
2hr 20:24

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