



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***Hansel and Gretel* Opens the 2026/2027 Fall Opera Season**

***Hansel and Gretel* will bring Sarasota Opera and Sarasota Ballet School and Conservatory together for their first-ever mainstage collaboration**

Sarasota Opera is offering a [discounted ticket package](#) for families to attend *Hansel and Gretel*.

September 8, 2026 — Sarasota Opera opens its 68th season this fall with Engelbert Humperdinck's [*Hansel and Gretel*](#), running October 30 through November 14. Premiered in 1893 in Weimar under the baton of Richard Strauss, Humperdinck's version of *Hansel and Gretel* offers a compelling musical and theatrical experience for audiences of all ages, melding lush orchestration with simple folk melodies to tell the timeless fairy-tale of two siblings who stray into the forest and encounter a beguiling Gingerbread Witch, finding courage in the face of peril.

This production of *Hansel and Gretel* marks the first-ever mainstage collaboration between Sarasota Opera, Sarasota Youth Opera, and Sarasota Ballet School's Margaret Barbieri Conservatory and Sarasota Ballet Studio Company.

Sarasota Opera will present six performances of *Hansel and Gretel*: two matinees at 1:30 p.m. (November 1 & 14) and four evening performances at 7 p.m. (October 30, November 4, 10 & 12). The earlier evening curtain time is designed to better accommodate children and families while the opera's runtime of just over two hours makes the performance especially well-suited to audiences of all ages. The company is offering a special family ticket package for *Hansel and Gretel* that includes two adult tickets, two free children's tickets, and \$10 tickets for additional children, which can be purchased by calling the Box Office at 941-328-1300.

Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* is a prime example of *Märchenoper*, or "fairy-tale opera," a genre that enjoyed enormous success in 19th century Germany. Setting to music supernatural stories – often allegorical fables built on the premise of good versus evil – was popular among composers like Richard Wagner, for whom Humperdinck was an assistant for many years. Humperdinck originally drafted music for *Hansel and Gretel* for a family puppet show at the behest of his sister, **Adelheid Wette**, who wrote the libretto based on the age old fairy-tale as published by the Brothers Grimm. The composer later expanded the work into a full-length opera. "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 to conduct this year.

Sarasota Opera's upcoming *Hansel and Gretel* will be staged by director and choreographer **Felicity Stiverson**, who first collaborated on the production with E. Loren Meeker in New Orleans and later in San Antonio. Stiverson performed as a dancer on and off Broadway before turning her attention to directing, and 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."

Hansel and Gretel lends itself to dance, with scenes including Humperdinck's "dream pantomime," when fourteen angels descend upon the children as they are lost in the forest, and the orchestral passage known as the "Witch's Ride." To bring these scenes to life, Sarasota Opera has invited a selection of young dancers from [Sarasota Ballet School](#)'s Margaret Barbieri Conservatory and Sarasota Ballet Studio Company. Though the two companies are already linked in many ways – Sarasota Ballet performs its annual *Nutcracker* at the Opera House and collaborates with the Sarasota Youth Opera on its annual "Images of Dance" program – this collaboration marks the first time that Sarasota Ballet dancers will appear in a mainstage production with Sarasota Opera.

Sarasota Opera's General and Artistic Director [Richard Russell](#) says that *Hansel and Gretel* offers the perfect opportunity to bring the two organizations closer together and to collaborate more deeply with local organizations: "It's the nature of this piece, which is really centered around kids."

Artists and Creative Team

The title roles in Humperdinck's *[Hansel and Gretel](#)* will be performed by the "remarkably compelling" (*Minnesota Star Tribune*) mezzo-soprano [Kara Morgan](#) as Hansel and recent Juilliard master's program graduate [Kerrigan Bigelow](#) as Gretel. Returning to Sarasota Opera to play the Witch is mezzo-soprano [Lisa Chavez](#), who most recently thrilled audiences as Azucena in the 2026 production of *Il trovatore*. The cast will also include [Lindsey Polcyn](#) as the Mother (seen last season as Mrs. McLean in *Susannah*) and the debut of baritone [Spencer Reichman](#) in the role of Peter; with Studio Artists [Sarah Stembel](#) as The Dewman and [Kira Neary](#) in the role of The Sandman.

Hansel and Gretel will be conducted by longtime Sarasota Opera collaborator [Anthony Barrese](#). Originally conceived by **E. Loren Meeker** and **Felicity Stiverson** for New Orleans Opera, the production will be directed and choreographed for Sarasota Opera by Stiverson, with **Nora Winsler** serving as associate director. The English singing translation is by **Cori Ellison**. **Steven C. Kemp** is the scenic designer, and costumes are designed by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. **Ken Yunker** is the lighting designer.

Performance Dates

Friday, October 30, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. (Opening night)

Sunday, November 1, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. (Matinee)

Wednesday, November 4, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, November 10, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, November 12, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 14, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. (Matinee)

Explore and Engage

For a deeper understanding of *Hansel and Gretel*, guests are invited to visit Sarasota Opera's [Digital Content Guide](#), which includes a specially curated [Spotify Playlist](#) and the [Digital Program](#). The next episode of Sarasota Opera's **Behind the Blue Curtain podcast: *Hansel and Gretel: Into the Woods*** will be available on September 11, and will feature Sarasota Opera fan favorite **Lisa Chavez**, who will be playing the role of the Witch, and director and choreographer **Felicity Stiverson**, who has previously staged the production for New Orleans Opera Association and Opera San Antonio.

A special family pack discount is available for *Hansel and Gretel* that includes two adult tickets* with two free children's tickets and \$10 tickets available for additional children. *Excludes sections A and P Tickets are available at the Sarasota Opera Box Office, by phone at (941) 328-1300, in person at 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota, or online at tickets.sarasotaopera.org.

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 68th season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast and celebrating 100 years of the historic Sarasota Opera House. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984, the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater — now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive youth opera program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, which underwent a \$20 million renovation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by *Musical America*. Richard Russell has served as General Director since 2012 and added the role of Artistic Director in June 2026. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division

of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

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