

# HANSEL AND GRETEL

HUMPERDINCK

**KS2 – 4 RESOURCE PACK  
FOR TEACHERS**



**opera  
north**



# HANSEL AND GRETEL

Music by **Engelbert Humperdinck**

Libretto by **Adelheid Wette**

**Hansel and Gretel are sent out into the woods  
to gather food...**

**Whilst full of fun and adventure at first, the wood  
soon becomes a dark and threatening place...  
what really lies inside the woods?**

**The evil Witch lurks, ready to capture her prey...  
how will Hansel and Gretel fare...?**

NB – quotes taken from the libretto of Opera North's 2003 production of Hansel and Gretel.  
Please note, there may be some changes to the text in the 2017 production.

Hansel and Gretel production photos taken from Opera North's 1979 production and Opera North's 2008  
production (credit: Brian Slater). Please note, there will be changes in the 2017 production.



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# INTRODUCTION AND 'WHAT IS OPERA?'

This learning pack is intended to offer teachers and pupils in KS2, 3 and 4 an introduction to Opera North's production of the opera Hansel and Gretel by the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck.

The pack includes information about the composer and librettist, the world of opera, and an introduction to the opera Hansel and Gretel, including: the plot synopsis, an introduction to the characters, key themes, interesting facts and activity ideas dispersed throughout the pack for use in the classroom which can inspire further ideas for discussion. Also included is an introduction to the instruments of the orchestra and how they feature within the opera.

Definitions for highlighted words can be found in the glossary.

## What is Opera?

Opera is a **hybrid** art form consisting of music, text, drama, and design elements. It is an art form in which singers and orchestral musicians perform a dramatic work combining text (called a **libretto**) and **score**, usually in a music theatrical setting.

The term 'opera' comes from the Latin word 'opus' meaning work. Opera has a musical accompaniment throughout, performed by an **orchestra** and singers. Some operas include spoken word and dance. There are always key main characters within an opera whose parts are sung by professional singers. Often (although not in the case of Hansel and Gretel) an opera will include a part for an opera chorus which is performed by a group of professional singers; an **opera chorus** will often represent a large group of crowd of people within the opera. Hansel and Gretel does, however, include a small chorus of children.

As with any art form, individuals may enjoy one style of opera over another. Essentially, like any drama, opera is about people and their stories, but told through music and song. In opera you can find some of the most extraordinary music ever written for the human voice.

## Hansel and Gretel

Hansel and Gretel is an opera written in three acts by the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck, based on (although not a direct representation of) the Grimm brothers' fairy tale. The opera initially started as a **song cycle** consisting of four songs to form part of a play created by Humperdinck's sister Adelheid Wette. Various revisions were made to the song cycle and it was eventually developed and composed into a full scale opera between 1891-2 in Frankfurt.

The composer described Hansel and Gretel as a fairytale opera (or **Märchenoper** as it is known in German). **The libretto** (or text) was written in German by Adelheid Wette. **Please note that Opera North's production will be performed in English.**

### KS3 – 4

The opera falls within the period of the late 19th Century: it is a German language opera and, whilst you can hear lots of musical ideas which link the work to this period of late Romantic musical history (strongly influenced by Wagner), Humperdinck was keen that he was not seen to be following solely in the musical tradition of the time, but that he was taking inspiration from earlier composers such as Felix Mendelssohn, alongside German folk styles.

# THE WORLD OF THE OPERA



## The Composer

*The 'composer' is a person who writes music*

- Engelbert Humperdinck was the composer of Hansel and Gretel
- He was born in Germany on 1st September 1854
- He studied at Cologne University in Germany where he took music lessons
- In 1880, he had the opportunity to work with the famous German composer Richard Wagner
- Working with Wagner helped to inspire Humperdinck to develop his original work on Hansel and Gretel into a full scale opera
- Hansel and Gretel was composed between 1891-2  
It is known as the composer's most famous work
- Humperdinck died in Germany on 27 September 1921

## The Librettist

*The 'librettist' is a person who writes the words for an opera. A libretto is very similar to a film script – it contains all the information needed to tell a story.*

- Adelheid Wette was the Librettist for Hansel and Gretel
- She was born in Germany on 4 September 1858
- She was a writer and had a particular interest in German folklore and fairy tales
- She died during the First World War on 9 August 1916 in Germany

*For further information on the Composer for KS3-4, please see the further reading list*

# TIMELINE

- 1809 Felix Mendelssohn was born
- 1812 The Brothers Grimm published their first collection of fairy tales
- 1813 Richard Wagner was born
- 1847 Felix Mendelssohn died
- 1852 First Schleswig War
- 1854 Engelbert Humperdinck born on 1 September in Sieburg, Germany
- 1864 Second Schleswig War
- 1864 Richard Strauss born
- 1866 Austro-Prussian War
- 1870-1 Franco-Prussian War
- 1871 The Unification of Germany took place on 18 January 1871 at the Palace of Versailles in France, where Wilhelm I of Prussia was declared German Emperor (*Kaiser*)
- 1871 Otto von Bismarck was appointed Chancellor of the German Empire
- 1875 German author Thomas Mann was born
- 1879 Humperdinck won a Mendelssohn scholarship to Italy where he met Richard Wagner
- 1880-1 Humperdinck assists Wagner with the production of the opera *Parsifal* at Bayreuth
- 1883 Richard Wagner died
- 1885-7 Humperdinck taught at the Gran Teatre del Liceu Conservatory in Barcelona
- 1888 Wilhelm II declared as German Emperor and King of Prussia
- 1890-7 Humperdinck taught at the Hoch Conservatory Frankfurt
- 1891-2 Hansel and Gretel composed
- 1893 First performance of Hansel and Gretel on 23 December in Weimar, Germany, conducted by the composer (and Humperdinck's friend) Richard Strauss
- 1896 Humperdinck made a Professor by Kaiser Wilhelm II
- 1914 Outbreak of World War One
- 1918 End of World War One
- 1921 Engelbert Humperdinck died on 27 September in Neustrelitz, Germany

## Timeline Colour Code

General History  
 Music and the Arts  
 Engelbert Humperdinck

## Did You Know?

In 1965, British pop singer Arnold Dorsey adopted the name Engelbert Humperdinck – after the composer

# SYNOPSIS

This synopsis is based on the original Hansel and Gretel story.

Please note the 2017 production will offer a different interpretation of the plot.



Credit: Brian Slater

The opera is split up into three **acts** (or chapters), which tell a different part of the story.

## Act 1 – Home: The Broom Maker’s Cottage

Hansel and Gretel are playing at home, rather than working...

Mother arrives home to find Hansel and Gretel haven’t finished their chores...

In her anger, Mother sends Hansel and Gretel out into the forest to collect strawberries...

Father arrives home to discover that Hansel and Gretel are missing...

He warns Mother of the dangers of the forest, including the evil Witch...

In a panic, Father and Mother set out into the forest to search for Hansel and Gretel...

## Act 2 – The Wood

Hansel and Gretel are happily picking strawberries...

They decide to eat a few strawberries...

Suddenly they realise their basket is empty, darkness surrounds them and they are lost...

The wood suddenly becomes a frightening place...

The Sandman then appears and sings Hansel and Gretel to sleep...

Fourteen angels gather to protect Hansel and Gretel as they sleep...

## Act 3 – The Witch’s House

The Dew Fairy wakes Hansel and Gretel from their sleep...

Hansel and Gretel discover the Gingerbread House...

They begin to nibble away at the house, until...

The Witch appears...

She lures Hansel and Gretel inside, placing a spell on them...

Gretel breaks the spell and they push the Witch into the oven, to her death...

The Gingerbread Children come back to life after Hansel breaks the spell...

Hansel and Gretel are reunited with Mother and Father and everyone celebrates...

**For further information on the Synopsis for KS3-4,  
please see the further reading list**

# ACTIVITY IDEAS – KS2

## Activity Idea – KS2 Freezeframes (Music & Drama)

This activity helps pupils understand the story and characters in *Hansel and Gretel*, whilst developing their teamwork, verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Divide your class into small groups and allocate each group a section of the opera to act out; the challenge is to act out sections silently, without words. Encourage pupils to think about dramatic movement to ensure they communicate their scene clearly to the rest of the class.

For example:

### Act 1

1. Hansel and Gretel are playing games
2. Mother arrives home, she is angry when she discovers Hansel and Gretel haven't finished their work
3. Father arrives home... but what has happened to Hansel and Gretel? What about the Witch?
4. Hansel and Gretel could be in danger... Mother and Father set out into the woods

Use the above idea or other Acts from the opera to devise new freeze-frame activities.

Why not try adding in props, simple costumes, and musical sound effects.

## Activity Idea – KS2 Surroundings (Drama / Art / Music)

The set from the 2017 production of *Hansel and Gretel* will be very simple, with everyday objects being used by Hansel and Gretel to portray their world. This activity will help pupils to consider how they can use everyday items to create their surroundings:

- Get into small groups of 5 people and give yourselves 1 hour to design a set for either Act 1 (Home: The Broom Maker's Cottage) / Act 2 (The Wood) / Act 3 (The Witch's House)
  - Pictures, photos or materials as a backdrop
  - Classroom percussion instruments to make sounds heard in the woods
  - Simple props (e.g. – decorate a cardboard box to transform it into the Witch's oven)
- Your challenge is to only use existing props and materials in your classroom, so be creative! You might want to think about using:

## Activity Idea – KS2 Hansel & Gretel Summary (English)

- Write a summary of the story in no more than 100 words

# ACTIVITY IDEAS – KS3-4

## Activity Idea – KS3-4 FreezeFrames (Music & Drama)

This activity is intended to help pupils develop their understanding of the story, alongside gaining a greater insight into the lives of each of the characters. The activity helps pupils to develop their teamwork skills alongside both verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Divide your class up into small groups and allocate each group a section of the opera to act out; the challenge is to act out sections silently, without spoken word. Encourage the groups to think about physicality and dramatic movement to ensure they communicate their scene effectively to the rest of the class.

For example:

### Act 1

1. Hansel and Gretel are distracted from their work and decide to play games
2. Their mother arrives home, furious to find Hansel and Gretel playing; in her anger, she sends Hansel and Gretel out into the forest to gather food
3. Father – heard singing from afar – arrives home from work with an abundant supply of food for the family
4. Mother and Father sing merrily, forgetting their troubles... all is well until Mother confesses that she sent Hansel and Gretel into the forest

You can use the above ideas or take inspiration from other acts within the opera to create as many freezeframes as you like.

Why not try adding in props, simple costumes, and musical sound effects to help recreate a scene, conjure up a specific atmosphere or to use as a transition from each frame to the next.

Try taking the idea even further: encourage one group to act out the story, whilst another group write and perform their own musical accompaniment to the piece. Create freezeframes for subsequent acts in the opera and link them together with music, movement or text.

## Activity Idea – KS3-4 Surroundings (Drama / Art / Music)

The set from the 2017 production of Hansel and Gretel will demonstrate a clever use of space and everyday objects which Hansel and Gretel will use to depict the world around them. This activity will help pupils to consider how they can be resourceful by using everyday items to create their surroundings:

- Get into small groups of 5 people and give yourselves 1 hour to design a set for either Act 1 (Home: The Broom Maker's Cottage) / Act 2 (The Wood) / Act 3 (The Witch's House)
- Your challenge is to only use existing props and materials in your classroom, so be creative! You might want to think about using:
  - Elements of film or photos as a backdrop
  - Recorded or live sound to help create an atmosphere
  - use live musical instruments where possible
  - The use of light to create shadows
  - Create simple props to help set the scene

## Activity Idea: Hansel & Gretel Tweets – KS3-4 (English)

- Summarize the story of Hansel and Gretel in the form of a tweet – use no more than 140 characters

# MEET THE CHARACTERS

## Hansel

Voicepart: Mezzo-soprano

The brother of Gretel and one of the main protagonists in the opera. Hansel ventures into action quickly, not always thinking through the consequences of his actions. He seeks to protect and look after Gretel. The role of Hansel is performed by a female soloist: Katie Bray. This might seem unusual at first, but it is normal in opera for a young male role to be played by a female soloist to reflect the youth and innocence of the character.

## Gretel

Voicepart: Soprano

Hansel's sister; she likes to think of herself as the 'responsible one' in the sibling relationship. Gretel cleverly tricks the evil Witch which leads to the Witch's demise.

Listen to Hansel and Gretel's beautiful **duet** known as the Evening Prayer (or Absendsegen in German). Listen carefully and you will hear them start singing together (this is called **homophony** in musical terms); they then move into a short **fugue** passage which is when one person starts singing alone, and the other joins in later. This takes place in Act 2, Scene 2 after the Sandman has visited Hansel and Gretel:

## Hansel and Gretel

*'Where each child lays down its head,  
Fourteen angels guard the bed,  
Two will stand above me  
At my feet two love me  
Two upon my right hand  
On my left two more stand  
Two will give me warning  
Two announce the morning  
Two times seven will show me God in heaven'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQbe9cGgC2Y>

Gretel: Malin Hartelius, Hansel: Liliana Nikiteanu, taken from Zurich Opera's 1999 production of Hansel and Gretel

## Peter (Always referred to as 'Father')

Voicepart: Baritone

Peter is Hansel and Gretel's father. He only features in the first and third act of the opera. In the first act, the Father arrives back home in a drunken state. Did he drown his sorrows because the family are so impoverished, or did he drink to celebrate his success in selling goods that day, enabling him to buy food for the family? The Father may initially appear unreliable as he staggers into the family home, but his true, caring patriarchal character is displayed once he realises his children have gone missing.

Listen to Father's famous **aria** (written in the style of a folk song) 'Ach, wir armen Leute' from Act 1, Scene 3 – this is the first time we meet Father in the opera; he is just arriving home from his day's work:

*'Curse the poor, how much we suffer,  
Work all day and get no supper,  
In your pocket a burning hole!  
In your stomach a gnawing mole!  
Ral-la-la-la, ral-la-la-la,  
Hunger eats away your soul!'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfWq88Rbf0w>

Father: Sebastià Peris, performed by the Taller de Ópera del Conservatori Superior de Valencia

## Voice Parts

**Soprano** – female singing voice with the highest vocal range

**Mezzo Soprano** – female singing voice pitched between soprano and alto

**Alto** – lowest female singing voice, pitched below soprano and above tenor

**Tenor** - a singing voice between baritone and alto or countertenor, the highest of the ordinary adult male range

**Baritone** – male singing voice between tenor and bass

**Bass** – male singing voice with the lowest vocal range

## Gertrud (Always referred to as 'Mother') –

Voicepart: Mezzo-Soprano

Gertrud is Hansel and Gretel's mother. She also only features in the first and third act of the opera. We first encounter the Mother when she arrives home only to find Hansel and Gretel are playing rather than finishing their household chores. She is very cross and is quick to scold Hansel and Gretel for their actions, sending them into the forest to collect berries.

Listen to Mother's aria from Act 1, Scene 2 as she laments the family's poverty and her weariness:

<https://youtu.be/JnMEI4aoUfo?t=20m10s> (LISTEN FROM 20:10-22:00)

## The Witch

Voicepart: Mezzo-Soprano

The evil character of the opera, the Witch is cunning and deceptive. She tricks Hansel and Gretel (alongside the other children she has deceived in the past) into thinking that the gingerbread house is there to be enjoyed, however her ulterior motive soon becomes apparent. Don't be fooled by the sweetness and light that lies on the surface; underneath lies a very different reality. The Witch is quick to use magic to her gain.

Listen to an extract of the Witch's aria from Act 3, Scene 3 as Hansel and Gretel meet the Witch:

*'My name's Rosina Lickspittle;  
When you're with me there's nothing to fear,  
Quite harmless, just a poor old dear.  
I'm fond of children, as you will see,  
That's why I love to have them for tea!'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKjFtDc8As>

The Witch: José Manuel Zapata, taken from Glyndebourne's 2013 production of Hansel and Gretel

## The Sandman

Voicepart: Soprano

The Sandman is a mythical creature who sends Hansel and Gretel to sleep, sprinkling magic dust over their eyes to bring sweet dreams.

Listen to the Sandman's aria from Act 2, Scene 2:

*'I am the little Sandman. A friendly helping handman.  
My dears I've come to touch you, to cuddle and to clutch you.  
And gently spread my merchandise of sand into your weary eyes,  
At once those heavy eyelids close, in seconds you've begun to doze;  
And when you're deep and very fast asleep,  
light shimmers from the Lode star to show the angels where you are.  
Then they will bring you safely to the land of dreams.  
My dreaming, dreaming children, such happy seeming children,  
Linger in the land of dreams!'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRRZDuQDIDE>

Sandman: Martina Jankova, taken from Zurich Opera's 1999 production of Hansel and Gretel

You will notice that Susan Bullock is singing two roles in this production: Gertrud (Mother) and The Witch.

One of the reasons for this is because parallels can be drawn between the character of the Witch and the character of the Mother

## Activity Ideas - KS3-4 (English/Drama)

- Brainstorm the similarities in character between the Witch and the Mother
- Does the Mother's character change at all throughout the course of the opera?
- How do you think Hansel and Gretel view their Mother? Compare the Mother's character from the end of Act 1 (where she sends Hansel and Gretel into the forest) and contrast this with the end of Act 3 (when Hansel and Gretel are reunited with their parents)
- Can you imagine what it must be like for a singer to have to change roles within the opera? Try to think about how you would get into character to convince the audience. Think about:
  - Costume changes
  - How you might sing in a different way to reflect your character?
  - How would you act for each role?

## The Dew Fairy

Voicepart: Soprano

The Dew Fairy is a mythical creature who comes to wake Hansel and Gretel from their sleep. She sprinkles dew over Hansel and Gretel, whilst singing of the beauty of the morning and the nature around them.

Listen to the Dew Fairy's aria from Act 3, Scene 1:

*'When dew drops on the daisy the dawn is dim and hazy.*

*The early birds amaze me but woe betide the lazy.*

*Kling! Klang! Kling!*

*Each dawn you yawn as my surprise of sunlight fills your bleary eyes;*

*A gentle breeze is stirring, the hum of life is purring,*

*Then up you spring, reborn in the glory of the morning,*

*a golden day is dawning.*

*Wake up you sleepers, it's rise and shine.*

*Rise up and greet the sunshine. So up you sleepers*

*awake awake'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EOHmyKIkF4>

(LISTEN FROM 0:00-1:55)

Dew Fairy: Martina Jankova, taken from Zurich Opera's 1999 production of Hansel and Gretel

### Activity Idea: Characterisation in Hansel & Gretel – KS2 (English)

- Divide your class up into 7 groups
- Allocate one character from the opera to each group: Hansel / Gretel / Father / Mother / The Witch / The Sandman / The Dew Fairy
- Ask each group to produce bullet points for each character; think about: what makes them unique / how they interact / do any of the characters change during the opera?
- Ask each group to share their findings with the rest of the class

### Activity Idea: Characterisation in Hansel & Gretel – KS3-4 (English)

- Think about how each character is presented in the opera
- Do the characters conform to the stereotype of:
  - Mother
  - Father
  - Children (Hansel & Gretel)
  - Witch
  - Fairy/Sandman (supernatural characters)
- How are they similar and in what ways are they different? Compare and contrast.
- If you were going to play a particular character in the opera, how would you prepare to get into the role of that character?

## Hansel and Gretel – Opera North’s 2017 Production Cast & Photos



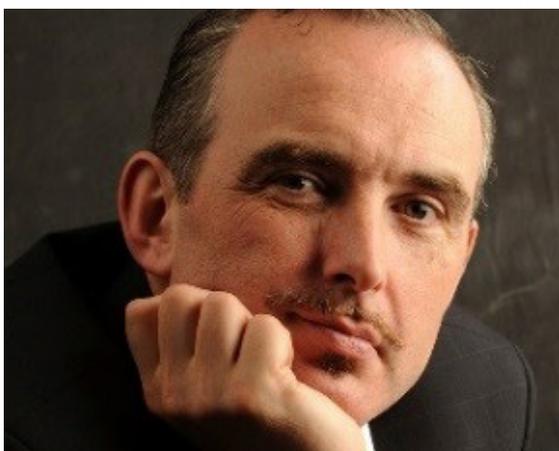
Credit: Fizz Photography

**Hansel – Katie Bray**  
Voicepart: Mezzo-Soprano



Credit: Sian Trenberth

**Gretel – Fflur Wyn**  
Voicepart: Soprano



Credit: Joe Low

**Peter (Always referred to as ‘Father’) –  
Stephen Gadd**  
Voicepart: Baritone



Credit: Christina Raphaelle

**Gertud (Always referred to as ‘Mother’) /  
The Witch – Susan Bullock**  
Voicepart: Soprano



Credit: Tim Dunk

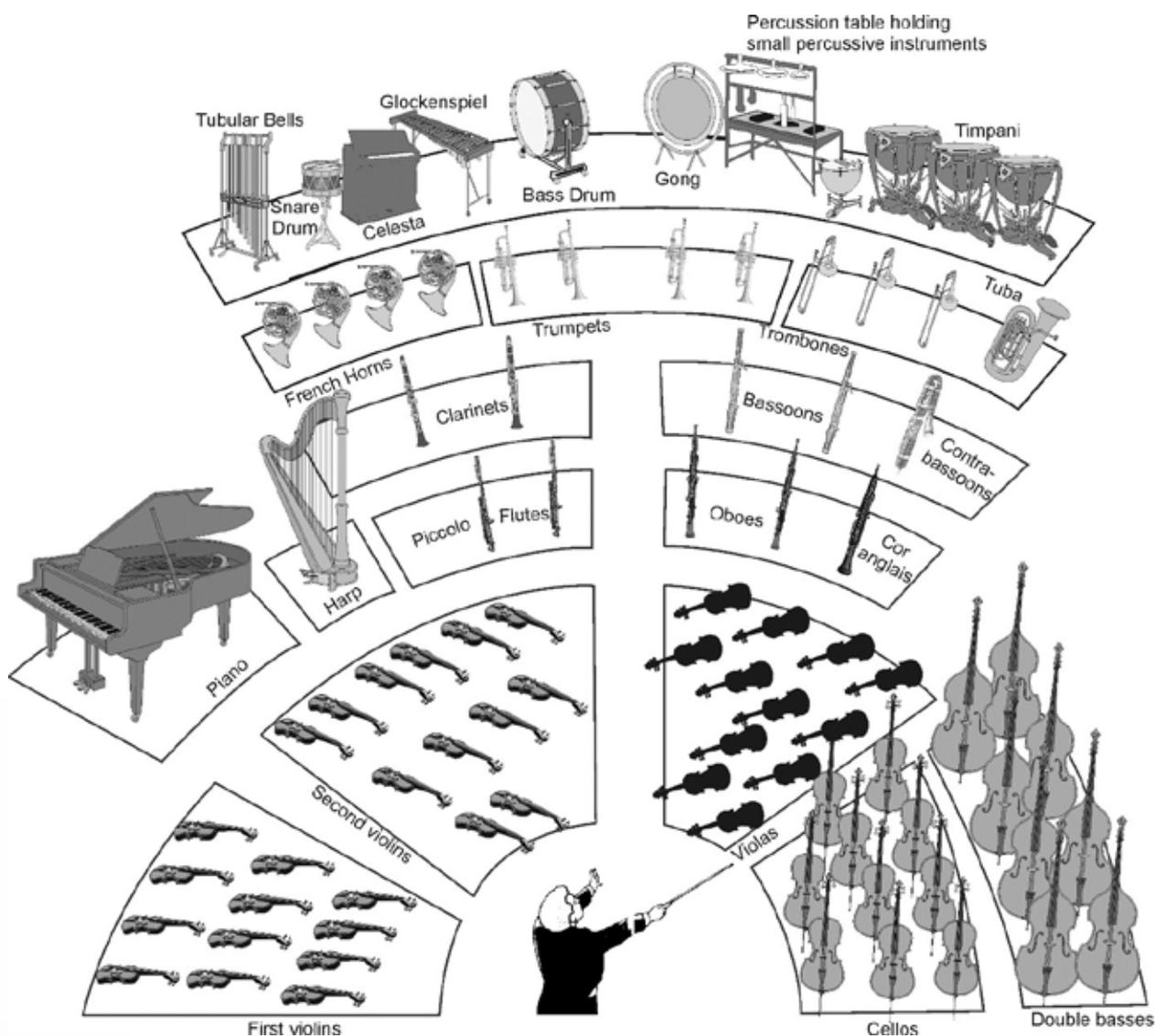
**The Sandman – Rachel J. Mosley**  
Voicepart: Soprano



Credit: Sian Trenberth

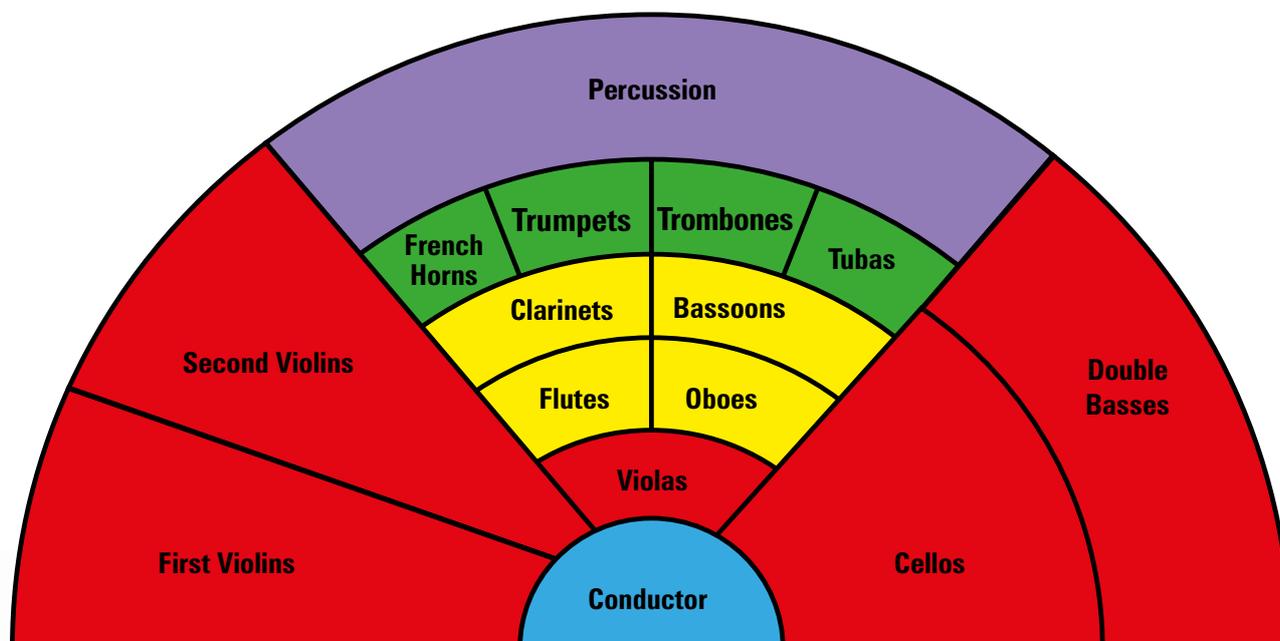
**The Dew Fairy – Amy Freston**  
Voicepart: Soprano

# MEET THE ORCHESTRA



The Opera North Orchestra is made up of a group of approximately 54 professional musicians, each of whom belong to a section (or family) within the orchestra, dependant on the instrument they play. The role of the orchestra in an opera production is to play the musical accompaniment to the opera. The orchestra also has its own **solo** moments within the opera where it plays on its own. These parts of the opera are known as:

- The **orchestral overture** - this is the introduction to the opera which helps to set the scene for the audience. The overture will often include famous musical themes which the audience will then hear later on in the production
- **Interlude** – the orchestral interlude is played during a scene change or between acts to mark a change in mood or atmosphere



Let's meet the four sections of the orchestra:

### Strings

### Woodwind

### Brass

### Percussion

We will learn more about how each section of the orchestra features in Hansel and Gretel below.

**For further information on the Orchestra for KS3 - 4, please see the further reading list – Meet the Orchestra**

## Strings

The string section is made up of four instruments: violin, viola, cello, double bass.

### The violin in Hansel and Gretel

Listen out for the beautiful violin solo which is played in Act 3, Scene 1 when Gretel awakes after the Dew Fairy's aria.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo>  
(LISTEN FROM 1:06:39-1:08:55)

The violin represents the birds singing, reflecting the words that Gretel is singing at that moment:

*'High in the branches a blackbird is calling.  
Down to my bedroom sweet notes are falling'*

Listen to the soaring ascending **melody** (tune) and the **trills** that the violin plays, perfectly depicting the song of a bird at dawn.

### The Viola & Cello in Hansel and Gretel

Listen to the duet between the Cello and Viola which takes place during the **orchestral interlude** before the start of Act 2, which sets the scene for the forest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo>  
(LISTEN FROM 38:27-39:07)

## Activity Idea – KS2-4 (Music)

- Can you ask pupils to guess which instrument starts the duet, and which instrument then takes over?
- See if the children can identify whether the cello and viola's melodies sound like a question and answer. In music terms, this is referred to as a **call and response**



## Woodwind

The woodwind section is made up of eight instruments: piccolo, flute, oboe, Cor Anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon.

### The Clarinet in Hansel and Gretel

Listen to the clarinet in Act 3, Scene 1 as it accompanies Gretel, soon after she wakes up in the forest with an ascending melody as she sings 'I slept here? In a pine tree bed!' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:06:37-1:06:58)

### The Flute, Clarinet and Oboe in Hansel and Gretel

At the beginning of Act 2, Scene 1 Gretel starts to sing:

*'Little man, who can you be, are you just another tree?  
Did you bring that crimson cloak for me?  
He balanced there on one leg and took his nap,  
And hid his glassy eye with his black, black cap.  
If I woke you, tap, tap, tap, would your little leg go snap,  
Hiding there beneath your black, black cap?'*

Listen as the Flute starts accompanying Gretel's song, then listen out for the Oboe and Clarinet as they join in too. See if you can hear the Flute and Clarinet play something called a trill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo>  
(LISTEN FROM 39:20-40:52)



## Brass

The brass section is made up of five instruments: horn, trumpet, tenor trombone, bass trombone and tuba. All of these instruments are played with brass mouthpieces; in order to make a sound out of the instrument, you have to 'buzz' on the mouthpiece (in other words, blow a raspberry!)

### The Horn in Hansel and Gretel

Listen to two examples of the Horn playing as part of the orchestra in Hansel and Gretel.

The first example is at the very beginning of the opera when four horns are playing in the orchestral overture helping to set the scene – listen to how the horns are playing both **melody** and **harmony**:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo>  
(LISTEN FROM 0:00-0:40)

The second example sees the horns accompany Gretel as she sings about the birds in Act 3, Scene 1 'Of course you [blackbird] rose at the break of day and now that the sun is up you're on your way. You busy blackbird, busy blackbird. Good to hear you!'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo>  
(LISTEN FROM 1:07:27-1:08:05)

### The Brass Section in Hansel and Gretel

Listen to how Humperdinck uses the whole of the brass section to full effect in Act 3 to mark Hansel and Gretel's discovery of and arrival at the gingerbread house – can you hear the trumpets echoing high above the rest of the brass section, then the rest of the brass section echoing the trumpet call? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:12:16-1:12:30)



## Percussion

The percussion section has a huge range of instruments which means it can vary greatly in size, depending on what the composer writes for. The percussion section falls into two main areas: tuned percussion and untuned percussion. In most pieces of orchestral music, the composer will write for Timpani (tuned) plus a selection of other percussion instruments (tuned and untuned).

The percussion instruments featured in *Hansel and Gretel* are: Timpani, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Triangle, Tambourine, Tam-Tam, Castanets, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Thunder Sheet.

### Bells in *Hansel and Gretel*

Listen to the bells that are played to accompany the Dew Fairy's song during Act 3 – the inclusion of bells in the score really helps to enhance the fairy tale theme: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:04:50-1:06:19)

### The Cuckoo in *Hansel and Gretel*

Listen to the Cuckoo instrument accompany Hansel and Gretel as they echo the sound of the bird in Act 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 42:32-43:58)

### The Harp in *Hansel and Gretel*

Listen to the harp as it plays arpeggios and glissando at the beginning of Act 3, Scene 2 when Hansel and Gretel discover the Gingerbread House 'Keep still! Not a sound! What is that, like magic and not a sound? As if some magical spring had unwound!' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:12:05-1:12:50)



## Orchestra Pit

In opera productions, you will notice that the orchestra do not play on the performance stage itself; they play in an orchestra pit. This is a specially sunken stage for the orchestra that sits below and just in front of the main stage where the production takes place. The **orchestra pit** is often dark and you might notice that the orchestra plays with lights on their music stands to help them see their music.

## Conductor

The **conductor** stands at the front of the orchestra pit (usually stood on a platform box to help them see across the whole of the orchestra). The conductor's job is to keep the orchestra playing in time with one another and with the soloists and chorus on stage. The conductor also carefully balances the sound made by each performer, to ensure that no part dominates another. A conductor will either use a **baton** or their hands to conduct (direct) the orchestra and performers on stage. The conductor reads from a very large **conducting score**; this large book contains music **notation** for each instrument in the orchestra and the singers, together with special performance markings from the composer.

## Did You Know?

The Thunder Sheet (a huge piece of very thin metal, often suspended on a frame and shaken vigorously by the percussionist to produce a thunderous sound) is used to great effect to depict the explosion of the Gingerbread House towards the end of Act 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:38:55-1:39:20)

## KEY THEMES



Photos: Brian Slater

### Hunger & Poverty

Hunger and poverty are key themes which underlie the opera. Hansel, Gretel and the Mother all lament their ongoing struggle from the outset – this is exacerbated by the fact that they cannot see an end to their problems:

*'Oh yes my stomach thinks it could eat a stone.  
Just crusts of bread, that's all we've had,  
Hunger keeps gnawing driving you mad'*

**Gretel & Hansel – Act 1, Scene 1**

*'My God we're desperate, we've nothing to live on,  
the children will starve and there's nothing to give them.  
No stock in the stock pot no crust in the bin  
No wonder they're feeble and thin.  
I'm exhausted. Weary, I'm finished.  
Dear God give us money.'*

**Mother – Act 1, Scene 2**

### Fear

Fear appears throughout the opera and is displayed most frequently by Hansel and Gretel. They are fearful of their Mother's reaction to their behaviour, the threat of danger in the woods and the Witch:

*'I'm frightened, it scares me;  
There is bad in the wood  
This is where children get lost for good'*

**Gretel – Act 2, Scene 1**



Photos: Brian Slater

## The Supernatural

The supernatural relates to elements that exist outside of the 'natural' world and this is a key theme of any fairy tale, adding to the intrigue of the plot. There are three supernatural characters in Hansel & Gretel:

- The Sandman
- The Dew Fairy
- The Witch

### Did You Know?

In German folklore, the woods depict a place of danger and magic – a place of the unknown where the supernatural lurks

## Justice

There is finally an end to the Witch's evil antics as she dies in Act 3; justice is done when we discover that the gingerbread children come back to life after the Witch's death:

*'Now that the Witch is dead baked to bread  
We're out of dread  
Teach her to boast and brag  
Roast the hog! Toast the scrawny scrag!  
We foiled her on our own, broil the crone!  
Boil her down to bone!'*

### Hansel & Gretel – Act 3, Scene 3

*'Give thanks to be alive!  
Give thanks that we survive,  
Alive that we may strive for life and light  
For strength and sight give thanks with all your might!'*

### Hansel & Gretel and the Gingerbread Children – Act 3, Scene 4

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR – EDWARD DICK

Credit: Sydney Theatre Company



### **Q: HOW DID YOU COME ABOUT DIRECTING HANSEL AND GRETEL? DID OPERA NORTH APPROACH YOU IN THE FIRST INSTANCE?**

The idea came out of a series of conversations I'd been having with Christine Chibnall, the Planning Director at Opera North. Christine was keen to do a season of fairy tale operas all of which would use video in some way, and we both thought that Hansel and Gretel would be an interesting piece to explore under those conditions.

### **Q: CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR IS IN AN OPERA PRODUCTION? DO YOU ASSEMBLE YOUR OWN TEAM TO WORK WITH?**

Because this opera is part of a season of three operas, all of which need to share some physical elements, the creative team was put together as part of a negotiation with the other Directors. As it turns out, I haven't worked with any of the team before, but they're all people that I was keen to collaborate with. As a Director there are things that attract you to the piece, and things that you want to explore in it, and you work with your team to find a way of expressing those things in a way that makes theatrical sense, and that responds to the music. It's up to you to lead that process, and take responsibility for the decisions that are made, and then to work with the performers to realise that vision for the audience.



**opera  
north**



'I was also interested from the beginning in the idea of doubling the Mother and the Witch'

**Q: HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE ROLE OF DIRECTING AS A CAREER? CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATHWAY?**

I started off directing plays at University and then became an assistant to a director called Declan Donnellan, whose company Cheek By Jowl tours stripped down, actor led productions of the classics around the world. I learned a huge amount about working with performers, and, because I was responsible for restaging the shows on tour, and because the productions often had very little by way of sets, that taught me a great deal about staging, which is quite hard to learn as a young director, except by doing it. I then graduated to fringe productions and then larger scale productions of my own. One of these was seen by Jonathan Reekie, who then programmed the Aldeburgh Festival and who offered me my first opera, Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, which was a wonderful experience, largely because I got to work with David Parry, a conductor who was very supportive and collaborative. I've been lucky enough to direct a few operas since, and it's a form I love, but I still feel like I'm on a learning curve.

**Q: DID YOU DECIDE WHETHER THE OPERA SHOULD BE PERFORMED IN GERMAN OR ENGLISH? HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT MAKING THIS DECISION?**

I think it was decided to do it in English - in David Pountney's wonderful translation - because there's so much charm and wit in the language of the piece, and it's easier to communicate that more directly to our audiences in translation.

**Q: HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR DIRECTING THIS PRODUCTION?**

There was a lengthy design process, which gave us the opportunity to explore lots of different ways of doing the piece, and to work through lots of different iterations of it before making a final decision. Essentially it was a series of meetings with the various designers, in which we'd interrogate what we thought the piece was about, and explore what we were trying to say about it and how we might do that, rejecting some ideas and refining others. All the time you're listening to the music, and trying to respond to it in the decisions you make. More recently I've been working through the piece with Gary Clarke the Choreographer, thinking about the specific staging challenges.

**Q: CAN YOU TELL US WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO PRESENT THE STORY OF HANSEL AND GRETEL IN THIS PARTICULAR WAY FOR THIS PRODUCTION?**

Well the initial brief was to use video in some way, so the first challenge was to find a way of doing that in a way that was conceptual and at the centre of how the story was going to be told, not merely decorative. So that was the starting point - Hansel and Gretel playing with a live camera and using it to create an imaginary world in which they get lost - a bit like the Blair Witch Project. I was also interested from the beginning in the idea of doubling the Mother and the Witch, which I think opens up some of the psychological themes at the heart of the fairy tale - the idea that the Witch is a product of the children's imagination, a fantasy version of the Mother who at first seems to be everything the Mother is not - generous rather than neglectful, but who in fact turn out to be a cannibal who must be overcome in order for Hansel and Gretel to grow up into adults. That's the idea at the heart of the production, and hopefully the live video is a playful and theatrical way of exploring it.

# BEHIND THE SCENES



In addition to the Conductor, Director, Soloists, Orchestra and Chorus, did you know that there is a vast team working hard behind the scenes for every single opera production that Opera North stages each season?

This is what the team looks like:

## Technical Team

- Stage Managers
- Stage Technicians
- Stage Wingmen
- Flymen
- Sound & Video Engineer/Manager
- Lighting Crew
- Electricians

## Wardrobe Team

- Costume Supervisors
- Wigs/Make-up Supervisor
- Wig Supervisors/Assistants
- Wardrobe Supervisors/Assistants
- Sewing Assistants

## Activity Idea – KS2-4 (Music)

- Using the Hansel and Gretel sketches as inspiration, have a go at designing your own costumes for the main characters in Hansel and Gretel: Hansel / Gretel / Mother / Father / Witch / Sandman / Dew Fairy
- Present your ideas to the rest of the class, explaining the inspiration and your ideas behind your design

For each opera production, the Director assembles a team to work alongside him/her to ensure that their overall vision for the opera comes to fruition in the form of the set, costumes, lighting and sometimes supplementary video or sound. The team for Hansel and Gretel is as follows:

Set Designer	GILES CADLE
Costume Designer	CHRISTINA CUNNINGHAM
Lighting Designer	MATTHEW HASKINS
Video Designer	IAN WILLIAM GALLOWAY
Choreographer	GARY CLARKE

The Opera North Technical Team and Wardrobe Team have to liaise closely with the Director and the team to ensure that their designs for the set and costumes are in keeping with the Director's overall vision for the opera.

Our colleagues in the Wardrobe Team have kindly provided us with some pictures of the initial sketches for the costumes that will be worn in Hansel and Gretel:

Witch



Mother



Father



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## Act

the main division of an opera i.e. Act I, Act II etc.

## Aria

a long accompanied song for solo voice

## Arpeggio

A musical technique where notes in a chord are sung one after another rather than together

## Baton

A thin stick used by a conductor to direct an orchestra

## Call and Response

Two related musical phrases sung one after another in a 'question and answer' style

## Composer

A person who creates music, either by musical notation or oral tradition. Literally 'one who puts together'.

## Conducting Score

A book of musical notation used by the conductor containing all of the music for the instrumental parts, chorus and vocal soloists

## Conductor

The person who directs the performance of the orchestra and the musical performance of the singers

## Duet

A performance by two singers (or instrumentalists)

## Flymen

People who are in charge of raising and lowering scenery during the opera performance

## Fugue

A piece of music with several different melody lines. One melody enters first and the others join in later

## Glissando

A musical technique where the instrumentalist or singer 'slides' between notes

## Harmony

Harmony is created when two or more notes are sung or played at the same time

## Homophony

Music played in block chords

## Hybrid

Something made by combining two or more different elements

## Librettist

The person who writes the Libretto for an opera

## Libretto

The text of the opera, like the script in a film or a play. Literally 'little book'

## Melody

The main tune of a piece of music

## Notation

The written symbols in a score that performers read to perform a piece of music

## Opera Chorus

A group of singers who sing together in the opera

## Orchestra

The group of instruments (strings, woodwind, brass, percussion) that play the musical accompaniment in an opera

## Orchestral Interlude

A short piece of music played between the longer sections of the opera

## Orchestral Overture

A piece played by the orchestra at the beginning of an opera

## Orchestra Pit

The lowered area in front of the stage in a theatre where the orchestra performs

## Romantic Period

A style of music from around 1800-1900.

## Score

A book of musical notation showing all of the music of the opera, including the instrumental parts, chorus and vocal soloists

## Solo

A song or piece of music sung or played by just one performer

## Song Cycle

A group of songs performed together. Usually linked by common theme or a story.

## Stage Managers

Coordinate all the activities on stage, including the technical operations and liaising with different departments to ensure the performance runs smoothly

## Stage Technicians

In charge of light and sound

## Stage Wingmen

Work on set-building and get-outs

## Trills

A musical technique in which a performer moves backwards and forwards between two notes very quickly

## Tuned percussion

Instruments that, when struck, produce an audible note

## Untuned percussion

Instruments that are struck and produce no clear note

## Further Reading for KS3-4

### Composer

### Synopsis

### Meet the Orchestra

## Other resources

A short video synopsis of the opera, from Glyndebourne Education

### [Watch Video](#)

For more information about the instruments of the orchestra, refer to this helpful guide from the Philharmonia Orchestra:

<http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/explore/instruments>

Hansel and Gretel Schools' Matinee performances supported by The Kirby Laing Foundation



Hammerson



Hansel and Gretel Leeds Schools' Matinee performance supported by Hammerson

Hansel and Gretel Salford Quays Schools' Matinee performance supported by the Sir John Fisher Foundation

Hansel and Gretel Newcastle, Salford Quays and Nottingham Schools' Matinee performances supported by The Foyle Foundation



FOYLE FOUNDATION

Opera North Education is supported by the Opera North Future Fund and the Whitaker Charitable Trust

# THE COMPOSER

## FURTHER READING FOR KEY STAGE 3 AND 4

### **The Composer – Engelbert Humperdinck (1854 – 1921)**

The composer Engelbert Humperdinck was born in Germany in 1854, a year after the outbreak of the Crimean War. Whilst there were musical influences at home, his family were keen for him to pursue a career in architecture rather than music. However, when Humperdinck went to study at Cologne University in Germany, he took music lessons to further his musical education and knowledge. After further study in Munich, Humperdinck won a Mendelssohn scholarship to Italy in 1879 where he met the composer Richard Wagner and was given the opportunity to assist him on the production of his opera Parsifal at Bayreuth. Humperdinck was also friends with the German conductor and composer Richard Strauss; Strauss praised Hansel and Gretel highly and was hugely supportive of this work – so much so that he conducted the first performance in December 1893. The opera became one of the most successful German operas ever – it remains Humperdinck's most famous work. Humperdinck was actually better known as a teacher of composition rather than a composer. He taught at the Gran Teatre del Liceu Conservatory in Barcelona (1885-87) and the Hoch Conservatory Frankfurt (1890-97). In 1896 Humperdinck was made a Professor by Kaiser Wilhelm II (who was the last German Emperor and King of Prussia).

### **Other works composed by Engelbert Humperdinck**

**Die sieben Geißlein (The Seven Little Kids), 1895**

**Königskinder (King's Children), 1897, 1910**

**Dornröschen (Sleeping Beauty), 1902**

**Die Heirat wider Willen (The Reluctant Marriage), 1905**

**Bübchens Weihnachtstraum (The Christmas Dream), 1906**

**Die Marketenderin (The Provisioner), 1914**

**Gaudeamus: Szenen aus dem deutschen Studentenleben  
(Gaudeamus igitur: Scenes from German Student Life), 1919**



# SYNOPSIS

## FURTHER READING FOR KEY STAGE 3 AND 4

The opera is split up into three acts (or chapters), which tell a different part of the story.

### Act 1 – Home: The Broom Maker’s Cottage

Hansel and Gretel are doing chores in the house; they soon become bored of their work so decide to cheer themselves up by dancing and singing to distract them from their hunger. Suddenly their Mother arrives home to find them galling around, as opposed to working. She is cross with Hansel and Gretel and berates them for their behaviour. In her anger, she accidentally knocks over the milk jug which contained their supper. Left with nothing to eat that evening, the Mother sends Hansel and Gretel out into the forest to collect strawberries.

The Mother is tired and weary, worn down by constant poverty. Just as she collapses in a chair, the Father arrives home. He can be heard singing from some way off before he arrives. The Father appears on the scene in a very jovial mood; it isn't long before Mother realises that he is tipsy. She is initially cross with him, but soon changes her tune when Father reveals a bag full of food for the family. Mother and Father begin to relax and laugh off the pressures of the day, until Father asks after Hansel and Gretel and Mother reveals that she sent them off into the woods. Father informs Mother of the dangers of the woods – most notably the Witch. In a panic, Father and Mother set off into the wood to look for Hansel and Gretel.

### Act 2 – The Wood

Hansel and Gretel are happily picking strawberries and enjoying the nature that surrounds them in the wood (listen out for the cuckoo call within the orchestra’s percussion section). In their merry state, Hansel and Gretel decide to eat a few strawberries; however, it isn't long before their basket is empty. Gretel tells Hansel off for finishing off the strawberries and she fears the reaction of their Mother if they return home with nothing to eat. They decide to try and search for more strawberries until they realise it has turned dark outside and they are, in fact, lost. Soon the nature around them becomes frightening and intimidating. In the midst of their fear, the Sandman appears in the distance. The Sandman sings a beautiful song, sending Hansel and Gretel to sleep. As Hansel and Gretel sleep, fourteen angels gather in the clouds and form a circle to protect Hansel and Gretel from harm as they sleep.

### Act 3 – The Witch’s House

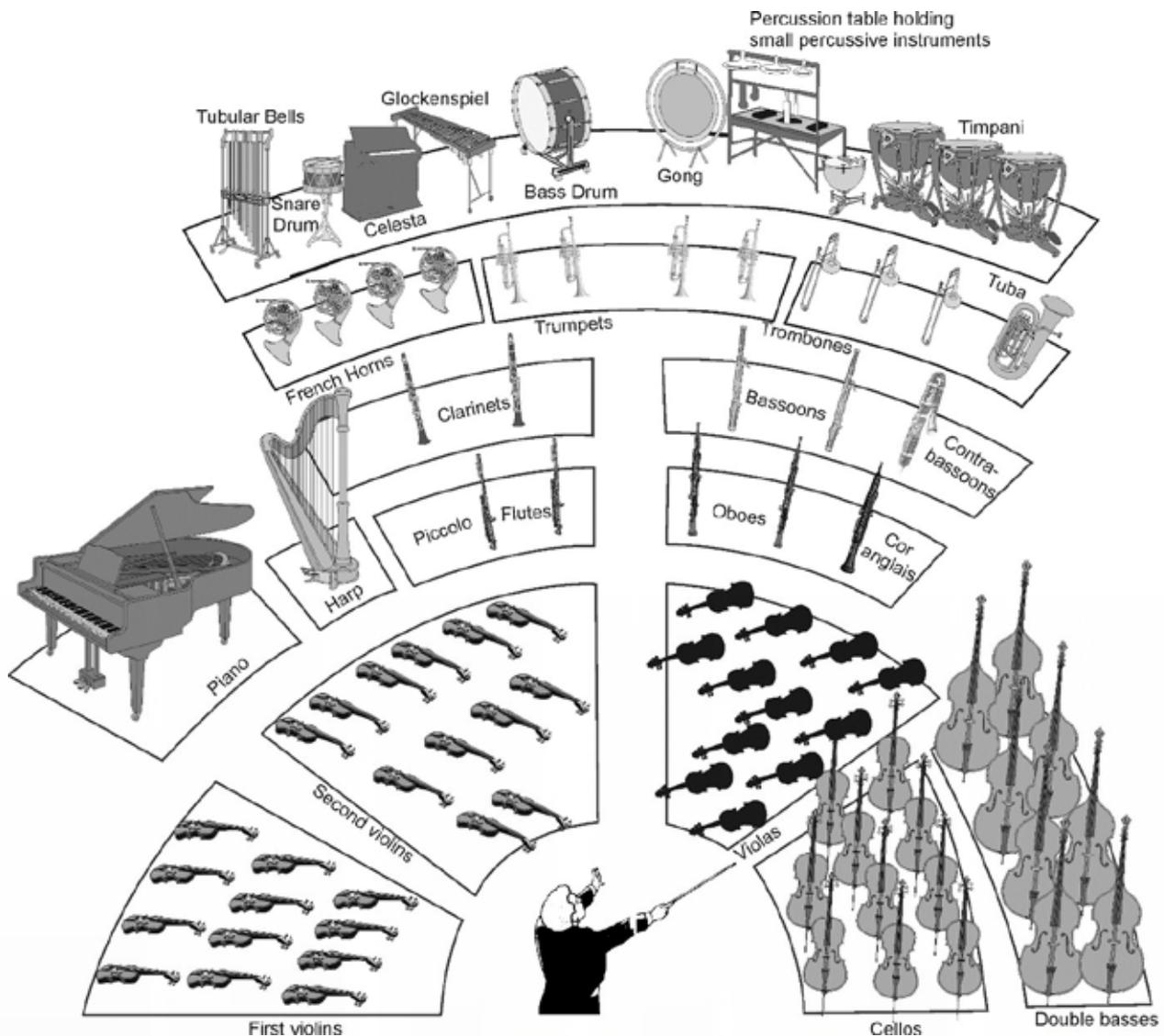
The Dew Fairy arrives in the morning to wake up Hansel and Gretel. They start the day in a happy mood and cannot believe their luck when they discover the Gingerbread House on their travels. Hungry and excited, Hansel and Gretel start to break off and eat the gingerbread. They are convinced that a woodland princess must dwell within such a lovely, sweet house. As they continue to nibble away at the Gingerbread House, the Witch emerges from the house. She lures Hansel and Gretel inside the house, casting a spell on them. She locks Hansel in a cage, intending to fatten him up so she can eat him. The Witch releases Gretel from the spell so that she can help the Witch operate the oven. Gretel helps Hansel escape from the cage and, as the Witch shows Gretel how to use the oven, both children push the Witch into the oven. As the Witch dies, the fence of gingerbread men turns back into children who were cooked and eaten by the Witch. Hansel breaks the Witch’s spell that has been placed on the gingerbread children and they come back to life, thanking Hansel and Gretel for breaking the Witch’s spell.

Father and Mother arrive to find Hansel and Gretel safe and well and the family celebrate the death of the Witch together with the children.



# MEET THE ORCHESTRA

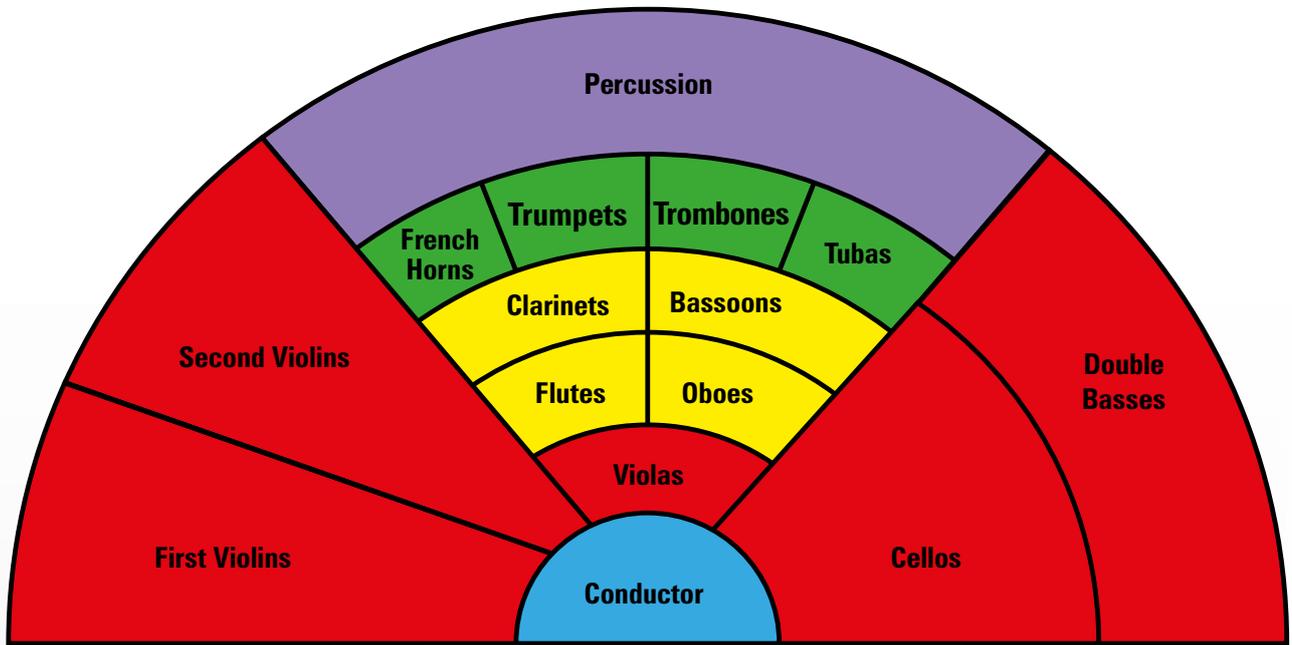
## KS3 – 4 FURTHER READING



The Opera North Orchestra is made up of a group of approximately 54 professional musicians, each of whom belong to a section (or family) within the orchestra, dependant on the instrument they play. The role of the orchestra in an opera production is to play the musical accompaniment to the opera. The orchestra also has its own **solo** moments within the opera where it plays on its own. These parts of the opera are known as:

- The **orchestral overture** - this is the introduction to the opera which helps to set the scene for the audience. The overture will often include famous musical themes which the audience will then hear later on in the production
- **Interlude** – the orchestral interlude is played during a scene change or between acts to mark a change in mood or atmosphere

# LET'S MEET THE FOUR SECTIONS OF THE ORCHESTRA:



**Strings**

**Woodwind**

**Brass**

**Percussion**

# STRINGS

The string section is made up of four instruments: violin, viola, cello, double bass.

## Let's find out more about each instrument

### Violin

- The violin is the smallest member of the string family.
- It is made of wood and has four strings (G D A E) which can be played with a bow made of horse hair (producing a smooth legato sound) or by being plucked with a finger (producing a detached staccato sound)
- The range of notes that the violin can play is from G to G; it can play higher than any other string instrument. Its music is notated (written in) the treble clef
- In the orchestra, the violins are divided up into two sections: First Violins & Second Violins. The First Violins usually play the melody whilst the Second Violins often play the harmony

### Viola

- The viola is slightly larger and can play lower notes than the violin; it has a rich, warm sound.
- It has four strings (C G D A) and its note range is from C to A.
- Some of its lower music is notated in the alto clef, whilst its higher music is notated in the treble clef
- It can also be played legato with a bow, or staccato by being plucked

### Cello

- The cello is much larger than the viola – so large, in fact, that it cannot be rested on a shoulder to be played; it has a large spike at the base so it can balance on the floor and it rests in between the cellist's legs to keep it in place whilst playing
- The cello is known as the 'tenor' voice in the string section; it has a beautiful rich, melancholic tone and is able to play expressive melodies and bass lines
- The cello has four strings (C G D A) and its note range is from C to C. It can play all the way from the bass clef through to the treble clef
- It can be played legato with a bow, or staccato by being plucked

### Double Bass

- The Double Bass is the largest member of the string family and it can play the lowest notes
- It has four strings (E A D G) and its note range is from D to G, played in the bass clef
- The double bass generally plays rhythmic notes, supporting the bass line or harmonies within an orchestra. Occasionally the double bass will have its own solo moment
- It can be played legato with a bow, or staccato by being plucked
- Double Bases also feature heavily in jazz music – you will often hear them playing staccato notes

# WOODWIND

The woodwind section is made up of eight instruments: piccolo, flute, oboe, Cor Anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon

## Let's find out more about each instrument

### Piccolo

- The Piccolo is the smallest member of the woodwind family
- The name is taken from the Italian word piccolo which means 'small'. It is half the size of a flute and can play an octave (8 notes) higher. Its note range is from D to B and it plays in the treble clef
- Flute players will often alternate between playing the flute and the piccolo
- It has a high-pitched sound which adds real clarity and brightness to the orchestra
- Most piccolos are made out of wood

### Flute

- The flute is one of the most well known instruments of the orchestra
- It is made out of metal and is the oldest known instrument
- Its note range is from C to C and it plays in the treble clef
- Composers often write beautiful solo melodies for the flute - listen to how the flute opens and features throughout Debussy's Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rpw4-J49auQ>

### Oboe

- The oboe is known as the soprano voice of the double reed family
- It is made out of wood and is played with a double reed – it is called double reed because it consists of two pieces of cane which vibrate against each other to produce a sound
- The sounds of an oboe is often described as 'pastoral' because in the past double reed instruments were used in folk music
- Its note range is from Bb to G, played in the treble clef
- The instrument has a haunting, melancholic sound; it often has solo moments within the orchestra, such as this example from Richard Strauss's tone poem Don Juan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzoBTD-D2zM> (LISTEN FROM 6:39-7:58)

### Cor Anglais

- The Cor Anglais (also referred to as the English Horn) is closely connected to the oboe. It is also a double reed instrument but is much larger than the oboe and has a deeper, richer tone, and is therefore known as the alto voice of the double reed family
- Its note range is from A to Bb, played in the treble clef
- The Cor Anglais is given some of the most beautiful solo melodies ever written for orchestra. Listen to this famous solo line from Dvorak's Symphony No.9, Movement 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqVljsX-aEc> (LISTEN FROM 0:55-2:16)

# WOODWIND

## Clarinet

- The Clarinet is made out of wood and is played with a single reed attached to a mouthpiece
- Its note range is from D to Bb, played in the treble clef
- It has an incredible range and is an extremely versatile instrument, able to play both romantic legato melodies alongside short staccato rhythms, ranging from pianissimo (very quietly) to forte (loud). The clarinet also features heavily in jazz music.
- Listen to this solo clarinet passage from Rachmaninov's Symphony No.2, Movement 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bneQ26bHXk> (LISTEN FROM 0:40-2:50)

## Bass Clarinet

- The Bass Clarinet is related to the clarinet but is much larger and can play much lower notes. Its body is made out of wood but it has a metal upturned bell at the end and the top of the instrument is bent into a crook shape to which the single reed is attached to the mouthpiece
- Its note range is from Bb to C, played in the bass clef
- Listen to a Bass Clarinet solo from Shostakovich's Symphony No.8, 5th Movement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtTU77w9Ing>

## Bassoon

- The Bassoon is part of the double reed family and is one of the lowest sounding instruments of the woodwind section
- It is a versatile and expressive instrument with a warm tone which blends seamlessly with the rest of the orchestra
- Its note range is from Bb to D, played in the bass clef & tenor clef
- Listen to the beginning of Stravinsky's ballet The Rite of Spring which features the solo bassoon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xfg9lIXhcPk>

## Contrabassoon

- The contrabassoon is also referred to as a 'double bassoon' as it is twice the size of a standard bassoon. The instrument is doubled over to account for its length
- The instrument plays an octave (8 notes) lower than the bassoon, and it can play some of the lowest notes in the orchestra. Its note range is from Bb to A, played in the bass clef
- Ludwig van Beethoven was the first composer to include a contrabassoon in symphonic repertoire in his Symphony No.5
- The contrabassoon often doubles the bass line within the orchestra, but occasionally it has more exposed moments. Listen to how the contrabassoon features as a solo instrument at the beginning of Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6fMOfJMIo> (LISTEN FROM 2:25-3:12)

# BRASS

The brass section is made up of five instruments: horn, trumpet, tenor trombone, bass trombone and tuba. All of these instruments are played with brass mouthpieces; in order to make a sound out of the instrument, you have to 'buzz' on the mouthpiece (in other words, blow a raspberry!)

## Let's find out more about each instrument

### Horn

- The horn is a brass instrument made of tubing wrapped into a coil with a flared bell.
- Its note range is from D to F, played in the bass clef
- The horn is very versatile and is played with valves which help to produce different notes. It can play very softly piano or very loudly forte, either as a solo instrument or as part of the wider horn section; Gustav Mahler was one of the composers who wrote some wonderful melodies for the horn within the orchestra.

### Trumpet

- The trumpet is the soprano voice of the brass family
- Its note range is from E to E, played in the treble clef
- Valves were developed for the trumpet in 1814 by Heinrich Stözel, which meant the instrument could be used in a much more versatile way within the orchestra
- Historically, the trumpet has been used as a means to attract attention or send messages and is therefore known for playing loudly. One such example would be in the form of a fanfare – listen to Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man to see what a fanfare sounds like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdqjCmmjeaA>

### Tenor Trombone

- The tenor trombone one of the lower instruments of the brass family. It is different from the horn and trumpet – it doesn't have any valves, so the pitch is changed by using seven chromatic slide positions, with each position lowering the pitch
- Its note range is from E to C, played in the bass clef (sometimes also in the tenor clef)
- Historically, the trombone was always associated with the supernatural; listen to how Richard Wagner used the trombones to play the leitmotif (or short recurring musical phrase) of the Walkürenritt (Ride of the Valkyries) at the beginning of Act 3 of Wagner's opera Die Walküre: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P73Z6291Pt8>

### Bass Trombone

- The bass trombone is similar to the tenor trombone but with a longer slide and double tubing
- It can play as one of the loudest instruments of the orchestra; its note range is from E to B, played in the bass clef
- Listen to just how low the Bass Trombone can play underpinning the bass line in the finale of Scene 4 - Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla from Wagner's opera Das Rheingold <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b80Jw8MuZxo> (LISTEN FROM 5:40-6:31)

# BRASS

## Tuba

- The tuba is the largest bass instrument of the brass section
- The tuba has valves which means it can play chromatically and it is coiled up into a tube shape
- Its note range is from E to C, played in the bass clef. It can play as low as the contrabassoon or the double bass
- Often overlooked as simply playing the bass line, the tuba can be used to great emotional and powerful effect – not only within the brass section, but as part of the whole orchestra. The tuba adds a depth and richness in tone that cannot be equalled.
- Listen to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Flight of the Bumblebee in an arrangement for tuba – listen to how fast the tuba player is required to play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-NVMsj6IXA>

# PERCUSSION

The percussion section has a huge range of instruments which means it can vary greatly in size, depending on what the composer writes for. The percussion section falls into two main areas: tuned percussion and untuned percussion. In most pieces of orchestral music, the composer will write for Timpani (tuned) plus a selection of other percussion instruments (tuned and untuned).

## Let's find out more about each instrument

### Timpani

- Timpani are very large types of drums. Made out of a copper bowl, they have a large calfskin drumhead stretched over the top. This is hit with a timpani stick to produce a sound
- Its note range is from D to G, played in the bass clef
- Foot pedals are used to change the pitch
- Timpani will often play bass notes of chords to enhance the bass section of the orchestra
- You will often hear something called a timpani roll within the orchestra – this is when the timpanist rapidly strikes the drum, alternating between left and right sticks

### Bass Drum

- The bass drum is the largest unpitched drum in the orchestra and it has two heads

### Cymbals

- Metal cymbals are generally used in orchestral music for effect. They can create a huge sound which cuts through the orchestra

# PERCUSSION

## Triangle

- The triangle is a bar of metal bent into a triangular shape. It is played with a thin metal beater

## Tambourine

- The tambourine is a hand held hoop drum. It has metal plates around the edge called jingles

## Tam-Tam

- The tam-tam is another name for a gong – it can produce a very loud sound when hit with a beater

## Castanets

- The castanet consists of two pieces of wood joined on one edge by a string. They are held in the hand and used to produce clicks for rhythmic accents or a rattling sound consisting of a rapid series of clicks. Castanets often symbolize dance music

## Xylophone

- The name xylophone is Greek for 'wood sound'
- The xylophone is made up of wooden bars (or keys) which are hit with a beater (either hard or soft to change the sound)
- Its note range is from F to A, played in the treble clef
- The xylophone started to be used in the orchestra from 1860

## Glockenspiel

- The Glockenspiel features a set of metal bars (or keys), which is hit with metal beaters
- It produces a very clear, bright sound
- Its note range is from G to Bb, played in the treble clef

## Thunder Sheet

- The Thunder Sheet (a huge piece of very thin metal, often suspended on a frame and shaken vigorously by the percussionist to produce a thunderous sound) is used to great effect to depict the explosion of the Gingerbread House towards the end of Act 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnMEI4aoUfo> (LISTEN FROM 1:38:55-1:39:20)

## ORCHESTRA PIT

In opera productions, you will notice that the orchestra do not play on the performance stage itself; they play in an orchestra pit. This is a specially sunken stage for the orchestra that sits below and just in front of the main stage where the production takes place. The orchestra pit is often dark and you might notice that the orchestra plays with lights on their music stands to help them see their music.

## CONDUCTOR

The conductor stands at the front of the orchestra pit (usually stood on a platform box to help them see across the whole of the orchestra). The conductor's job is to keep the orchestra playing in time with one another and with the soloists and chorus on stage. The conductor also carefully balances the sound made by each performer, to ensure that no part dominates another. A conductor will either use a baton or their hands to conduct (direct) the orchestra and performers on stage. The conductor reads from a very large conducting score; this large book contains music notation for each instrument in the orchestra and the singers, together with special performance markings from the composer.

# GLOSSARY

## Alto Clef

A musical symbol in a piece of music that indicates the pitch of the notes. Alto clef is lower than the treble clef but higher than the tenor clef and is used for some viola and cello music

## Arpeggio

A musical technique where notes in a chord are sung one after another rather than together

## Bass Clef

A musical symbol in a piece of music that indicates the pitch of the notes. Bass clef is used for the lowest notes, it is used by instruments such as the cello, double bass, bassoon and many more

## Baton

A thin stick used by a conductor to direct an orchestra

## Chord

When more than one note is played at the same time a chord is formed

## Chromatic

A musical scale which uses every note as it goes up or down

## Conducting Score

A book of musical notation used by the conductor containing all of the music for the instrumental parts, chorus and vocal soloists

## Conductor

The person who directs the performance of the orchestra and the musical performance of the singers

## Forte

An Italian word meaning the music must be played loudly

## Glissando

A musical technique where the instrumentalist or singer 'slides' between notes

## Legato

An Italian word meaning the music must be played smoothly

## Leitmotif

A short recurring musical phrase usually linked to a specific character or theme

## Notated

Music that is written down

## Notation

The written symbols in a score that performers read to perform a piece of music

## Octave

A series of eight notes where the top and bottom note will be same pitch but one will be higher than the other

## Orchestra

The group of instruments (strings, woodwind, brass, percussion) that play the musical accompaniment in an opera

## Orchestral Interlude

A short piece of music played between the longer sections of the opera

## Orchestral Overture

A piece played by the orchestra at the beginning of an opera

## Orchestra Pit

The lowered area in front of the stage in a theatre where the orchestra performs

## Pianissimo

An Italian word meaning the music must be played very quietly

## Rhythmic

Music that is played in a particular rhythm

## Solo

A song or piece of music sung or played by just one performer

## Staccato

An Italian word meaning the music must be played short and detached

## Tenor Clef

A musical symbol in a piece of music that indicates the pitch of the notes. Tenor clef is higher than the Bass clef but lower than the Alto clef. It is used for some bassoon and trombone music

## Treble Clef

A musical symbol in a piece of music that indicates the pitch of the notes. Treble clef is higher than the Alto clef and is used for higher notes. It is used for many instruments including Violin, Flute and Clarinet

## Tuned

A tuned instrument produces notes of a specific pitch

## Untuned

An untuned instrument, such as some percussion, produces no clear pitch when played

## Valve

Added to some brass instruments, such as the trumpet, in the 1800s to allow them to produce a greater range of notes