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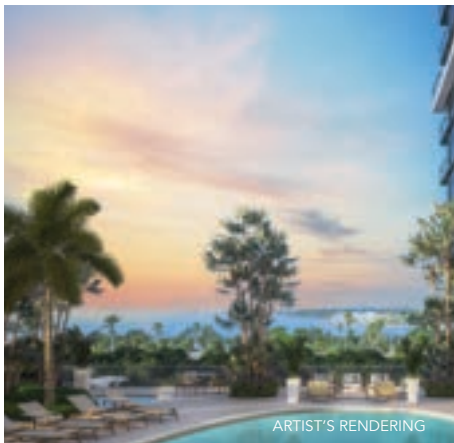
Richard Russell, General & Artistic Director



2026 FALL SEASON

*Hansel and Gretel
Rootabaga Country*

William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre



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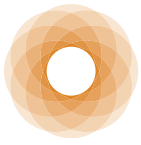
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We are glad you have chosen to enjoy a live opera performance at Sarasota Opera. Here are some tips to make you feel at home in our theater, and to ensure you have the best possible experience.

- English texts are shown above the stage so you can follow along, even when the opera is in a foreign language.
- No special preparation is necessary when you come to the opera. This program book will provide you with all the information about our productions, including a full cast list, program notes, etc. You can also check our website, SarasotaOpera.org, for further information.
- To ensure an enjoyable experience for you and other audience members, cell phones and electronic devices that make any kind of sound or emit light must be turned off while you are in the theater. Phone conversations, texting, and audio and video recording are not permitted. Leaving the real world behind for a while and enjoying the beauty of opera will do you a world of good!
- If you are late, you can watch and listen to a live stream of the performance in the William G. and Marie Selby Lobby on the second floor. You will be seated in the theater at the first available opportunity.
- For your convenience, the Box Office is open before all Sarasota Opera performances. Visit the kiosk in the lobby to purchase tickets for any performance or call (941) 328-1300.
- Found articles should be turned in to the House Manager. Lost items may be claimed from the Sarasota Opera Box Office at 61 N. Pineapple Avenue, Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Sarasota Opera is equipped with hearing loop technology. Patrons who need auditory assistance, but do not have hearing aids or implants, may pick up hearing devices in the main lobby. For patrons who require visual assistance, binoculars are also available. A driver's license or another form of identification is required to check out an assistance device.

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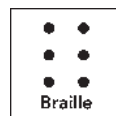
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MESSAGE FROM THE *General & Artistic Director*

I came to opera young. Introduced by an enthusiastic fifth-grade teacher when I was 10, by seventh grade, I was already a seasoned operagoer. Growing up in New York, I had been to the Met and had become, with my mother, a subscriber to New York City Opera, where orchestra tickets were \$9.95 each. I had already seen operas by Verdi, Puccini, and Wagner, and had begun delving into the Ring Cycle.

I was surprised when a seventh-grade teacher, upon learning of my interest in opera, told me that her family's Christmas tradition was to go to the Metropolitan Opera to see *Hansel and Gretel*. At that point, I hadn't seen or heard the work, and I must admit that I assumed she was talking about a children's opera. Although I was familiar with the title and the composer—whose name was often confused with that of a then-current pop singer—I had not yet heard the piece. I knew it had been the first complete opera broadcast by the Metropolitan Opera, on Christmas Eve in 1931. My interest piqued, and that conversation led me to the public library to borrow a recording.

What I found was magical. Although the story was familiar from the fairy tale I had learned as a small child, the opera was filled with wonderful music that went far beyond a simple children's piece. Because I was already familiar with the operas of Richard Wagner, I immediately responded to the complexity of the orchestration and the beauty of the melodic writing. And yet my twelve-year-old self also delighted in the rich characterization of *Hansel and Gretel*, and, of course, the Witch—not to mention the fact that the opera ends with a stage full of children singing of the Witch's demise. I could see why this was a beloved family tradition. Although my taste in those days leaned toward the dramatic works of verismo, Verdi, and Puccini, I understood that *Hansel and Gretel* could be a wonderful introduction to the art form for young people while still satisfying the more sophisticated palate of seasoned operagoers.

That early experience helped shape my belief that opera can enter a young person's life vividly and permanently. It is one reason we dedicate so many of our resources to the Youth Opera program. Over the twenty plus years that I've been involved with Sarasota Youth Opera, I've seen how many of those young people have become opera lovers, with some going on to work in opera professionally as singers or administrators. That is why this program is so important to us.



Photo by Matt Holler

Because the most persuasive way to introduce young people to the art form is to let them participate in it, we believe that having works written for them to sing is the best way for them to understand what opera can be. The repertoire for young voices is small, which is why we have commissioned six Youth Operas over the history of the program, with two more in the works. Rachel J. Peters, who wrote *Rootabaga Country* for us in 2017, created a beautiful work that also challenges young performers musically and vocally. Ms. Peters has also credited our commission in helping lead her toward writing operas; she has since written ten more works.

If opera is to have a future—and I believe passionately that it does—engaging young people must be central to that future. I'm encouraged by research showing that younger generations may be more open to classical music than their parents were. It is our job to give them as many opportunities as possible. I'm grateful to all our patrons and supporters who understand this and help us make it a reality.

RICHARD RUSSELL
General & Artistic Director

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A NIGHT OF *Camellias & Champagne*

SARASOTA OPERA GALA

Honoring David and Edith Chaifetz

Saturday, January 30, 2027

Reception at 6 PM | Dinner at 7 PM

The Ora | Grand Ballroom | 578 McIntosh Road

*A*mid the elegance and extravagance of Violetta's Parisian salon, romance flourishes beneath the shimmer of candlelight and champagne, while love, sacrifice, and indulgence collide in one of opera's most unforgettable stories. This Gala evokes the glamour and fragility of high society in Paris, wrapped in the symbolism of camellias and the sparkle of champagne.

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\$250 per person | Limited Seating

**INTO THE ENCHANTED FOREST
WITH HANSEL AND GRETEL**
Friday, November 13, 2026, 6:30 PM
A magical open-air evening where live performances bring the whimsical world of *Hansel and Gretel* to life through music.

**A NIGHT ABOARD HER MAJESTY'S SHIP
WITH GILBERT AND SULLIVAN**
Wednesday, February 17, 2027, 6:30 PM
Drop anchor and raise a glass for an evening inspired by Gilbert and Sullivan's enchanting operettas. Enjoy Victorian charm, clever satire, lively melodies, and theatrical flair.

Salute TO THE Stars

AWARDS
LUNCHEON

Sarasota Yacht Club
Tuesday, March 9, 2027, 11:30 AM
Patron Level: \$175 per person (Premium Seating)
Individual Reservations: \$100 per person

Celebrate the artistry and achievement of Sarasota Opera's outstanding Apprentice and Studio Artists at our annual Salute to the Stars luncheon. Enjoy a gourmet meal with fellow opera enthusiasts while experiencing live performances by the season's award-winning singers. These honors are made possible through the generosity of visionary donors and the Sarasota and Manatee Opera Guilds.



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SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2026						
25	26	27	28	29	30 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 7:00 PM	31
NOV 1 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 1:30 PM	2	3	4 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 7:00 PM	5	6	7 <i>Rootabaga Country</i> 5:00 PM
8 <i>Rootabaga Country</i> 12:00 PM	9	10 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 7:00 PM	11	12 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 7:00 PM	13	14 <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> 1:30 PM
FEBRUARY 2027						
<div>The Opera Gala* January 30 at 6:00 PM</div>	1	2	3	4	5	6 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM
7	8	9 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	10	11 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	12	13 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM
14 <i>La traviata</i> 1:30 PM	15 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	16 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	17	18 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	19	20 <i>La traviata</i> 1:30 PM Artists' Choice Concert 7:30 PM
21 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 1:30 PM	22 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	23	24 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	25	26 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	27 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 7:30 PM
MARCH 2027						
FEB 28 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 1:30 PM	Mar 1 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	2 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 7:30 PM	3 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	4 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 7:30 PM	5 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	6 <i>Jenůfa</i> 7:30 PM
7 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 1:30 PM	8 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	9 Salute to the Stars Awards Luncheon 11:30 AM*** <i>Jenůfa</i> 7:30 PM	10 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 7:30 PM	11 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	12 Apprentice Artists at Noon Covers at 3 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	13 <i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> 1:30 PM <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM
14 <i>Jenůfa</i> 1:30 PM	15 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	16	17 <i>La traviata</i> 7:30 PM	18 <i>Jenůfa</i> 7:30 PM	19 <i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i> 7:30 PM	20 <i>La traviata</i> 1:30 PM Emerging Artists Showcase Concert 7:30 PM
21 <i>Jenůfa</i> 1:30 PM	22 Opera House Tour 10:30 AM	<div>Opera Lovers Weeks are March 3-14. See all 4 Winter Opera Festival productions in as few as 3 days. Opera Lovers subscriptions are available online or via the Box Office.</div>				
<div>*Held at The Ora, Sarasota **Held at Michael's On East ***Held at the Sarasota Yacht Club</div>						

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RICHARD RUSSELL, General & Artistic Director

2027 WINTER OPERA FESTIVAL



La traviata

FEBRUARY 6 - MARCH 20, 2027

Giuseppe Verdi | Francesco Maria Piave



H.M.S. Pinafore

FEBRUARY 13 - MARCH 19, 2027

Arthur Sullivan | W.S. Gilbert

Ariadne auf Naxos

FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 13, 2027

Richard Strauss / Hugo von Hofmannsthal



Jenůfa

MARCH 6 - MARCH 21, 2027

Leoš Janáček

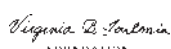


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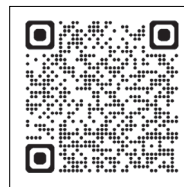
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New OLD FRIENDS, COLLABORATION

Sarasota Opera's *Hansel and Gretel* Unites Opera, Ballet, Orchestra, and Youth Opera

BY MARINA HARSS



Many of us grew up with the story of *Hansel and Gretel*, about two poor but resourceful children who go into the forest on their own, are trapped by an evil witch, and end up outsmarting her, saving themselves and scores of other children in the process. It is one of the primal children's tales, about the courage and ingenuity of children—their ability to get themselves out of a tight spot by reading their circumstances and helping each other.

Engelbert Humperdinck's opera, which returns to Sarasota Opera after a sixteen-year absence, retains the simplicity and directness of the tale, making it an ideal work both for adult and young audiences. For kids, the story is scary but accessible. And for adults, there is more than enough musical depth and nuance to keep them interested.

Hansel and Gretel's origins lie in a musical entertainment Humperdinck composed for his sister, who liked to put on a puppet show for her children every year at Christmas. This family Christmas show was such a success that Humperdinck decided to turn it into an opera that combined the child-like story with sophisticated, even Wagnerian musical elements. "It contains some of the most deeply complex music I've ever worked on," says Maestro Anthony Barrese, who conducted the show in Sarasota in 2010 and returns again this year. "Sometimes it feels like a Brahms symphony." The premiere took place at the Hoftheater in Weimar, Germany, in 1893, under the baton of Richard Strauss, composer of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*.

All the principal roles, including those of Hansel and Gretel, are performed by adults. Both Hansel and Gretel are sung by women: Gretel is a soprano and Hansel is a mezzo-soprano. Humperdinck was skillful in creating musical parts for them that included child-like qualities (purity, simplicity, playfulness) but also required real, adult, operatic singing.

Just as skillfully, Humperdinck combined these adult voices with the sound of an actual children's chorus. At the end of the opera, when the children are freed from the witch's spell, they flood the stage, singing a joyful song. Here we get the energy and spirit that only children can bring. "It's very endearing, because after hearing adults singing, you suddenly hear this more pure sound," says Jessé Martins, music director of the Sarasota Youth Opera, whose singers will be heard in this final chorus. "And there is that element of surprise; the audience isn't expecting to see children onstage."

It's always a joyous occasion when the young singers of the Youth Opera get to appear in a mainstage production, as they do in *La bohème*, *Carmen*, *Tosca*, and other works. The kids in *Hansel and Gretel* range from about 11 to 16. It is not the only opera the Youth Opera is performing this fall—they are also putting on their own show, *Rootabaga Country*, by Rachel J. Peters. The Youth Opera is a year-round program, in which about 100 kids take part each year, learning every aspect of what it takes to put on an opera. The opportunity to be included in one of the company's mainstage operas is one of the highlights.



"The whole concept of the Youth Opera," says Richard Russell, General and Artistic Director of Sarasota Opera, "is integrating young people into the life of the company. It's that opportunity to be part of the whole experience, and we hope it will be infectious, that it will lead them to make opera part of their life in some way."

In this particular production of *Hansel and Gretel*, directed by Felicity Stiverson, kids will not only be singing, but dancing too, and not just at the end. Stiverson is a former dancer who performed on and off Broadway before turning to choreography and directing both opera and musical theater. Dance is central to her approach. "Anytime you can add dancing to an opera," she says, "you gain so much in storytelling, stage pictures, and narrative."

This is Stiverson's third time working on *Hansel and Gretel*. Her first two experiences were collaborations with the director E. Loren Meeker, first for New Orleans Opera Association and then for OPERA San Antonio. This time, working alone, she has amplified the place of dancing and stage movement even more than in those previous iterations. To make that possible, the Sarasota Opera invited students from The Sarasota Ballet School, Margaret Barbieri Conservatory, and Sarasota Ballet Studio Company (all under the umbrella of The Sarasota Ballet) to take part in the production.

Hansel and Gretel has always contained an element of dance, or at least of movement. At the end of Act 2, Hansel and Gretel, who are lost in the forest, sing a prayer ("When at Night I Go to Sleep"). Fourteen angels appear and perform what Humperdinck described as a "dream pantomime." This scene has often been choreographed into a dance. Stiverson saw this as an opportunity to inject more choreography into the show, and to integrate dance more fully into the action. The dancers are more like forest creatures than like angels; they help to create the transition between the daytime life of the forest and the more menacing world of night-time. As Stiverson put it, "They help transition into and out of the dream sequence."

Stiverson has found other places to include movement as well, as during the ominous orchestral passage known as the "Witch's Ride," which introduces the second act. Here, the dancers become what Stiverson describes as "tree-like, ominous creatures" who crawl in from the edges of the stage. They become a living,

breathing setting for Hansel and Gretel's adventures, suggesting the dangers that the young protagonists will be facing. It moves the action from "their home life into this new, ominous, possibly dangerous environment," says Stiverson.

The dancers are all young, ranging in age from about 10 to their teens, selected, like the singers in the children's chorus at the end, by audition. Previously, the Sarasota Youth Opera has collaborated with dancers from the Margaret Barbieri Conservatory and Sarasota Ballet Studio Company in a yearly program called "Images of Dance." But this is the first time students from The Sarasota Ballet School will appear in a mainstage production at Sarasota Opera. It is, says Christopher Hird, Education Director at The Sarasota Ballet, an exciting opportunity for the kids. "It's always great for the kids to have that kind of experience," says Hird, "and I love the educational element of these kinds of collaborations. It's so helpful for them to have an understanding of how different art forms work." It is equally interesting for the members of the Youth Opera to see how dancers work.

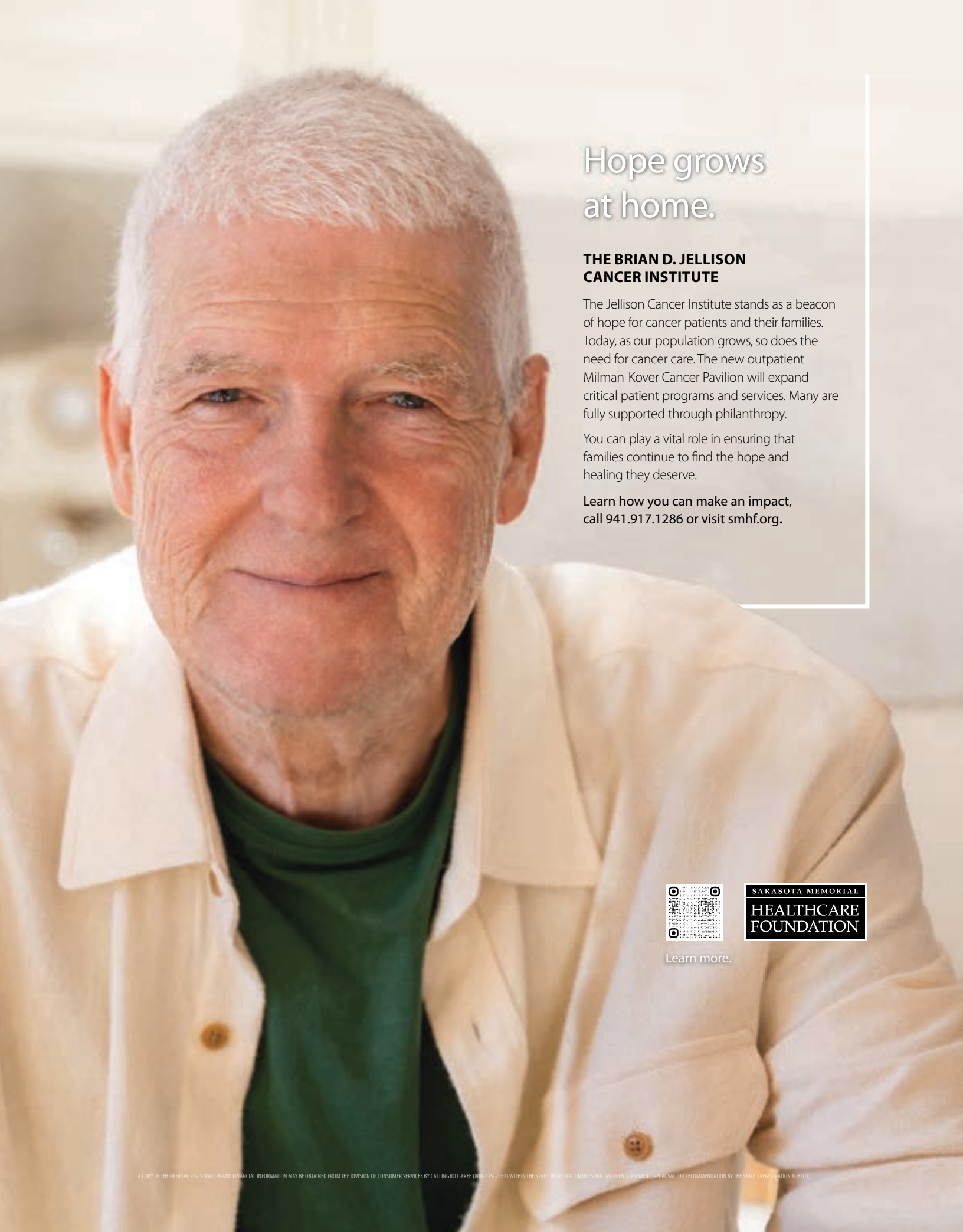
The two companies, who have been in Sarasota for decades, are already linked in other ways. Many of the ballet's performances take place at the opera house, as does the school's yearly *Nutcracker* production. This year, the orchestra for *The Nutcracker* will be conducted by none other than Sarasota Youth Opera music director Jessé Martins.

The current production of *Hansel and Gretel* has been an opportunity to bring the two organizations even closer, a goal for the general and artistic director, Richard Russell.

"First of all, it's the nature of this piece, which is really centered around kids," says Russell. "But also, what a great opportunity to collaborate with the Ballet. It aligns so well with my desire to do more collaborations with our local organizations."

For an opera so deeply invested in what children can do, bringing all these young performers together seems particularly fitting.

Marina Harss is a freelance culture writer based in New York City.



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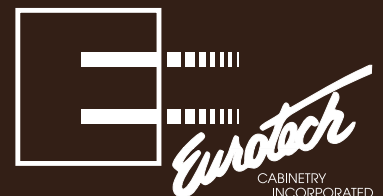


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Hansel and Gretel
Engelbert
Humperdinck

OCTOBER 30 - NOVEMBER 14, 2026

Hansel and Gretel

MUSIC BY ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK

LIBRETTO BY ADELHEID WETTE

English singing translation by Cori Ellison

Sung in English with English supertitles

Production originally created for New Orleans Opera

Conductor
Production

Stage Director and Choreographer
Associate Director
Scenic Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Hair and Make-Up Designer
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Managers
Youth Opera Chorus Master
Assistant Conductors

Anthony Barrese
E. Loren Meeker
and Felicity Stiverson
Felicity Stiverson*
Nora Winsler*
Steven C. Kemp
Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Ken Yunker
Brittany Rappise
Francesca MacBeth
Annie Hennen, Eva Schramm
Jessé Martins
Andrew Downs, Artyom Pak

The Sarasota Ballet School and Conservatory dancers

Kayleigh Blackmore
Sophia Close
Katherine Gore
Abigail Groves
Gabriella Tiesling
Lucinda Valdez

Children

Sofia Rose Hutchens
Ellis Perrin
Adelaide Egan
Avonlea Lyon
Zoe Breneman
Eden Sizemore
Amelia Swaim
Andigoni Ludera
Kat Dureska
Madeleine Kucera
Joy Dates
Olivia Bergamo

Cast

Hansel
Gretel
Gertrud
Peter
The Dew Fairy
The Sandman
The Witch

Kara Morgan
Kerrigan Bigelow*
Lindsey Polcyn
Spencer Reichman*
Sarah Stembel**
Kira Neary**
Lisa Chavez

Children's Chorus

Juliana Alvarado
Alfonso Balmaceda
Cynthia Balmaceda
Loretta Balmaceda
Giuliana Bordes
Stephanie Casanova
Asher Claire

Reyna Kim
Sophie Lunsford
Ara Martinez-Oliva
Eva McDonald
Mia Moreno
Fiona Muolo
Zuzanna Retel

Abril Sanchez-Rodriguez
Emiliana Sarmiento
Elsie Stephens
Maia Vergnais
Elle Zukas

sarasota orchestra

* Sarasota Opera Debut
** Sarasota Opera Studio Artist
With the Sarasota Orchestra and
the Sarasota Ballet School and Conservatory

Sarasota Ballet
SCHOOL
director · IAIN WEBB



FELICITY STIVERSON, Stage Director & Choreographer

Beloved by audiences since its 1893 debut, Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel*

and *Gretel* pairs a folk-inspired score with the classic Grimm Brothers' fairy tale. From the warmth of the "Evening Prayer" to the sweep of the "Witch's Ride," Humperdinck's score offers an enchanting journey for all ages. My vision for directing this production was to honor the work's timeless spirit while leaning into its rich theatricality and drawing upon the immense artistic talent here in Sarasota. Bringing this story to life has been a deeply rewarding collaborative effort. As director and choreographer, it has been a privilege to assemble such a diverse group of artists, including our exceptional lead singers and musicians, professional and youth dancers from the Sarasota Ballet School and Conservatory, and the talented members of the Sarasota Youth Opera. In approaching this piece, I sought to highlight its magical elements—balancing the darker thematic motifs with moments of optimism, discovery, humor, and redemption. As an opera director and parent to a six-year-old, revisiting this classic in 2026 creates a stronger personal significance. I am continually moved by *Hänsel* and *Gretel*'s journey: when facing adversity, their resourcefulness, resilience, and unyielding bond ultimately restore hope to their family and community, and to us as viewers. I hope you enjoy the performance!



ANTHONY BARRESE, Conductor

I first fell in love with *Hänsel & Gretel* in 2010, when I conducted it for the

Sarasota Opera winter season. It is that rare work that succeeds on several levels at once. It enchants children with its deceptively simple melodies, yet beneath its fairy-tale charm lies a score of remarkable sophistication, every bit as carefully crafted and detailed as a Brahms symphony.

The opera's origin story reflects this same duality. Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette, recognizing that the intimidating shadow of Wagner and Humperdinck's involvement in the premiere of *Parsifal* had stifled her brother's own creative voice, asked him to compose music for four folk songs from *Hänsel and Gretel* for her children to sing. What began as a modest family project soon expanded into a work with dialogue and, ultimately, the full-fledged opera audiences know today.

Humperdinck's achievement is all the more remarkable because of the historical weight under which he labored. He succeeded in creating a truly Wagnerian opera, rich in orchestral color, dramatic depth, and thematic complexity, yet free of the pretension that can sometimes burden Wagner's works.

This miraculous piece presents a satisfying microcosm of the work of conducting. Sophistication and simplicity, vocal and orchestral lines must all be united as seamlessly as possible, and I am delighted to share the resulting tapestry.

HANSEL AND GRETEL *Synopsis*

ACT I

At Home

Hänsel is making a broom and Gretel is darning socks but Hänsel complains of his hunger. Gretel shows him some milk that a neighbor has given them to make a rice pudding. Cheered, Hänsel decides he doesn't want to work any more and the two begin to dance (*Brüderchen, komm tanz' mit mir / Brother come and dance with me*). Their mother, Gertrud, enters and is angry to find them idle. In her anger, she knocks over the jug of milk. A desperate Gertrud, knowing that there will be no supper for her family, sends the children out to pick strawberries in the forest.

An off-stage song announces the return of her husband Peter (*Rallala, rallala*). He has been celebrating his success selling his brooms at the village market and has brought food home. When he asks about the children, Gertrud tells him about the broken milk jug and the two laugh. When he asks where they are, she tells him that she has sent them to the Ilsenstein Forest. Peter tells her about the wicked witch who lives there, using sweetmeats to lure children to her lair, where she bakes them in her oven. Horrified, they rush out in search of their children.

ACT II

In the Forest

An orchestral prelude depicts the Witch's Ride. As Hänsel searches for strawberries, Gretel weaves a garland of flowers. Hänsel crowns his sister with the garland, calling her "Queen of the Forest," as night falls. The pair soon realize that they have eaten all the strawberries and lost their way. The Sandman comes, throwing magic dust as they sing their evening prayer (*Abends will ich schlafen gehen / When at night I go to sleep*). They fall asleep and have a magical dream.

INTERMISSION

ACT III

At the little gingerbread house

The Dew Fairy awakens the children and they notice a little house made of sweets, encircled with a fence of gingerbread children. Hungry, they begin to nibble on the house, but as they do they hear a voice within (*Knusper, knusper, knäuschen/Crunchy, crunchy, mousey*). The Witch appears and casts a spell on the unsuspecting Hänsel and leads him in a cage.

In order to fatten Hänsel up for her recipe, the Witch prepares more food for him. Meanwhile Gretel obtains her magic wand, frees Hänsel from his cage, and the two children push the Witch into the oven (*Juchei! Nun ist die Hexe tot/Hurrah! Farewell you wicked witch*). This breaks the spell which had imprisoned the gingerbread children and they come to life. Peter and Gertrud, searching for Hänsel and Gretel enter. As the oven explodes, the Witch, now a giant cookie is extracted and all cheer.

World Premiere: the Hoftheater Weimar on 23 December 1893, conducted by Richard Strauss.

HANSEL AND GRETEL *Background*

HANSEL AND GRETEL:

A Fairy Tale on a Grand Operatic Scale

When Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* appears on an opera season, it is sometimes assumed to be a work intended primarily for children. The association with the Grimm Brothers fairy tale can obscure the fact that this opera is one of the most musically sophisticated and richly orchestrated works regularly performed in the repertoire. While the story is certainly family friendly, the score is anything but childlike.

From its first measures, *Hansel and Gretel* reveals a lush, expansive musical world. The orchestra is large and opulent, and Humperdinck makes full use of its expressive power. Extended orchestral interludes are so fully developed that they function almost as an additional character, deepening the emotional and dramatic landscape of the opera. This is music written on a symphonic scale, demanding both technical precision and interpretive depth.

The opera's stature was recognized immediately at its premiere in Berlin, which was conducted by Richard Strauss, a close friend and admirer of Humperdinck. Gustav Mahler led the Vienna premiere, and Arturo Toscanini later conducted performances during his tenure at La Scala. Such champions are not incidental footnotes; they signal the seriousness with which the work was regarded by the leading musical minds of its time.

Humperdinck's own musical pedigree further explains the opera's richness. Although his parents hoped he would pursue architecture, he studied composition with Ferdinand Hiller and Franz Lachner before encountering Richard Wagner in Italy. Wagner was so impressed by the young composer that he invited Humperdinck to assist with the first production of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth and to tutor his son Siegfried. Immersion in Wagner's musical language left a clear imprint on Humperdinck's style.

In *Hansel and Gretel*, Humperdinck blends this Wagnerian influence with melodies inspired by folk song, creating a sound world that is both immediately accessible and harmonically complex. The orchestration is often contrapuntal, with melodic lines weaving in and out of one another, producing a dense and glowing texture. Wagner's presence is especially evident in the orchestral interludes, most notably *The Witch's Ride* between Acts I and II, whose surging energy and vivid orchestral color unmistakably recall *The Ride of the Valkyries*. Here, the orchestra vividly depicts the witch's wild flight through the forest, rising to an exhilarating, almost overwhelming intensity.

At the same time, the opera remains a masterful piece of storytelling. Folk-like melodies lend directness and warmth to the interactions between characters, grounding the drama emotionally. The overture, which introduces many of the opera's principal themes, sets the tone from the outset. Though Hansel and Gretel face poverty, hunger, loneliness, and danger, the music assures us that this is a fairy tale in the deepest sense—one that ultimately leads to safety, joy, and wonder.



When *Hansel and Gretel* was first performed at the Metropolitan Opera in 1905, New York Times critic Richard Aldrich wondered how audiences would respond to "this gay little children's tale elaborated musically with all the resources of the Wagnerian method and orchestra." He quickly answered his own question, concluding that the opera revealed "an achievement of the highest talent and skill," and that there seemed to be no one in the house untouched by its beauty and delight.

More than a century later, Aldrich's observation still rings true. *Hansel and Gretel* is an opera of remarkable craft, emotional depth, and orchestral brilliance—one that speaks to audiences of all ages and rewards serious listening. We hope that Sarasota Opera's production will allow listeners to rediscover this beloved work not merely as a fairy tale, but as the profound and enchanting operatic experience it truly is.

Richard Russell has served as General Director since 2012 and added the role of Artistic Director in June 2026.

Rootabaga Country

Rachel J. Peters



NOVEMBER 7 & 8, 2026

Rootabaga Country

MUSIC & LIBRETTO BY RACHEL J. PETERS

Adapted from the book *Rootabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg

Sung in English with English supertitles | Commissioned by Sarasota Opera, World Premiere in 2017

Production created by Sarasota Opera

Conductor
Stage Director
Scenic Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Hair and Make-Up Designer
Assistant Conductors
Chorus Assistant
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Managers

Jessé Martins
Martha Collins
Sheryl Liu
Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Ken Yunker
Brittany Rappise
Jordan Brooks, Yihao Zhou
Lisandra Rodriguez Varela
Emily Stafford
Annie Hennen, Eva Schramm

Cast

Gimme The Ax
Please Gimme
Ax Me No Questions
Ticket Agent
Clown
Potato Face Blind Man
Jason Squiff
Blixie Bimber
The Kernel
Snippo Hike
Bevo Hike
Mrs. Axenbax
Mayor
Weatherman
Doctor
Traffic Cop
Monkey
Henry Hagglyhoagly
Henry's Mittens
Susan Slackentwist
Shopkeepers

Dylan Schang **
Abril Sanchez-Rodriguez (11/7) | Emiliana Sarmiento (11/8)
Giuliana Bordes (11/7) | Isabella Maltese (11/8)
Elle Zukas
Marley Intemann
Riley Findley **
Kai Casey
Zuzanna Retel (11/7) | Sarah Vargas (11/8)
Aria Tillman
Sophia Silva-O'Connell (11/7) | Reyna Kim (11/8)
Jalil Campbell
Eva McDonald (11/7) | Isla Outerbridge (11/8)
Olivia Novak
Stephanie Casanova
Selah Driscoll
Marley Intemann
Laila Amicucci
Dylan Alan
Loretta Balmaceda, Céleste O'Neil
Mia Moreno (11/7) | Ara Martinez-Oliva (11/8)
Sophie Lunsford, Victoria Oquendo,
Adriana Rossi, Maia Vergnais

** Sarasota Opera Studio Artist

Rootabaga Country Orchestra
Chorus: Sarasota Youth Opera

YOUTH OPERA PRODUCTION SPONSORED BY THE LES AND CAROL BRUALDI FOUNDATION

The commissioning of Rachel J. Peters for *Rootabaga Country* received funding from
OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program, supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation

ROOTABAGA COUNTRY *Synopsis*

Gimme The Ax and his two children (Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions) have grown tired of their lives, and the children wish to know more about their mother (Alelia) who died when they were young. Gimme The Ax suggests they sell all their possessions and purchase tickets on the Zigzag Railroad to Alelia's favorite place, Rootabaga Country. With tickets in hand, the family boards the Zigzag Railroad into the sky.

After traveling through the lands of balloons and circus clowns, they reach Rootabaga and head to the post office for a map. There they meet the Potato Face Blind Man who explains there are no maps and no postmen. Rootabagans receive someone else's mail and deliver it, so everyone meets someone new each day.

Their first letter is addressed to Jason Squiff, and the family finds him trying to wash green sludge from his hair. The letter requests he remove a clog from Blixie Bimber's cistern. To his surprise the clog is The Kernel who proclaims, since Jason has a letter Q in his name, Jason's clothes should be covered in popcorn. Though he tries to change, Jason finds it impossible to rid himself of popcorn. The Kernel assures him that the new look is better than his old clothing. Jason realizes he feels distinguished in his new attire, all due to the letter Q in his name. Gimme The Ax shares with his children that he recalls Alelia's humongous feet that, like the letter Q in Jason's name, were something she never asked for but came in handy when least expected.

Their next delivery is from Mrs. Axenbax to Bevo Hike requesting a meeting about his son Snippo's behavior at school. Bevo finds Snippo has gotten himself into additional trouble; his thumb is stuck in his nose. Bevo seeks the help of the mayor, weatherman, and doctor without success. Finally, the traffic cop, with the help of a monkey and a ladder, frees Snippo's thumb.

Gimme the Ax is reminded how Alelia would help all of them whenever they were in a sticky situation, just like the people of the town came together to help Snippo.

The final delivery is for Henry Hagglyhoagly, a poor minstrel in love with Susan Slackentwist. When Henry finds his fingers are too cold to play the guitar, his two mittens, Please Gimme and Ask Me No Questions assist him in serenading Susan who falls instantly in love.

The children sadly wish their mother could be with them sharing all of these experiences and happiness, but their father reminds them she will always be part of their memories.

The Potato Faced Blind Man tells them they have no more letters to deliver, so family debates where to go next. They realize they have already found a new home in Rootabaga Country. They may not be a family of four perfect people, but a family can be made up of any combination. They happily accept that anyone rooting for each other, and sticking it out until the storm clouds part, is a family, and they decide to stay with their newfound friends in Rootabaga Country.



ABOUT ROOTABAGA COUNTRY

By Composer and Librettist Rachel J. Peters

Since my middle school days in Missouri, I have felt a kindred spirit in Carl Sandburg's writing. With *Rootabaga Stories*, he struck an uncanny balance of silliness and profundity, resulting in a tone and landscape like nothing I have witnessed yet in the youth opera repertoire. The delightfully odd characters and their shenanigans comprise a world that feels familiar yet reaches far beyond our everyday experience. From the Potato Face Blind Man's accordion-accompanied life lessons to Henry Hagglyhoagly's frozen guitar serenade, so much music already lives in these tales that it is impossible not to imagine it while reading them. I can think of no better vehicle than opera to introduce this uniquely American literary master and folk hero to a new generation.

Sandburg did not create a mother for the children in his book, which led me to think about unofficial families. If we are lucky enough to share a connection with anyone, then we probably have them. Beyond blood relations, my own unofficial family of friends and colleagues has transformed my life in ways I never thought possible. At a time when just being a kid trying to grow up is more confusing than ever before, whether or not our Alelias are there with us, it is vital to remember that family truly is "anybody rooting for each other/when the world is cattywompus". This opera is dedicated to official and unofficial families everywhere. I humbly thank everyone at Sarasota Opera for bringing it to life so magically.

World Premiere: Sarasota Opera, 2017

ROOTABAGA COUNTRY *Background*



Rachel J. Peters, Composer and Librettist

Composer/librettist Rachel J. Peters' operas include *Lesson Plan* (On Site Opera/Caramoor), *Companionship* (Virginia Arts Festival, Fort Worth Opera), *Rootabaga Country* (Sarasota Opera, Seattle Opera), *Sketchbook for Ollie* (Lyric Opera of Kansas City), *The Wild Beast of the Bungalow* (Oberlin Conservatory) and *Three Amputators* with Royce Vavrek (Arctic Chamber Music Festival), *No Ladies in the Lady's Book* (Utah Opera), *Staggerwing* (Opera Kansas), and *Men I'm Not Married To* (Cleveland Opera Theater) with Lisa DeSpain, *Steve* (Boston Opera Collaborative), *Everything Comes to a Head* with Margi Preus and Jean Sramek (Decameron Opera Coalition), *Pie, Pith, and Palette* with Marvin J. Carlton (The Atlanta Opera), and *Welcome to the Madness* (complete with live horses) with Leanna Kirchoff (Opera Steamboat).

Rachel's musicals include *Only Children* with Michael R. Jackson (NYU Tisch, Lincoln Center Directors Lab), *Tiny Feats of Cowardice* with Susan Bernfield (NYC Fringe Festival), *Write Left* with John Walch (Playwrights Horizons Theatre School), *Tomato Red* (UC Irvine), and *Octopus Heart* (NYU Steinhardt).

Rachel's extensive catalogue of songs has been performed at Lincoln Center, Second Stage, National Opera Center, Symphony Space, New York Festival of Song, National Sawdust, Ars Nova, Joe's Pub, and cabarets and theatres nationwide. She has written specialty material for Broadway luminaries Zachary James, John-Andrew Morrison, Mary Testa, and

Lauren Worsham. Rachel contributed to the new generation of *The AIDS Quilt Songbook* and *My Brother's Keeper* on NYFOS Records.

Rachel has held residencies at Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Yaddo, Brush Creek Arts, Millay Arts, and Soaring Gardens. She has received Anna Sosenko Assist Trust and multiple ASCAPPlus awards as well as an OPERA America Female Composers Discovery Grant for *Manor of Speaking*...with Kevin Thomas Townley, Jr. Rachel is an alumna of New Dramatists Composer-Librettist Studio, The American Opera Project, and the John Duffy Institute for New Opera.

Rachel originally hails from St. Louis, Missouri, where she grew up singing in children's choruses. She has called New York City home since 2003.

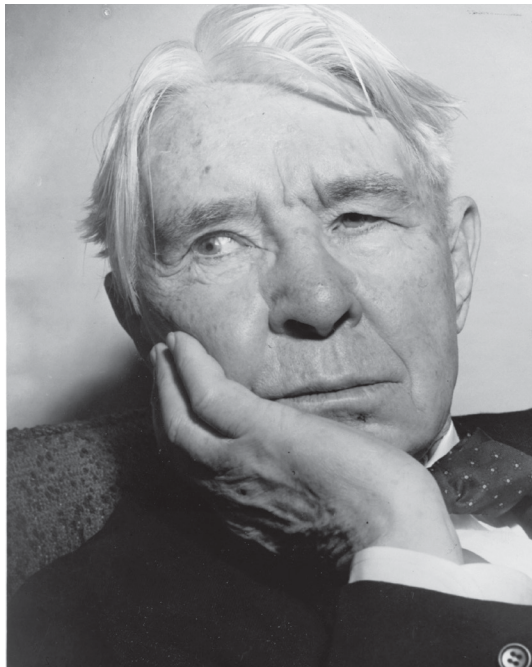
Carl Sandburg, Author

Author-poet Carl Sandburg was born the second of seven children on January 6, 1878 to Swedish immigrants August and Clara. He quit school following his graduation from eighth grade and spent a decade working a variety of jobs - barbershop porter, milk truck driver, brickyard hand, and a harvester in the Kansas wheat fields -before traveling as a hobo in 1897.

When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 Sandburg volunteered for service and at the age of twenty was ordered to Puerto Rico. Upon his return to his hometown of Galesburg, Illinois, he entered Lombard College while supporting himself as an on-call fireman. As the first decade of the century wore on, he grew increasingly concerned with the plight of the American worker. In 1907 he served as an organizer for the Wisconsin Social Democratic Party during which he met Lilian Steichen, whom he married in 1908.

Sandburg was virtually unknown in 1914 when a group of his poems appeared in *Poetry* magazine. Two years later his book *Chicago Poems* was published, and the thirty-eight-year-old author found himself on the brink of a career that would bring him international acclaim. More works followed including *Rootabaga Stories* (1922), a book of fanciful children's tales, his two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, and his four-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. He received a second Pulitzer Prize in 1951 for *Complete Poems*.

Carl Sandburg died at his North Carolina home July 22, 1967.



The Artists FALL 2026



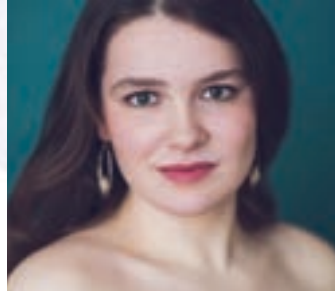
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Conductor • Melrose Park, IL
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Hansel and Gretel

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L'infedeltà delusa (2024)
Roméo et Juliette (2020)
L'italiana in Algeri (2017)
Hansel and Gretel (2010)
 Debut: Assistant to
 the Music Staff (2002)

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 Opera Southwest
Il barbiere di Siviglia,
 Florida Grand Opera
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Kerrigan Bigelow

Soprano • New York, NY
GRETEL
Hansel and Gretel
SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Gretel, *Hänsel und Gretel*,
 The Juilliard School
 Mariuccia, *I due timidi*,
 The Juilliard School
La princesse,
L'Enfant et les sortilèges,
 Tanglewood Vocal Fellow



Jordan Brooks

Music Staff • West Chester, PA
ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA

La bohème, Il trovatore (2026)
 Debut: Assistant Conductor (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Assistant Conductor, *The Consul*,
 Opera at USC
 Assistant Conductor, *La bohème*,
 Chicago Summer Opera
 Assistant Conductor,
Die Zauberflöte,
 Berlin Opera Academy



Lisa Chavez

Mezzo-soprano • Oakland, CA
THE WITCH
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA

(partial list)
Azucena, Il trovatore (2026)
Santuzza, Cavalleria rusticana (2025)
Thérèse, Thérèse (2023)
Dido, Dido and Aeneas (2021)
Fenena, Nabucco (2019)
Carmen, Carmen (2018)
 Debut: *Madame de Croissy*,
Dialogues des carmélites (2017)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Maggie Bell, *Stonewall*,
 New York City Opera
Isabella, L'italiana in Algeri,
 Opera San Jose
Frugola/Principessa/Zita, Il tritico,
 Lithuanian National Opera
 and Ballet Theatre



Martha Collins

Stage Director • Ottawa, Canada
DIRECTOR
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA

(partial list)
Susannah (2026)
Cavalleria rusticana
and Pagliacci (2025)
Carmen (2024)
Ernani (2023)
Attila (2022)
L'inganno felice (2021)
Roméo et Juliette (2020)
I masnadieri (2006)
 Debut: Apprentice Artists Program
 Stage Director (2004)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

L'occasione fa il ladro, Opera Southwest
Faust, Tri-Cities Opera/New York
Ariadne auf Naxos,
 Land of Enchantment Opera/
 New Mexico
Die Zauberflöte, New York University



Andrew Downs

Music Staff • Bloomington, IN
ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA

The Merry Widow, Susannah (2026)
Brundibár (2025)
Carmen; Lucia di Lammermoor (2024)
 Debut: Assistant Conductor (2024)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Conducting Fellow,
 Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra
The Nutcracker,
 Carmel Symphony Orchestra
 Assistant Conductor/Coach,
 Indiana University Opera
 and Ballet Theater



Riley Findley

Baritone • Kansas City, MO
POTATO FACE BLIND MAN
Rootabaga Country
STUDIO ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Schaunard, La bohème (2026)
 Debut: Studio Artist (2025)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Ufficiale, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*,
 Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Il Conte Almaviva,
Le nozze di Figaro,
 Canto Vocal Program
 Gregorio, *Roméo et Juliette*,
 Lyric Opera of Kansas City



Nidia Guevara-Nolasco

Mezzo-soprano • Angleton, TX
STUDIO ARTIST
SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Mistress Quickly, Falstaff,
 Shepherd School of Music
Woman in Hat/Duchess,
The Ghosts of Versailles,
 Shepherd School of Music
Dido, Dido and Aeneas,
 Stetson University

The Artists FALL 2026



Annie Hennen

Assistant Stage Manager •
Laramie, WY
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
Hansel and Gretel;
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: Assistant Stage
Manager (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
Stage Manager,
Opera Southwest
Assistant Stage Manager,
Aspen Music Festival



Henry Horstmann

Baritone • Glen Cove, NY
RESIDENT ARTIST
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: Apprentice Artist 2025

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
Baritone, *The Gilbert and Sullivan*
Time Machine, Long Island Tour



Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Costume Designer • Oceanside, NY
RESIDENT COSTUME DESIGNER
Rootabaga Country;
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: 1998

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
Alley Theatre
Asolo Theatre
Florida Grand Opera
Opera Delaware
ABC
PBS
Ringling Bros. Clown College
Baltimore Opera
Kentucky Opera
Barter Theater



Steven C. Kemp

Scenic Designer • Houston, TX
SCENIC DESIGNER
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA
The Merry Widow (2026)
Stiffelio (2025)
Luisa Miller (2024)
Ernani (2023)
Debut: *Tiefland* (2018)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
La Cenerentola,
Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Lalovavi, Cincinnati Opera
Tosca, The Atlanta Opera



Deidre Lahiff

Mezzo-Soprano • Goshen, NY
RESIDENT ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: Apprentice Artist (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
Alto Soloist, *Symphony No. 9*
(Beethoven), Austin Symphony
English Teacher, *Paul's Case*,
Opera Maine
Beggar Woman (cv),
Sweeney Todd: The Demon
Barber of Fleet Street,
Opera Maine



Sheryl Liu

Scenic Designer • Pittsburgh, PA
SCENIC DESIGNER
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: *Rootabaga Country* (2017)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
The Sound of Music,
Man of La Mancha, *Ah Kuhling*
(touring productions
mainland China)
The Emperor Jones, (Limón Dance
Company/New York & Mexico)
Wargo Ballymore Part One:
Winners (Chelsea Opera/
New York)
The Death of Bessie Smith,
Frankenstein, *Sleeping Beauty*,
Genius (by Chopin)
(Hudson Guild Theatre
Company/New York)
Balm In Gilead (Lee Strausberg
Institute/New York)



Jeremy Luis Lopez

Tenor • Long Island, NY
RESIDENT ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA
Debut: Apprentice Artists 2026

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
Concert with Artyom Pak,
Ferrari Fall Festival
All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce
of 1914, Playhouse on Park
Mr. Mulligan/Father Chapelle/
Mayor, *The Ballad of Baby Doe*,
Central City Opera



Francesca MacBeth

Stage Manager • New York, NY
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA
Production Stage Manager,
Sarasota Opera (2013-present)
Debut: Assistant Stage Manager,
The Little Sweep (2005)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS
A Streetcar Named Desire,
Opera Theatre of St. Louis
Stage Manager,
Sarasota Cuban Ballet
Stage Manager,
Next Generation Ballet

The Artists FALL 2026



Jessé Martins

Music Staff • Sapiranga, Brazil
CONDUCTOR
Rootabaga Country
YOUTH OPERA MUSIC DIRECTOR

SARASOTA OPERA (partial list)
 Conductor, *Susannah* (2026)
 Conductor,
Lucia di Lammermoor (2024)
The Hobbit (2024)
The Little Sweep (2023)
The Secret World of Og (2022)
La Fille du régiment (2022)
Dido and Aeneas (2021)
 Debut: Youth Opera
 Music Director (2011)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Assistant Music Director,
 Opera Factory/New Zealand

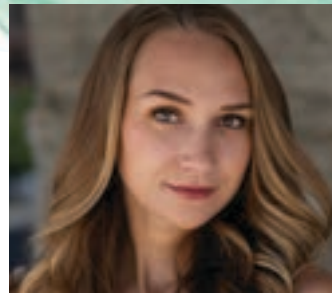


Jordan McCready

Mezzo-Soprano • Anchorage, AK
STUDIO ARTIST
Hansel and Gretel
SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Flora, *The Enchanted Pig*,
 Lyric Opera of Orange Country
 Cherubino (cover), *Le nozze di Figaro*,
 Central City Opera
 Kate Pinkerton, *Madame Butterfly*,
 Opera Colorado



Kara Morgan

Mezzo-soprano • Andover, MN
HANSEL
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA

Spirit; Dido, Dido and Aeneas (2021)
 Debut: Apprentice Artist (2020)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Rosina, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*,
 Minnesota Opera
 Stéphano, *Roméo et Juliette*,
 Minnesota Opera
 Tigrana, *Edgar*, Minnesota Opera



Kira Neary

Soprano • New York, NY
THE SANDMAN
Hansel and Gretel
STUDIO ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Frou Frou, *The Merry Widow* (2026)
 Debut: Apprentice Artist (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Constance and The Skeptic covers,
Constance: A Confession,
 Experiments in Opera
 Zerlina, *Don Giovanni*,
 Off-Brand Opera
 Micaëla, *Carmen*,
 Lighthouse Opera Company



Kat Norman

Soprano • Albuquerque, NM
RESIDENT ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Debut: Apprentice Artist (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Apprentice Artist, Sarasota Opera
 Pamina, *Die Zauberflöte*,
 Music on Site Inc.



Artyom Pak

Music Staff • Tashkent, Uzbekistan
ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA

Program Director of the
 Apprentice Artists
 Program (2026)

Debut: Assistant Conductor,
Così fan tutte (2025)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

L'Enfant et les sortilèges,
 The Juilliard School
Dialogues des carmélites,
 The Juilliard School
Il barbiere di Siviglia,
 Central City Opera



Rachel J. Peters

Composer/Librettist • St. Louis, MO
COMPOSER/LIBRETTIST
Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA

Rootabaga Country

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Rootabaga Country, Seattle Opera
Lesson Plan, On Site Opera/Caramoor
Companionship, Virginia Arts Festival/
 Fort Worth Opera
Sketchbook for Ollie,
 Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Staggerwing, Opera Kansas
Pie, Pith, and Palette,
 The Atlanta Opera



Lindsey Polcyn

Mezzo-soprano • Jackson, OH
GERTRUD
Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA

Mrs. McLean, *Susannah* (2026)
 Apprentice Artist (2025)
 Debut: Apprentice Artist (2024)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Mrs. Nolan/Baba cover,
The Medium,
 Delaware Valley Opera Company
 Gertrude, *Roméo et Juliette*,
 Quisisana Resort
 La Zia Principessa, *Suor Angelica*,
 Orchestra Society of Philadelphia

The Artists FALL 2026



Brittany V.A. Rappise

Wig & Makeup Designer •
Paterson, NJ

WIG & MAKEUP DESIGNER

SARASOTA OPERA (partial list)

La Wally (2020)

Rigoletto (2020)

Nabucco (2019)

Carmen (2018)

Norma (2018)

Debut: *La traviata* (2017)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Wig & Makeup Designer,
Des Moines Metro Opera
2022-Current

William Tell, Boston Lyric Opera

Don Giovanni, Opera Delaware

Tosca, Nashville Opera



Spencer Reichman

Baritone • Austin, TX

PETER

Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Marcello, *La bohème*,

Opera Company of Middlebury,

Shreveport Opera

Sonora, *La fanciulla del West*,

Wichita Grand Opera

Baritone soloist, *Carmina Burana*,

York Symphony Orchestra

Lazar Wolfe, *Fiddler on the Roof*,

Union Avenue Opera



Dylan Schang

Tenor • Appleton, WI

GIMME THE AX

Rootabaga Country

STUDIO ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Little Bat, *Susannah* (2026)

Debut: Studio Artist (2026)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Little Victor, *Elizabeth Cree*,

Music Academy of the West

Gastone, *La traviata*,

Opera Company of Middlebury

Joe Cable, *South Pacific*,

MacBeth Productions



Eva Schramm

Assistant Stage Manager •

Cincinnati, OH

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Hansel and Gretel;

Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA

Debut: Assistant

Stage Manager (2025)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Assistant Stage Manager,

Atlanta Opera

Stage Manager,

Aspen Music Festival



Uma Singh

Soprano • Cleveland, OH

RESIDENT ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Debut: Apprentice Artists 2026

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Tatiana (cover), Eugene Onegin,
Wolf Trap Opera

Beryl Barbell,

Katie: Strongest of the Strong,
Lyric Opera of Chicago

Lyric Unlimited

Fulbright Scholarship, Germany

Central City Opera

Bonfils-Stanton Studio Artist



Emily Stafford

Stage Manager • Athens, WV

STAGE MANAGER

Rootabaga Country

SARASOTA OPERA (partial list)

Stage Manager, *Il trovatore* (2026)

Stage Manager, *La bohème* (2026)

Stage Manager, *Così fan tutte* (2025)

Stage Manager, *Le nozze*

di Figaro (2025)

Assistant Stage Manager,

The Hobbit (2024)

Assistant Stage Manager,

Lucia di Lammermoor (2024)

Debut: Assistant

Stage Manager (2017)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Opera Theatre of St. Louis

Sweeney Todd, Opera Maine

It's a Wonderful Life,

West Virginia Public Theatre



Sarah Stembel

Soprano • New Orleans, LA

THE DEW FAIRY

Hansel and Gretel

STUDIO ARTIST

SARASOTA OPERA

Apprentice Artist (2026)

Debut: Apprentice Artist (2024)

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Nella, *Gianni Schicchi*, Opera Idaho

Sister Genovieffa, *Suor Angelica*,

Opera Idaho

Papagena, *Die Zauberflöte*,

Opera Mississippi



Felicity Stiverson

Director/Choreographer •

Annapolis, MD

STAGE DIRECTOR/ CHOREOGRAPHER

Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Hansel and Gretel,

Opera San Antonio/

New Orleans Opera

The Fairy Queen,

Manhattan School of Music

Turandot, New Orleans Opera

The Anonymous Lover,

Opera Philadelphia

Susannah, Wolf Trap Opera

The Artists FALL 2026



Nora Winsler

Associate Director • Centreville, VA

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Il barbiere di Siviglia, Virginia Opera

Orfeo ed Euridice, The Dallas Opera

La bohème, The Dallas Opera

Pagliacci, Minnesota Opera

Madama Butterfly,

Lyric Opera of Kansas City



Ken Yunker

Lighting Designer • Seattle, WA

RESIDENT LIGHTING DESIGNER

SARASOTA OPERA

Debut: 2007

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Principal Lighting Designer,
Alliance Theatre Company
(2004-2017)

Resident Lighting Designer,
Atlanta Opera (1993-2015)

Lighting Designer -
Americas Brazil, Florida Grand
Opera, Bermuda Arts Festival,
Utah Opera, New Orleans
Opera, Tulsa Opera,
Opera Santa Barbara,
Opera New Jersey,
Toledo Opera,
San Antonio Opera



Yihao Zhou

Pianist • Beijing, China

YOUTH OPERA MUSIC STAFF

Hansel and Gretel

SARASOTA OPERA DEBUT

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Associate Conductor,

Le nozze di Figaro,

Indianapolis Opera

Rehearsal Pianist, *Hildegard*
(World Premiere),

Beth Morrison Projects/ LA Opera

Staff Pianist, The Juilliard School

Vocal Coach, Manhattan

School of Music

Photo by New Orleans Opera Association



PRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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YOUTH OPERA *Members*

Sarasota Youth Opera Mixed Chorus

Sylvia Adams	Ara Martinez-Oliva
Dylan Alan	Eva McDonald
Juliana Alvarado	Mia Moreno
Laila Amicucci	Samuel Moreno
Alfonso Balmaceda	Fiona Muolo
Cynthia Balmaceda	Maxim Nekorystnov
Loretta Balmaceda	Olivia Novak
Stefaniia Biedakurova	Harper Olney
Amalia Bordes	Céleste O'Neil
Giuliana Bordes	Enrique Oquendo
Abigail Buhr	Victoria Oquendo
Jalil Campbell	Isla Outerbridge
Cara Carlson	Gabi Pennington
Stephanie Casanova	Natalia Peno
Kai Casey	Natalie Purmort
Asher Claire	Julia Retel
Selah Driscoll	Zuzanna Retel
Brenna Farrell	Eddie Robinson
Kayla Farrell	Nahiana Rosado-Gonzalez
Sophia Gambrell	Adriana Rossi
Ora Grant	Nikita Rybak
Eleanor Havasi	Abril Sanchez-Rodriguez
Marina Intemann	Emiliana Sarmiento
Marley Intemann	Isabella Scaccino
Emmylou Johnston	Sophia Silva-O'Connell
Reyna Kim	Aria Tillman
Live Klein	Sarah Vargas
Theodore Levey-Baker	Maia Vergnaix
Juniper Loccisano	Vivienne Xian
Sophie Lunsford	Elle Zukas
Isabella Maltese	

Sarasota Youth Opera Preparatory Chorus

Natalia Alokeh	Maryam Jibril
Gabriela Balmaceda	Delphine Kaplon
Valeria Balmaceda	Dominic Parker
Matias Calderon	Grace Paver
Emily Dalton	Emma Reid-Christie
Paloma Eyler	Vivienne Shakura
Mia Gemesi	Rhema Joy Stahlmann
Naomi Gonzalez	Elsie Stephens
Lillian Huff	Dora Yu
Albika Izmailova	Angela Zhang

Rootabaga Country Orchestra

VIOLIN
ChungYon Hong, Concertmaster

VIOLA
Nathan Frantz

CELLO
Nadine Trudel

BASS
Gil S. Katz

FLUTE
Allison De Francesco

CLARINET
Bharat Chandra

BASSOON
Fernando Traba

TRUMPET
Ben Hauser

TROMBONE
Steven Osborne

HARP
Giuseppina Ciarla

PERCUSSION
Matthew Kibort

PIANO
Yihao Zhou





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Sarasota Orchestra FALL 2026



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Violin

Daniel Jordan, *concertmaster*
Christopher Takeda, *associate concertmaster*
Jennifer Best Takeda, *assistant concertmaster*
Michael Turkell, *principal second*
Meghan Jones, *assistant principal second*
Katherine Baloff
Felicia Brunelle
Anne Chandra
Hannah Cho
Marlena Chow Morgan
Carlann Evans
ChungYon Hong
Laura Jensen-Jennings
Leah Latorraca
Milene Rossato Moreira
Sean O'Neil
Shawna Trost

Viola

Stephanie Block, *principal*
Nathan Frantz, *acting assistant principal*
Peter Ayuso
Audrey Naffe
Lewis Rosove
Yordan Tenev

Cello

Natalie Helm, *principal*
Christopher Schnell, *assistant principal*
Oleg Babkov
Troy Chang
Chizuko Matsusaka
Nadine Trudel

Double Bass

John Miller, *principal*
Samuel Dugo, *assistant principal*
John Price

Flute

Betsy Hudson Traba, *principal*
Carmen Newell Bannon

Piccolo

Allison DeFrancesco

Oboe

Bobby Nunes, *principal*
Nicholas P. Arbolino

English Horn

Nicholas P. Arbolino

Clarinet

Bharat Chandra, *principal*
Daniel Parrette, *assistant principal*

Bass Clarinet

Calvin Falwell

Bassoon

Fernando Traba, *principal*
Matthew Matheny, *assistant principal*

Horn

Hugo Bliss, *co-principal*
Joshua Horne, *co-principal*
Shea Kells-Murphy
Andre Richter

Trumpet

Diana Lopez, *principal*
Benjamin Hauser, *co-principal*

Trombone

Brad Williams, *principal*
Steven Osborne

Bass Trombone

I. Marc Morgan

Tuba

Nate Seman, *principal*

Timpani

Yoko Kita, *principal*

Percussion

Marcelina Suchocka, *principal*
Jack Rutledge
Matt Kibort

Harp

Phoebe Powell, *principal*

Library

Katie Knox, *principal*
Paul Greitzer, *assistant principal*



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- Photo recognition in the season program book(s)

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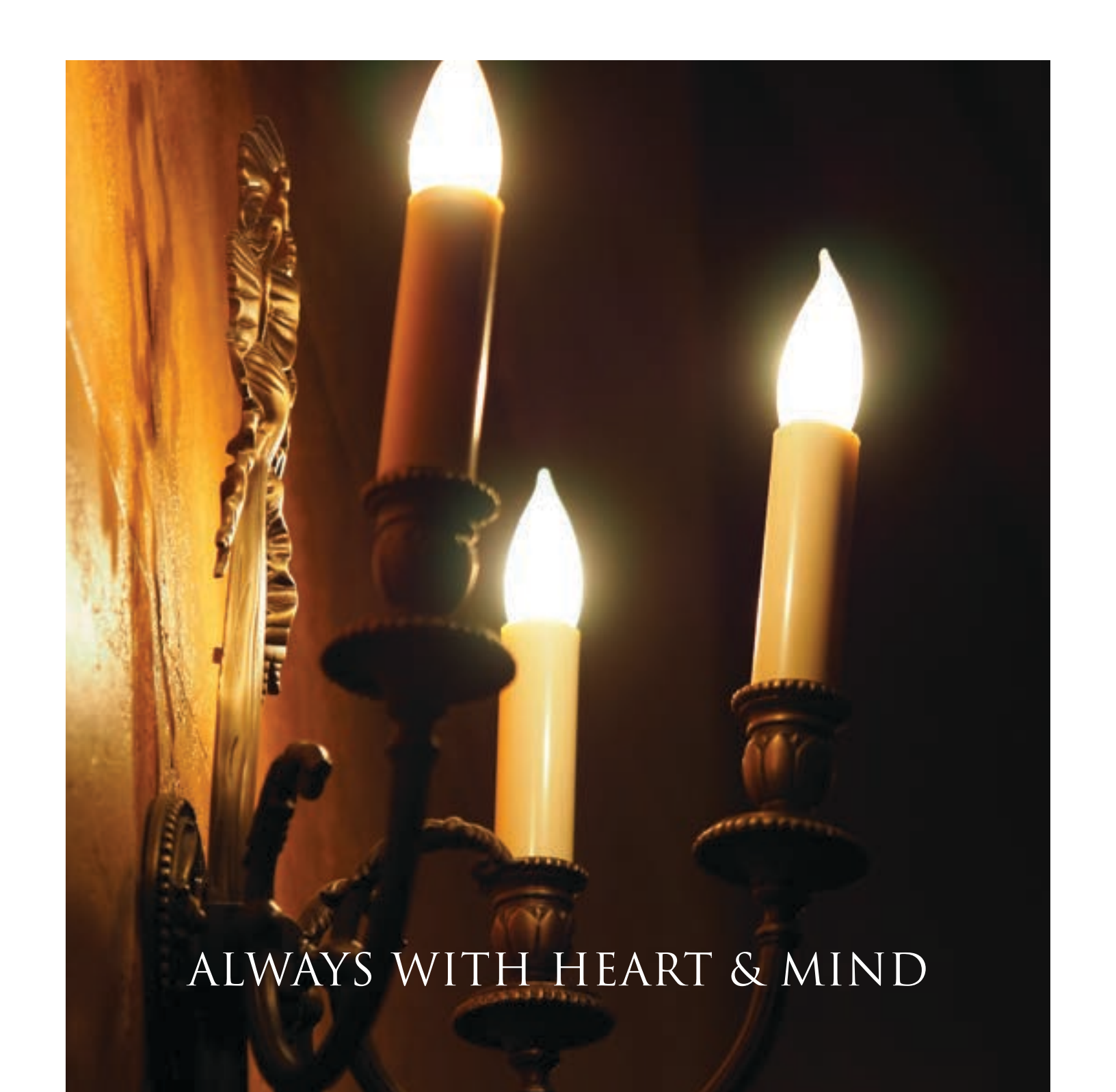
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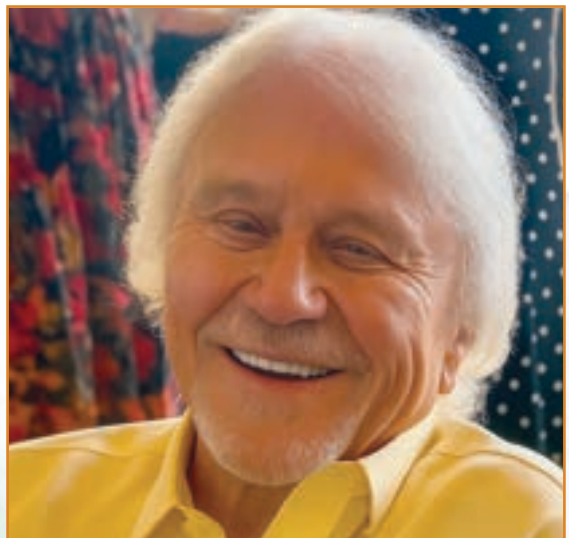
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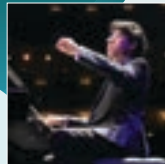
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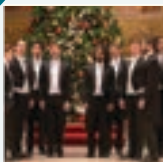
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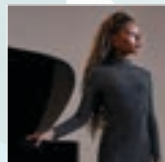
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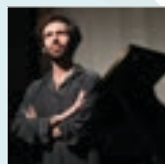
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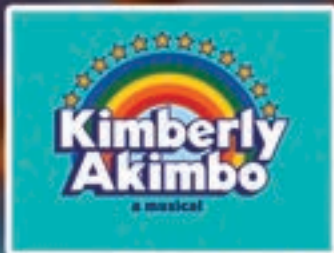
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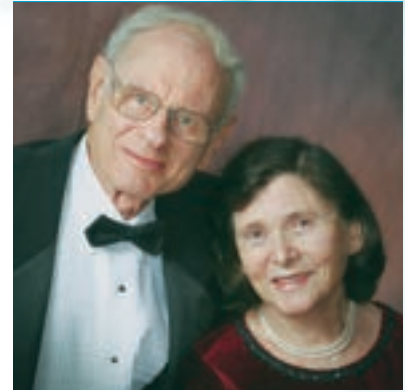


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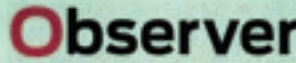
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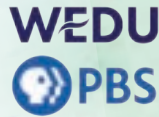
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October 23 - 25, 2026 | FSU Center

Gemma Bond's *Manner* (Company Premiere)

Sir Frederick Ashton's *Divertissements*

Dominic Walsh's *Wolfgang for Webb*

Program Two

November 20 - 21, 2026 | Sarasota Opera House

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Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Solitaire* (Company Premiere)

Jessica Lang's *Lyric Pieces*

Alexei Ratmansky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (Company Premiere)

Program Three

December 18 - 19, 2026 | Van Wezel

ACCOMPANIED BY THE SARASOTA ORCHESTRA

Christopher Wheeldon's *Within the Golden Hour* (Company Premiere)

Sir Frederick Ashton's *The Two Pigeons*

Program Four

January 29 - February 1, 2027 | FSU Center

George Balanchine's *Donizetti Variations*

Ashley Page's *The Pump Room* and *Walking in the Heat* (Company Premieres)

Paul Taylor's *Mercuric Tidings* (Company Premiere)

Program Five

February 26 - March 1, 2027 | FSU Center

Paul Taylor Dance Company

Presented by The Sarasota Ballet

Program Six

March 26 - 27, 2027 | Van Wezel

ACCOMPANIED BY THE SARASOTA ORCHESTRA

Sir Frederick Ashton's *Romeo and Juliet*

Program Seven

April 30 - May 1, 2027 | Sarasota Opera House

ACCOMPANIED BY THE SARASOTA ORCHESTRA

Marius Petipa's *The Kingdom of the Shades* (From *La Bayadère*) (Company Premiere)

Dame Ninette de Valois' The Rake's Progress

Antony Tudor's *Gala Performance*



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FEB 26-27

POPS 2
MUSIC OF THE KNIGHTS

DEC 23

DISCOVERIES 2
A FESTIVE CELEBRATION

MAR 5-7

MASTERWORKS 6
BRAHMS & ELGAR

JAN 9-10

MASTERWORKS 3
MOZART & DVOŘÁK

APR 3-4

MASTERWORKS 7
CHOPIN & MAHLER *

JAN 22-23

POPS 1
HOLLYWOOD'S GREATEST HITS

APR 9-10

POPS 3
ROCK LEGENDS OF THE
'60S & '70S

FEB 5-7

MASTERWORKS 4
CARMINA BURANA *

MAY 8

DISCOVERIES 3
BEETHOVEN BOOKENDS *

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