

HANSEL AND GRETEL RE-ENACTED

GREAT OPERA ACT, INSPIRED BY A WELL-KNOWN GERMAN FAIRYTALE, DRAWS CROWDS DURING ITS FIRST STAGING AT BROOKHOUSE SCHOOL AFTER A BUMPY YEAR IN THE WORKS

Once upon a time there dwelt on the outskirts of a large forest a poor wood-cutter with his wife and two children; the boy was called Hansel and the girl Gretel. He had always little enough to live on, and once, when there was a great famine in the land, he couldn't even provide them with daily bread. One night, as he was tossing about in bed...

Sounds familiar? It will for some. Well this past weekend the Brookhouse School theater was turned into the woods as OPERAtion Classics staged the fairy tale opera to an adoring audience at the opening night. With some modification, the musical composed by 19th century composer Engelbert Humperdink struck a cord with theater goers who, no doubt, recalled their childhood.

The powerful vocals, acting, décor and props that re-enacted the woods and a German household centuries back were exceptional.

The smiles from the cast when the curtains rolled down told it all.

The staging itself has been a very long journey that started over a year ago for producer Editta Camm and her team. In fact, the cast had to change a number of times over that period. The original group comprised of sopranos Elizabeth Njoroge and Doreen Ziegler, mezzo soprano Joyce Tannian, medical student/pianist Paul Nduati and visual arts artist Editta Camm, who also acts as their manager and producer.

"The original 'Hansel' Elizabeth

Njoroge had to pull out of the project due to unforeseen circumstances. There was no choice but to quickly invite a mezzo soprano from Germany familiar with the role," explains Editta.

The talented professional Daniela Bosenius was the mezzo soprano who came in from Germany. That, however, wasn't enough to produce a full scale opera, hence the addition of *Tusker Project Fame* judge Ian Mbugua and the famous Moipei Triplets of Mary, Martha and Magdalene. Their younger sister Seraphine also joined. These talented Maasai girls have very beautiful voices (well trained by their father Nicholas ole Moipei who is also their teacher) and often perform 'a capella' or accompanied by piano only, mostly in classical styles.

The cast and production was also boosted by the addition of US-trained Kenyan mezzo soprano Maggie Gitu, who had just returned from a



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- EDITA CAMM



The cast of *Hansel and Gretel* after the musical performance at Brookhouse School last Friday

long stay in the United States. She executed her role of the witch with near-perfect wizardry skills and exceptionally.

They admit that it wouldn't have been possible without the kind sponsorship from Commercial Bank of Africa, Swiss International Airline, GM East Africa and Safaricom.

"A lot of what we earn will be given to charity especially in education and conservation. We also support exceptional children with good KCPE grades but who can't afford fees for secondary school," says Editta Camm who also designed, painted and produced all the back drops, costumes and other props.

The performances will be staged at the Great Rift Valley Lodge and Golf Resort at Green Park in Naivasha tomorrow and at Kenya National Theater next weekend.

HANSEL AND GRETEL OPERA DEBUTS IN KENYA

Photos/ DUNCAN NDOTONO



1 Daniela Bosenius, playing Hansel, and Doreen Ziegler, playing Gretel, on stage.
2 Mother Joyce Tannian with Father Ian Mbugua.
3 Dr Elizabeth Bake, Dr Eunice Brookman and Jennifer Nyanjom.
4 Paul Nduati on the piano.
5 Patricia Jentz with Dicke Kraff, both of Kenya Museum Society.
6 Karen Gakenia, Chris Pasha and Sarah Kiptoo, all of Commercial Bank of Africa.
7 Dr Elizabeth Blake, Wairimu Wanjaiya and Sam Kungu.

A little over a 100 years ago, a dotting uncle composed four songs to accompany a puppet show his nieces were giving at home. Years later, following a few modifications, Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel's* Opera piece became a worldwide favourite. However, its homegrown version that premiered at Brookhouse School in Nairobi last

week was the amazing work of a small group of artists calling themselves OPERAtion Classics with the help of Commercial Bank of Africa who funded the production. The eclectic cast, among them the Moipei sisters, Tusker Project Fame's Ian Mbugua and Coloratura soprano Doreen Ziegler, gave action and sound to producer Edita Camm's vision. Also worthy of note was the evening's pianist

Paul Nduati whose dexterity on the keyboard was truly a marvel. *Hansel and Gretel* is a fairy tale about a young brother and sister threatened by a cannibalistic witch living deep in the forest in a house constructed of cake and confectionery. The opera show is expected to tour throughout Nairobi and Arusha in the next three weeks.

OPERA DEBUTS IN KENYA

Last Friday and Saturday a fortunate audience of adults and children enjoyed a unique performance of Humperdinck's opera *Hansel & Gretel* at Brook House School's magnificent high tech theatre. It was unique as it was a real complete opera sung by Kenya residents and demonstrated the extraordinary singing and acting talent we have in Kenya.

Gretel was played by Doreen Ziegler, a consummate actor, who filled the auditorium with her soaring soprano. Daniela Bosenius, a professional Swiss opera singer, who was familiar with the role of Hansel, was asked to replace a Kenyan singer in the last minute. She added much to the musical direction of the opera and was ideally suited to the mezzo role of Hansel. Joyce Tannian, playing the mother with her rounded mezzo voice was a mother you would not want to cross! The tender rendition of the talented Moipei triplets and their sister as the Ginger bread children brought one or two wet eyes in the audience. Playing the Father, Ian Mbugua,

proved all his dramatic abilities on stage. Maggie Gitu as the Witch gave a bravura performance, drawing the audience into her evil plans, and was met with applause when she met her timely end in the oven. The opera was performed professionally in every detail and still so touching. An impressed lady said after the performance: "It felt so real, I've never seen a show like that before!"

"Hansel & Gretel" will be performed in Naivasha (Green Park) on 2nd April, the German School Nairobi on 6th April and Nairobi National Theatre on 9th and 10th April.

