



PERFORMING ARTS

'Hansel and Gretel' will wander through some unusual woods

BY PATRICK NEAS *SPECIAL TO THE STAR*

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A rendering of the "Hansel and Gretel" set shows the woodblock cutout effect of creating the backdrops and props from paper. **JEFF RIDENOUR**

Engelbert Humperdinck's opera "Hansel and Gretel" breathes Old World charm. From the Brothers Grimm fairy tale on which it's based to the charming folk tunes Humperdinck wove into the score, "Hansel and Gretel" is a 19th century journey into the woods.

The opera department of the [University of Missouri-Kansas City's Conservatory of Music and Dance](#) will present "Hansel and Gretel" in a very traditional production — but with an intriguing twist — for four performances beginning Oct. 26 at White Recital

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Felimon Lamb, who is beginning her third year as director of opera at the conservatory, is directing *Hansel and Gretel*. She's keeping the opera's original setting, but recent cuts in UMKC's theater budget, which have resulted in the loss of faculty members and resources shared by the opera department, have made it challenging for Lamb to create that Brothers Grimm look onstage.

"The theater department still has to support its own productions, and it's important they do that," Lamb said. "But if you have to cut back on faculty, then there are not enough faculty members to support another production, and opera is the hugest of productions. They can't say, 'Great. We'll build your set.' So we had to figure out how can we create the epic nature of opera and still keep the budget lower."

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Lamb's solution? Paper.

"In other words, where you would have hardwood sets representing an actual house, real trees or something, those are all made out of paper," Lamb said. "My set designer is very creative, and we've gone with this woodblock cutout thing. You can still project on paper, and we'll have projections. You can shine lights through the back or you can light it differently. It's an experimental, interesting way of going about it."

The costumes will even be made out of paper. They'll be based on traditional designs, with Hansel wearing lederhosen and Gretel a dirndl, but they'll be made of Tyvek, the kind of paper used in the white mailer bags you can buy at the post office.

"It's very hardy paper," Lamb said. "You can wash it, you can do all kind of things with it. Our costume designer, Maureen Thomas, has figured out all kinds of interesting ways to work with that paper and with craft paper. Even our props person is using lots of papier-mâché."

Lamb says that although using paper is a budgetary stop-gap measure, for "*Hansel and Gretel*" it's also a valid aesthetic choice.

"The designer has cut out some things so there will be a lot of full color backlight coming through those cutouts," she said. "There will be a little bit of shadow play. We have a Hansel and a Gretel who are almost 6 feet tall, so how do we make the mother look huge? Well, if you put her in a big shadow, then she looks huge. It's a toy theater aesthetic. We're playing. That's what theater is about."

Humperdinck: Hansel and Gretel (Royal Opera House)



The opera's youthful charm will be emphasized by a cast made up entirely of singers from the conservatory and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City's young artists program.

"There is a sweetness about it," Lamb said. "It's lush and romantic and has nice folksy melodies. And it's a good time of year to do it. There's nothing like Halloween season for an opera about a witch."

7:30 p.m. Oct. 26, 27 and 28 and 2:30 p.m. Oct. 29. White Recital Hall, 4949 Cherry. \$12. 816-235-6222 or tinyurl.com/ybhm5znf.

KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

There is something about the nostalgic music of Czech composer Antonín Dvořák that sounds especially satisfying in the fall. [The Kansas City Symphony](#) conducted by Michael Stern will perform Dvořák's sun-dappled Symphony No. 8, as well as music by Dvořák's son-in-law, Josef Suk, Oct. 27-29 at Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. Also on the program is the Violin Concerto No. 1 by Dmitri Shostakovich performed by Mayu Kishima.

The concert opener, the Scherzo Fantastique, was composed by Suk in 1903. It was probably the last happy work Suk created. The following year, both Dvořák, who was not only Suk's father-in-law but also a beloved mentor, and his wife died. After those tragedies, most of Suk's music took on a morbid character.

"The Suk is a fascinating piece," Stern said. "Aside from the originality of his voice, the fact that he writes a fantastic scherzo is already something significant. It was in vogue at the time. Think of 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice.' It's the same kind of tone poem, self-contained, sparkling and lighthearted. Scherzo, after all, means joke."

Kishima, the soloist for the Shostakovich concerto, is the winner of the 2016 [Isaac Stern International Violin Competition](#) held in Shanghai, China. She is the first person to have won the competition named after Stern's legendary violinist father.