
HANSEL & GRETEL

Young Artist Opera Studio

The Opera Studio, Netley

Review by Hayley Horton

After a successful run at the Bundaleer Weekend, Patrick Lim has brought the fairy tale "Hansel & Gretel" with operatic score by Engelbert Humperdinck to the Opera Studio in a sugary-sweet English version of the original German.

Lim's passion for opera and his ongoing efforts are once again evident, this time adding value by allowing even younger performers to experience opera, which is admirable.

With a very familiar story, the production itself is adequate, but lacks a freshness and cheekiness that the original story begged for. Fiona Linn as Hansel and Eleanor Blythman as Gretel capture the childishness of the characters and are adept vocalists. Linn particularly does well with the sometimes awkwardness of playing a boy.

Vocally, the highlights of this show however are Tom Millhouse and Jessica Dean, both of whom play small roles. Millhouse as the children's father has a stunning voice that fills the studio with a resonance that inspires.

Dean as the Dew Fairy is equally splendid vocally and not only wakes Hansel and Gretel from their slumber, but also the audience at what is a slower moment of the production. Both of the fairies (Dean and Rachel McCall as the Sleep Fairy) provided a coquettish charm, making even a simple scene change amusing.

Although the production is aimed at a younger audience, the grimness of this Brothers Grimm tale is missing, which leaves the audience wanting more than sweet singing, particularly with Deborah Caddy's portrayal of the Step-Mother/Witch who is more clown-like than scary (unless clowns frighten you of course).

The children ranging from very young to mature teenagers not only sing as a chorus, but dance a ballet which fills the stage. Each child evidently will gain experience like no other with the process, however some further direction and polishing is required to tighten their performance.

Musically, this opera is once again mastered by one of the best repetiteurs in Adelaide, Anthony Hunt who holds his own throughout the night. Hunt's skills would be further enhanced by a live ensemble (even a small one) and would allow the composition to compliment the vocalists.

Overall, Lim has assembled a light-hearted lark, which will introduce younger audiences to the world of opera and with a bit of polishing and pizzazz to the sets and costumes, could enthrall the more experienced audiences also.