

Hansel and Gretel: the platform for the opera professionals of tomorrow

By the opening night of *Opera Warwick's Hansel and Gretel* on January 12th at Warwick Arts Centre Theatre, only a year will have passed since the internationally acclaimed baritone **Richard Whitehouse** saved the day by singing *Count Almaviva* in the society's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Just twelve months later, *Warwick University's* blooming society can boast its own batch of future stars that are able to use **Hansel and Gretel** as a springboard to professional success.



Leading on from their sell-out productions of *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, this **Opera Warwick** production of **Hansel and Gretel** boasts the greatest number of aspiring opera singers to emerge from the university in a single year - ever. Breaking into the highly competitive world of music conservatoires are sopranos **Elizabeth Holmes** and **Harlee Gresty**, and tenor **Oliver Marshall**, who have all already received offers from the internationally renowned *Guildhall School of Music & Drama* and *The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*, with more auditions still to come.

'Opera Warwick's productions have given us an unparalleled training ground to develop our craft as singing actors and I'm delighted that our efforts have been rewarded and recognized by such prestigious conservatoires', says Elizabeth, who plays Gretel: 'a role that demands both dramatic - and vocal - acrobatics!'

But the show's success is not limited to the action on stage. **Hansel and Gretel's** stage director **Felicity Green** has been asked to assistant direct for the *London Youth Opera*, winning the commission through her insistence on *'making opera exciting and relevant for young people and new audiences.'* she says. *'Working in English makes opera more accessible, but a lot of translations of Hansel and Gretel were quite archaic - they wouldn't fit our ethos at all! So we thought we would employ the help of a professional to create our own.'*

And so Grammy-nominated translator **Kit Hesketh-Harvey** (headline act for the *BBC Comedy Proms*, and of *Kit and the Widow*), whose translations have been used by the *Royal Opera House*



and *English National Opera*, came on board to tutor **Opera Warwick** members in the creation and development of their innovative concept and English translation.



Furthering his desire to 'catch them whilst they're young,' Kit oversaw this 'witty and modern translation' which completely renovates the traditional German fairy tale; **Hansel and Gretel** live on the outskirts of modern day Berlin in utmost poverty. As their mother sends them to forage for food in the city bins, news arrives that the circus has come to town. This circus is accompanied by a ringmaster renowned for luring children into his clutches with the smell of frying onions from his dazzling hot dog stand...



And the deluge of young talent doesn't stop there. In the pit, rallying a 45-strong orchestra, conductor **Benjamin Hamilton** embarks on his seventh opera at just 23. Having attended the *Royal Northern College of Music's* conducting course, supported by a scholarship from the **University of Warwick Opportunity Fund**, he now studies under the international baton of **Paul McGrath** (*Opera North & English Touring Opera*).



'Opera is the greatest of all the arts' says **Benjamin**, 'in *Hansel* we've got music, we've got dancing and we've got theatre. This has been an extra-special project for me as I am in a position to bring my love for opera to a new audience – children. The power of and excitement in music is never so keenly seen as through the eyes of children in community music – which we've tried to made a big focus of **Hansel and Gretel**.'

Head of Creative Arts at *Kenilworth School*, **Richard Marr**, challenged his Year 7 and 8 students to 'dare to take a step out of their comfort zone and give something a try that, after hard work, will be worth it'. The response was overwhelming - with nearly 100 children aged between 11 and 13 enthused to take part in **Hansel and Gretel's** chorus of children. *Kenilworth School* children will feature in the performances.

Roll up, Roll up! The circus has come to town! **Opera Warwick's** production of **Hansel and Gretel** provides a rare boiling pot of talent and professionalism that is guaranteed to capture the hearts and imaginations of all who join them. **Hansel and Gretel** offers an extraordinary opportunity for all the family to watch these aspiring artists as they leap from the stages of the *Warwick Arts Centre Theatre* onto the perilous tightrope of the professional world of opera.

Performances of the show at *Warwick Arts Centre* are at 7.15pm on Thursday 12th to Saturday 14th January with an additional Saturday Matinee at 2.15pm. Tickets, starting from just £6, are available from the *Warwick Arts Centre Box Office* on 02476 524 524 or www.hansel-and-gretel.co.uk.



invitation | MEDIA NIGHT

We would like to extend an invitation for you to you to attend out media night on **Friday 13th January, 2011**. The performance starts at 7.15pm (with enough time to take your seat after the Mead Gallery opening party). During the interval complimentary drinks will be served in the upstairs bar in the Arts Centre. Both then and over drinks immediately after the performance there will be an opportunity to mix with, and ask questions of, the cast, crew and translators as well as members of the University community and Students' Union. Tickets must be reserved in advance from the Warwick Arts Centre Box Office by quoting 'media' on 02476 524 524.

editor's notes | FURTHER INFORMATION

For further details contact Benjamin Hamilton, President of Opera Warwick on 07525 462 461 or b.f.hamilton@warwick.ac.uk.

editor's notes | COMMENT

Richard Whitehouse, Elizabeth Holmes, Harlee Gresty, Oliver Marshall, Felicity Green, Kit Hesketh-Harvey, Benjamin Hamilton, Paul McGrath and Richard Marr are all available for comment upon request.

editor's notes | IMAGES

Images are available on request. A final rehearsal weekend will be held at Warwick Arts Centre from Monday 2nd – Sunday 8th January. Dress rehearsals will be held on the evenings of Tuesday 10th and Wednesday 11th January. We would be happy to accommodate members of the media at any of these rehearsals.



biography | OPERA WARWICK

Opera Warwick is the University of Warwick society for all those who love opera or are looking for performance and creative production experience at Warwick. It is arguably the most innovative student opera society in the country and is doing more than most professional companies to bring opera right into the 21st Century.

Opera Warwick is going through an exciting time following the sell-out successes of the two Mozart masterpieces, *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro* in the Warwick Art Centre main theatre. With the student translated, completely updated production of *Hansel & Gretel* set for performance in January, Opera Warwick hopes to continue this strong, professional reputation.

However, Opera Warwick is not just for singers. The society provides for instrumentalists, directors, producers, set designers, marketers, creative writers, technicians, and those who just like to watch a bit of opera, a fantastic opportunity to indulge their passion.

biography | KIT HESKETH-HARVEY

Kit Hesketh Harvey (born Christopher John Hesketh Harvey on 30 April 1957 in Nyasaland, now Malawi) is a British comic performer, translator and scriptwriter.

He was educated as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral and then Tonbridge School in Kent before moving on as a choral scholar under John Rutter to Clare College, Cambridge, later becoming a member of the Cambridge Footlights

He wrote the script for Merchant Ivory's *Maurice* (1987), and has worked on *The Vicar of Dibley* series for the BBC. He wrote *Full Throttle*, starring Rowan Atkinson, and *Hans Andersen: My Life As A Fairytale* (Hallmark).

He is the writer and singer of the musical comedy act *Kit and The Widow*, which has had a number of West End and Broadway theatre runs and tours internationally. They have had their own series on BBC Radios 3 and 4, and two TV specials on Channel 4. He starred in the 1996 production of *Salad Days* at the Vaudeville Theatre, and in *Tom Foolery* (Jermyn Street and national tour). He co-devised and starred in the original production of the Sondheim revue, *Putting It Together*. He makes occasional appearances on the many BBC Radio 4 series requiring witty panellists such as *Just a Minute* and *Quote Unquote*. He was also a panellist on the unbroadcast pilot episode of *QI*.

Winner of the 1988 Vivian Ellis Award for writers for music theatre, he subsequently studied as a pupil of Stephen Sondheim, and his musicals include *Writing Orlando* (Barbican 1988) and *Yusupov* (Bridewell Theatre). He also wrote the lyrics for the operamusical *Which Witch* (Piccadilly Theatre 1992). He adapted the English version of Jacques Offenbach's *La Belle Helène* (2006) directed by Laurent Pelly for English National Opera. His translation of *The Bartered Bride* for Charles Mackerras at the Royal Opera House was Grammy-nominated, and he has translated many other operas, including *The Turk In Italy*, *Le Roi Malgre Lui*, *The Marriage Of Figaro*, *The*

Daughter of the Regiment, *Veronique*, *Bluebeard* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Original libretti include *Varjak Paw* (composer Julian Phillips). He co-produced *Shadwell Opera's Magic Flute* at the Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh, (Herald Angel Award 2009). His plays include *Five O'Clock Angel* at the Hampstead Theatre. He writes regularly for *Country Life* magazine (2009 IPC's *Writer Of The Year*). His radio play, *A La Villa Bab Azzoun*, produced by *Moving Theatre*, won the 2009 *Prix Europa*.

