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The Music of Hansel and Gretel

Holly Williams

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Holly Williams
Honors Project
May, 2001
Musical Composition

The Music of Hansel and Gretel

The honors project that I chose to do was to write music to the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. I made a few alterations in the story to make it fit the music I chose to write. The way this would be performed is that there would be dancers on stage who act out the movements of the story without saying any words, so that the only sound is the music I've written. The music is made up of one of each of the following: violin, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, bassoon, drums, vibes, and piano. The music I wrote corresponds to movements that the actors would perform on stage.

The story of Hansel and Gretel, written by Grimm, is that of two children whose step-mother decides that she and her husband (the children's father) need to leave their children in the forest to die, so that they can have more money for themselves. The father is reluctant, but finally allows it to happen. The children overhear the parents talking about this, and so get bread to leave a trail back home once in the forest. The family leaves to the forest, with the children dropping bread behind them. They get to the forest and the parents go back home. The kids wake up, discover the birds have eaten their bread, and so start hiking through the woods. They come upon a house made of candy and are thrilled with this. They meet the woman who lives in the house and she welcomes them. Here is where I rewrite the story. I chose to have the woman immediately lock the doors of her house and tell them that she is going to eat them. She goes to turn on the oven and asks Gretel to make sure it is hot. Then, she takes off her wig, and to the children's surprise it is their step-mother, who wants to finish them off!

Now I go back to Grimm's version; Gretel tells the step-mom that she does not know how to check the oven. The step-mom goes over to the oven and shows her, whereupon Hansel and Gretel push her into the oven and watch her burn. Then the children celebrate and live in happiness in the house of candy.

I chose to rewrite the story in this way, because I think it is more dramatic to have the witch be the step-mom, and it makes sense. I also prefer to write music in minor keys with tense undertones. That is why I chose this fairy tale. It is naturally gruesome, which made it easier to write the music for it.

I have really enjoyed this assignment. It has allowed me to be creative in many ways: rewriting the story, thinking about how dancers/actors would perform it, and of course creating different themes and musical interludes to fit each scene. I hope others can enjoy it in the same way I do.