



McGill



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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Montreal Elementary Schools collaborate with Opera McGill in 3 performances of Englebert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*

For immediate release

Montreal, November 4, 2010 – Opera McGill will present *Hänsel und Gretel* on Thursday, November 11, Friday, November 12, and Saturday, November 13 at 7:30 p.m. in Pollack Hall. Tickets are \$17 adults/\$12 children, students and seniors. *Hänsel und Gretel* is the 2010/2011 Lisl Wirth Black Box Festival production, and is the first of three productions in this season of Opera McGill. Four Montreal area primary schools have participated in the production of sets for the upcoming performances of Englebert Humperdinck's beloved children's opera. Participating schools include L'Ecole le Plateau, L'Ecole Nouvelle Querbes, St. George's School of Montreal and Elizabeth Ballantyne School.

As part of Opera McGill's Community and Educational Outreach Program, excerpts from the opera, as sung by McGill student performers, were presented to over 250 children in grades 3 to 6. Opera McGill Director **Patrick Hansen** along with assistant Véronique Coutu described the opera in detail to them. The students were then asked to illustrate approximately one dozen of the key elements of the opera (for example gingerbread houses, witches, forests) which have since been treated by set designer **Vincent Lefèvre** and will become the projected sets for the performances on November 11, 12 and 13. All students who participated in the project, along with their parents and collaborating teachers, have been invited to a special private performance of the opera. Children's artwork will also be on display throughout the East Lounge of Pollack Hall.

About *Hänsel und Gretel*: Englebert Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* was composed in 1891-2 and was premiered on December 23, 1893 by Richard Strauss. The libretto was written by his sister Adelheid Wette, and is based on the Grimm brothers' fairy-tale Hänsel und Gretel. With many folk-music themes and a familiar fairy-tale story, the opera has been a favorite with adults and children alike. In the first act the children sing and dance, forgetting that they are supposed to be working. The mother sends them into the forest to pick strawberries, but also where they are in danger from the Gingerbread Witch. In act 2 the children wander close to the witch's lair. The children get lost, and suddenly the forest seems scary and full of danger. They grow sleepy and sing a prayer. Fourteen angels of their prayer dance around them silently while they sleep. Act 3 finds them awake in front of a house made entirely of gingerbread. Hänsel and Gretel are captured by the witch, and Hänsel is imprisoned in a birdcage to be fattened up. The witch tells Gretel to look inside the oven to see how the gingerbread is doing and Gretel pretends not to understand. The witch crawls in to show her how, Gretel slams the door shut and the oven explodes with the witch in it. Gingerbread children appear and beg to be set free, and they come alive. The parents arrive and joyfully embrace their children.

Pollack Hall is located at 555 Sherbrooke Street West.

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