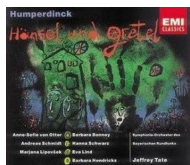


Engelbert Humperdinck - Hansel & Gretel (1990)

Written by bluesever
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Disc 1 1 - *Ouverture/Vorspiel/Prélude (Orchester)* ERSTES BILD/ACT 1/PREMIER ACTE
Erste Szene/Scene 1/Première Scène 2
- *Suse, liebe Suse, was raschelt im Stroh? (Gretel/Hänsel)* 3 - *So recht! und willst du nun nicht mehr klagen (Gretel/Hänsel)* 4 - *Brüderchen, komm tanz` mit mir - Tanzduett (Gretel/Hänsel)*
Zweite Szene/Scene 2/Deuxième Scène
5 - *Holla! ... Himmel! Die Mutter! (Mutter/Hänsel/Gretel)* 6 - *Marsch! Fort in den Wald! (Mutter)*
Dritte Szene/Scene 3/Troisième Scène
7 - *Ral la la la, ral la la la, Heissa Mutter, ich bin da! (Vater)* 8 - *Ho ho! Wer spek-spektakelt mir da im Haus... (Mutter/Vater)* 9 - *Doch halt, wo bleiben die Kinder? (Mutter/Vater)* 10 - *Wenn sie sich verirrt im Walde dort (Mutter/Vater)* 11 - *Eine Hex`, steinalt haust tief im Wald (Mutter/Vater)* 12 - *Vorspiel - Der Hexenritt/Witches` Ride/La Chevauchée des Sorcières*
ZWEITES BILD/ACT 2/DEUXIEME ACTE Erste Szene/Scene 1/Première Scène
13 - *Ein Männlein steht im Walde (Gretel/Hänsel)* 14 - *Mein Erbelkörbchen ist voll bis oben! (Gretel/Hänsel)* 15 - *Gretel, ich weiss nicht den Weg nicht mehr! (Hänsel/Gretel/Echo)*
Zweite Szene/Scene 2/Deuxième Scène
16 - *Der kleine Sandman bin ich, st! - Lied des Sandmanns (Sandmann/Hänsel/Gretel)* 17 - *Abends, will ich schlafen gehn (Hänsel/Gretel)*
Dritte Szene/Scene 3/Troisième Scène
18 - *Traumantomime/Dream Pantomime/Pantomime de rêve (Orchester)*
Disc 2
1 - *Vorspiel (Orchester)*
DRITTES BILD/ACT 3/TROISIEME ACTE Erste Szene/Scene 1/Première Scène
2 - *Der kleine Taumann heiss`ich (Taumann)* 3 - *Wo bin ich? Wach`ich? (Gretel/Hänsel)*
Zweite Szene/Scene 2/Deuxième Scène
4 - *Bleib` stehn! (Gretel/Hänsel)* 5 - *Wie duftet`s von dorten (Gretel/Hänsel)*
Dritte Szene/Scene 3/Troisième Scène
6 - *Knusper knusper Knäuschen (Stimme aus dem Haus/Hänsel/Gretel/Kinder)* 7 - *Ich bin Rosina Leckermaul (Hexe/Hänsel/Gretel)* 8 - *Halt! Hokus pokus, Hexenschuss! - Fluch der Hexe (Hexe)* 9 - *Nun Gretel, sei vernünftig und nett (Hexe/Gretel/Hänsel)* 10 - *Hurr hopp hopp hopp (Hexe)* 11 - *Auf` wach` auf, mein Jüngelchen (Hexe/Gretel/Hänsel)* 12 - *Juchhei! Nun ist die Hexe tot - Knusperwalzer (Hänsel/Gretel)*
Vierte Szene/Scene 4/Quatrième Scène
13 - *Erlöst, befreit, für alle Zeit! (Kinder/Gretel/Hänsel/Vater)* Letzte Szene/Final Scene/Scène
Finale 14 - *Vater! Mutter! (Hänsel/Gretel/Mutter/Vater/Alle)*

Barbara Bonney (Gretel), Anne Sofie von Otter (Hänsel), Hanna Schwarz (The Mother), Marjana Lipovsek (The Witch), Andreas Schmidt (The Father), Tölzer Knabenchor, Bayerischer Rundfunk Symphonie Orchester, Jeffrey Tate – director

There is a Brucknerian glow to the sound in the opening of the Prelude, giving a reminder that the orchestra was for long associated with Eugen Jochum. Tate's warm moulding of phrase has something Jochum-like about it too, but if that seems to promise a heavyweight reading of Humperdinck's magical children's opera, it is a misleading impression. Tate's crisp and delicate pointing of the Witch's spell theme in the Prelude then leads on to a reading of exceptional warmth and sympathy which yet adopts speeds generally faster than those in the rival versions listed. In the complete opera an overall difference in timing of five minutes between Tate and all three of the selected comparisons may seem small, but it is enough to give an extra tautness, when rhythms are sprung so resiliently, and moulded phrasing leads on with such persuasiveness and refinement. Karajan (EMI) may be more rapt, giving more mystery at slower speeds to such passages as the Evening Hymn and Dream Pantomine, but the freshness of Tate avoids any hint of sentimentality, giving the Evening Hymn the touching simplicity of a children's prayer. Tate, like Pritchard in his fine Cologne CBS version, does not bring Wagnerian power to the Witch's Ride as Solti (Decca) does, but his still-weighty approach matches the way that, like Pritchard, he relates the opera more to the Wagner of Act 2 of *Die Meistersinger*.

In any case, the Witch of Marjana Lipovgek is the finest of all, firm and fierce, using the widest range of expression and tone without any of the embarrassing exaggerations that mar, for example, Elisabeth Söderström's strong but controversial reading for Pritchard, and without any of the fruitiness of the conventional readings provided on the other sets. Lipovsek's change of voice between the hocus-pocus spell (given extra horror with echo-chamber resonance) and her insinuating address to the children is a model of characterization. That is typical, and the chill she conveys down to a mere whisper makes one wish, more than usual, that the part is not longer.

The rest of the casting matches that in finesse, with no weak link. Barbara Bonney as Gretel and Anne Sofie von Otter as Hansel are no less fine than the exceptionally strong duos on the rival sets, notably Schwarzkopf and Grummer on the Karajan set and Cotrubas and von Stade on the Pritchard. The main difference is that Bonney and Otter have younger, fresher voices, so that they have to use fewer operatic wiles in their characterizations, yet with timbre ideally contrasted. In a note with the booklet, the EMI executive producer, Peter Alward says, "young children should have young parents", and he chose Andreas Schmidt and Hanna Schwarz accordingly. Both of them, like Lipovgek, characterize vocally with a wide range of expression

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and tone, but without the underlining and Tunny-voice' exaggeration you often get.

Barbara Hendricks is warm and distinctive as the Sandman, pure and sweet of tone, if not always ideally clean in attack. My one slight reservation about the casting is over Eva Lind as the Dew Fairy, not quite pure enough in her topmost register and not ideally hushed, but that is a role which regularly tends to bring disappointments in the casting, as rather more markedly with Ruth Welting in the Pritchard set. There is a slight question-mark too over the use of the Rilz Boys' Choir for the ginger-bread children at the end. Inevitably they sound what they are, a beautifully matched team of trebles, and curiously the hearttug is not quite so intense as with the more childish-sounding voices in the rival choirs.

Those are minimal reservations, when the breadth and warmth of the recording add to the compulsion of the performance, giving extra perspectives in focus and dynamic. For all the brilliance of the Decca recording, Solti's set lacks warmth. The Karajan will never be superseded for the magic and intensity of the performance, and the 1953 mono recording is astonishingly clear, but the new sound cocoons the ear in quite a different way. The merits of the Pritchard set on CBS follow closely those of Tate, but the playing of the Gurzenich Orchestra rarely if ever quite matches that of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in refinement and point, and on balance I prefer the EMI casting. EMI are also more generous with the number of tracks provided. --- Edward Greenfield, Gramophone [11/1990], arkivmusic.com

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