OPERA

Engelbert Humperdinck's

Hänsel und Gretel

Conductor	**Raphael Jiménez**
Director	**Kevin Newbury**
Scenic Designer	**Laura Carlson-Tarantowski**
Costume Designer	**Chris Flaharty**
Lighting Designer	**Jeremy K. Benjamin**
Assistant Conductor/Chorus Master/ Musical Preparation	**Kyung-Eun Na**
Rehearsal Pianist	**Tatiana Lohkina**
Assistant Director	**Rebekah Grande**
Choreographer	**Miguel Alejandro Castillo Le Maitre**
Video Designer	**Greg Emetaz**
Stage Manager	**Robert Pierce**
Assistant Stage Managers	**Kingsley Du** **Samantha Lewis**

This production will use strobe lighting, which may affect photosensitive viewers, and theatrical haze throughout the performance.

Hänsel und Gretel is 2 hours and 5 minutes,
including a 20-minute intermission between Acts II and III.

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Cast of Characters

Thursday and Saturday Performances

Hänsel	Lucie Freeman
Gretel	Alexandra Larios
Peter, der Vater	William Sulkow
Gertrude, die Mutter	Vaughn Holleran
Die Knusperhexe	Lydia Rommel
Sandmann	Drucilla Dumas
Taumännchen	Lily Clark

Friday and Sunday Performances

Hänsel	Caroline Jacobson
Gretel	Ella Vaughn
Peter, der Vater	Maverick Williams
Gertrude, die Mutter	Amelia Reines
Die Knusperhexe	Eva Yang
Sandmann	Mackenzie Sturm
Taumännchen	Maya Brown

Chorus

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Aurora Gibney-Krashen
Lydia Jin
Sabine Lesniewicz
Grace Musante
Eva Occhiogrosso

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Jake Winneg, *asst. concertmaster*
Marianne Swenson
Sebastian Tsai
Eleanor O'Brien
Milla Hsu
Ally Chung

VIOLIN II
Nathaniel Lasaga-Ivey, *principal*
Hannah Klein-Berger, *assistant principal*
Sunny Khurana
Jack Dorsey
Khloe Gui

VIOLA
Kyle Sonon, *principal*
Eliza Watkins, *assistant principal*
Liam Young-Skeen
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Aaron Scott, *assistant principal*

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Murphy Shi

FLUTE
Parv Gosai, *principal*
Murphy Shi

OBOE
Miguel Arroyo, *principal*
Malcolm Belcher

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Joshua Hauck

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DIRECTOR OF ENSEMBLE OPERATIONS
Roy Fuccio

* indicates guest artist

PROGRAM NOTES

Hänsel und Gretel (1892)
by Engelbert Humperdinck (1854 - 1921)

Can we call *Hänsel und Gretel*, Engelbert Humperdinck's retelling of the classic Brothers Grimm fairytale, a children's opera? One might be inclined to think so; after all, the story is about children, is frequently told to children, and the opera is an all-time family favorite. Yet *Hänsel und Gretel* is also very much an "adult" work. It operates on two levels at once: there is childlike simplicity in the many folk-inspired moments, yet in the dramatic moments we are suddenly reminded that Humperdinck had been Richard Wagner's assistant during the preparation of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1882. While children may enjoy the opera, it contains some elements that only the accompanying parents may appreciate.

The question that every opera composer had to ask during the 1890's was how to break free from the overwhelming influence of Wagnerian music drama. Humperdinck's solution was to turn to the world of fairytales and to be inspired by folk music. Fairytales were similar to the ancient myths that Wagner had worked with, in that they were both removed from the world of everyday reality. Yet a fairytale such as *Hänsel und Gretel* (while it included its share of supernatural elements) involved ordinary people such as a poor village broom-maker and his family, rather than gods, giants or dwarves. The style of folk music was eminently suitable for the portrayal of such characters, though Humperdinck felt that a more complex musical language was also occasionally required to do justice to the full range of emotions and situations the story called for.

What became the greatest success of Humperdinck's career started out rather modestly. The composer's sister, Adelheid Wette, had written some poems based on the familiar fairytale to entertain her children, and asked her brother to set them to music. Uncle Engelbert obliged, and composed some music that was initially intended to be heard only in the family circle. Later he expanded his version of *Hänsel und Gretel* to a Singspiel – a light opera where the sung numbers were connected by spoken dialogue. Finally he decided to turn the music into a full-fledged opera, sung from start to finish. At this point, the words had to be rewritten and expanded – a task Humperdinck undertook with the help of his fiancée, Hedwig Taxer.

The first performance, led by none other than Richard Strauss, was a triumph. In the audience was the 33-year-old Gustav Mahler, who immediately declared the new opera a "masterpiece" and went on to conduct it some 50 times in Hamburg, where he was chief conductor from 1891 to 1897. In some ways, Mahler's own artistic endeavors at the time were quite similar to Humperdinck's; he was also interested in folklore, witness his long-time

involvement with the collection of folk poetry *The Youth's Magic Horn*. There are moments in *Hänsel und Gretel* (like the opening of the Witches' Ride) that may sound "Mahlerian" to us, if only because the two composers were drawing from similar folkloristic sources. The admiration between Mahler and Humperdinck was mutual, as we can see from the correspondence they kept over the years.

Act I

The opera begins with an introduction in a slow tempo, whose chorale-like melody, the "evening prayer," will be heard in the second act and again at the very end. The first scene shows the two children at play, oblivious to the chores their mother had given to them. Gretel's opening song, "Suse, liebe Suse" ("Suzy, pretty Suzy") is an original German folksong; the popular tune to which she and Hänsel dance a little later is, however, a brilliant imitation by Humperdinck. The tone of the music turns dramatic when the children's mother, Gertrud, returns. Appalled at finding them idle, she launches into an angry tirade, accompanied by agitated motives in the orchestra. To add insult to injury, she knocks over the milk-jug which breaks into a hundred pieces. The exasperated Gertrud lets out a loud scream, hitting a high B (one half-step shy of a C). As there is little food in the house, she sends the children into the woods to gather strawberries. Gertrud's anger now gives way to sadness: she laments the family's extreme poverty, and, "exhausted to death," dozes off for a few moments.

Peter the broom-maker makes his entrance with a folk-like song that is about poverty as well; yet Peter is in a happy state of mind. He already knows what we are going to find about very shortly, namely that his bag is full of the most delicious food – thanks to a particularly good day at the market. Gertrud, aroused from her sleep, listens as her husband tells her how he managed to sell so many brooms. The music suddenly changes course as Peter asks about the children and Gertrud replies, still angry over what happened before, says that they may have gone to the rock known as the Ilsenstein, meinethalben ("for all I care"). Shocked, Peter threatens his wife with one of his newest and strongest brooms, and then tells her that the Ilsenstein is near the dwelling of a very dangerous wicked witch. This prompts him to demonstrate another use of the broom as a witch vehicle. His "witch ballad" ends Act I, but it is strongly connected to the "Witches' Ride," which introduces Act II.

Act II

The scene is the middle of the forest, where Gretel sings a folksong known to every German child about a little mushroom standing by itself in the woods. This sets the stage for an idyllic scene where the children continue their play

just where they left it in Act I. As they listen to the call of the cuckoo, they not only eat all the strawberries they have gathered for their mother but also completely lose track of time, until night falls and the children realize that they can't find their way home. Their former happiness gives way to fear as the children experience mysterious noises and the flickering light of the will-o'-the-wisp. Horrified, they cry out for help, but are answered only by the echo and the cuckoo. Gretel's panic is expressed by anxious tremolos ("trembling" musical figures) in the orchestra. She becomes almost delirious when, suddenly, a strange little man appears, announced by some magical harp sounds and a solo violin. Ein Männlein – a little man --, like the one Gretel was singing about earlier, except this one is not a mushroom but the Sandman, who puts the children to sleep by sprinkling enchanted fairy dust in their eyes. After the Sandman's beautiful fairy-song, Hänsel and Gretel say their evening prayer, in which they entreat no fewer than fourteen angels to keep watch over them while they sleep. Another orchestral interlude, known as the "dream pantomime," follows in which the fourteen angels come down from heaven. They "dance a stately dance," as the instruction in the score reads, while the orchestra plays the melody of the evening prayer.

Act III

After an animated orchestral introduction, the Dew Fairy appears to awaken the children. Her song begins exactly like the Sandman's lullaby from the previous act, but the continuation is different. The magic is the same, and so is the love for the children who are in dire need of protection; yet the music is much more energetic, as it calls on Hänsel and Gretel to wake up, and face a sunny and beautiful new day. Gretel's lyrical aria greeting the birds in the trees develops into a virtuoso showpiece full of coloratura (rapid passagework). Hänsel takes a little longer to open his eyes, but eventually he joins his sister in a brief duet. The motifs of the previous "dream pantomime" return as Gretel recalls the dream she just saw.

Soon, however, the children will notice something that is not a dream, yet no less miraculous: they come upon a house made all of gingerbread, and their surprise is announced by a new and highly animated orchestral figure. In a happy duet, they admire this wonder of edible architecture, and they proceed to put it what they believe to be its proper use.

Inevitably, the witch calls from inside the house (the children first mistake her voice for the wind). She appears at the doorstep, and draws Hänsel and Gretel towards her. Her folk-like melody takes on some menacing overtones, and is punctuated by her scary, high-pitched laughter. Looking forward to some gastronomical pleasures of her own, she prevents the two children from running away by casting an immobilizing spell on them. She sings "hocus pocus, bonus jocus, malus locus," showing her good Classical education (the last four words are Latin for "a good joke, a bad place") – and the music

moves chromatically (in half-steps), as is often the case in mysterious and magical episodes in 19th-century opera. The melodies are deceptively playful as the witch shuts Hänsel up in a stable, and, forcing Gretel to help her, begins preparations for her meal. As the oven heats up, the vocal and instrumental lines become darker and darker. Sure of her success, the witch seizes a broomstick (one wonders whether it was made by our friend Peter) and starts riding around the stage in wild excitement. The music perfectly captures the famous moment when Hansel sticks out a thin chicken bone through the lattice, fooling the witch into believing that it is his finger, far from being ready to cook. Finally, Hänsel and Gretel manage to outwit the witch and push her into the burning oven. Overjoyed, they sing a "Witch Waltz": Juchhei! Nun ist die Hexe tot, which is hard to translate any other way but: "Ding, dong! The witch is dead." They happily collect all the gingerbread, all the fruit and other delicacies they can lay their hands on, but then they hear a strange noise. The oven explodes, and in the same moment, all the gingerbread children who used to form the witch's fence come back to life, turning back into the real boys and girls they were before they were hexed by the wicked witch. They sing a quiet song of thanksgiving, which then turns into an exuberant expression of joy.

At the high point of the celebration, Peter and Gertrud appear. They have been looking for their children ever since we last saw them in Act I, and arrive just in time to join their voices to the final chorus. Starting out as a dance (recalling Hänsel and Gretel's dance from Act I), the finale culminates in a solemn moment as everyone sings the melody of the evening prayer together.

—Peter Laki

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



Kevin Newbury is an opera, theatre, film and television director with over 100 projects to his credit. Career highlights include: *SOUL(SIGNS): Making Music Visible* (PBS/WNET/All-Arts, Emmy Award winner), *The Nutcracker* (PBS, Emmy Award winner), three *PBS Great Performances Broadcasts: Bernstein's MASS* (Ravinia Festival), *Doubt* (Minnesota Opera) & *Bel Canto* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); dozens of world premieres, including *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (Grammy Award Winner; Santa Fe Opera, Seattle Opera, San Francisco Opera, Finnish National Opera), *Candy & Dorothy* (GLAAD Media Award Winner), *Kansas City Choir Boy* (starring Courtney Love, Prototype Festival, American Repertory Theatre, Center Theatre Group), *Unholy Wars* (Spoleto Festival USA and Opera Philadelphia), *The Good Swimmer* (BAM Next Wave), and five operas with composer Gregory Spears including *Fellow Travelers* (Cincinnati Opera, NY Times "Best of 2016"), *Castor & Patience* (Cincinnati Opera, NY Times "Best of 2022") and *The Righteous* (Santa Fe Opera). Five of Kevin's productions have been nominated for Best World Premiere at the International Opera Awards and his production of *Norma* for Canadian Opera Company won three Dora Awards. Other theatre credits include *Candide* (starring Bradley Cooper & Carey Mulligan, Philadelphia Orchestra) and *Eighty-Sixed* (Diversionary Theatre; Nominee: San Diego Critics Circle Award: Outstanding Direction of a Musical). In 2023, Kevin served as Creative Director for Liz Phair's *Exile in Guyville* 30th Anniversary National Tour and he is currently directing and co-producing the 10th Anniversary National Tour of *Fellow Travelers*: Seattle Opera, Portland Opera, San Diego Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival (2026), Austin Opera, BAM Opera House (2027), Washington National Opera (2028). Co-Founder: Up Until Now Collective.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Hansel und Gretel is a story about the search for home, sustenance and security. Our production is set on the Lower East Side of New York City in the Summer of 1977, a time when New York was plagued by economic insecurity, a brutal heatwave and rampant crime. At the same time, downtown New York was experiencing a cultural Renaissance, from the genre-defining music scene to the gender-bending nightclub culture.

In our production, Hänsel and Gretel and their parents have just arrived in New York City, looking for opportunity. That very same night, the young and curious siblings get lost "in the woods" of a city both dangerous and magical. Inspired by vibrant 1977 cultural touchstones like Andy Warhol, *Star Wars* and *Saturday Night Fever*, our *Hänsel und Gretel* is a valentine to New York's rich history and culture. In fact, Summer 1977 featured the debut of an actual valentine: the now-legendary "I❤️ NY" campaign.

Most of all, our production is a tribute to the wit, wonder, and imagination of childhood—flourishing even in the face of great hardship.





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ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR



Born in Florida and raised in Venezuela, Raphael Jiménez has built an international career defined by poetic musical vision, dynamic interpretive clarity, and an enduring commitment to music education. From his early years as a violinist in the Simón Bolívar National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela to his first conducting appointment within Venezuela's renowned El Sistema, Jiménez quickly emerged as a compelling musical leader, becoming Principal Conductor of the Caracas National Ballet at just twenty-two.

Praised by The New York Times for his "tightly wrought" and "stirring, vividly shaped" interpretations, and by the Washington Times for his "delicious buoyancy and impeccable taste," Jiménez has conducted orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia, including the symphony orchestras of Zhejiang and Guangxi in China and the national symphonies of Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, and Puerto Rico. His work has also extended to opera and ballet, leading the opera orchestras of Lübeck in Germany and Palm Beach in Florida. He has also collaborated with the New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center.

Currently Director of Orchestras and Professor of Conducting at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Jiménez is widely admired for his ability to inspire young musicians to perform with uncommon artistry and discipline. Following performances at Carnegie Hall and Symphony Center, critics praised the Oberlin Orchestra for achieving a level "any city would be happy to have as its resident professional ensemble." Through every ensemble he leads, Jiménez brings together rigor, imagination, and a profound belief in the transformative power of orchestral music.

PRODUCTION TEAM

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Joseph P. Natt

Assistant Technical Director
Clark van Beek

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Laura Carlson-Tarantowski

Scenic Artist
Jo-Anne Steggall

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Costume Production
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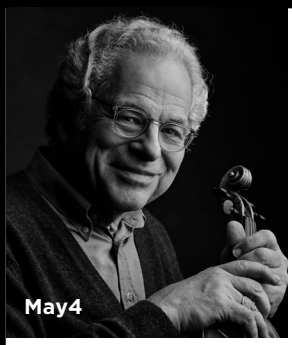
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STUDENT BIOS

Maya Rose Brown (Taumännchen)
Maya Rose Brown is a third-year soprano pursuing a degree in Vocal Performance with a concentration in Arts Administration at Oberlin Conservatory studying under Dr. Katherine Jolly. Most recently, Maya sang the role of Barbarina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, while covering the role of Norina in *Don Pasquale*, with Mediterranean Opera Studio and Festival. Additionally, in 2024 Maya made her professional debut as the Shepherd in Palm Beach Opera's *Tosca*. Her other operatic credits include Eustacia in *Bastianello* with Oberlin Opera Theater and First Knabe in *Die Zauberflöt*e with Chicago Summer Opera.

Lily Clark (Taumännchen)
Lily's previously played the role of chorus in Cendrillon with the Oberlin Opera Theater. Lily studies with Professor Edge.

Lucie Freeman (Hänsel)
Lucie's previous roles include Prince Charmant in Viardot's *Cendrillon* with Queen's Summer Vocal Institute (QSVI), Dorothée in Massenet's *Cendrillon* at Oberlin, and Mrs Nolan in Menotti's *The Medium* with QSVI. Lucie currently studies with Professor Salvatore Champagne.

Vaughn Holleran (Gertrud, die Mutter)
Soprano Vaughn Holleran recently debuted as the 2nd Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* with Prague Summer Nights. She was in the chorus of *L'Amant Anonyme* with Oberlin Opera Theater and studies with Professor Katherine Jolly.

Alexandra Larios (Gretel)
Alexandria makes her role debut as Gretel in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* at Oberlin Conservatory. Her previous scene work includes Gianetta in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, and Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Miami Beach Classical Music Festival. She is currently in the studio of Professor Salvatore Champagne.

Eva Occhiogrosso (Chorus).
This is Eva's first role. She studies with Professor Mathilda Edge.

Amelia Reines (Gertrud/Mutter)
Amelia's previous roles include Léontine in *L'amant Anonyme* and Spirit III in *Cendrillon* with Oberlin Opera Theater. Amelia studies with Professor Salvatore Champagne.

Lydia Rommel (Die Knusperhexe)
Lydia is a dual degree fifth-year student studying vocal performance and studio art. Her previous roles include Amadora/Ettalina in *Bastianello* with Oberlin Opera Theatre, Madame de la Haltière in *Cendrillon* with Oberlin Opera Theatre, Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare* with Saluzzo Opera Academy, and Florence in *Albert Herring* with Oberlin Opera Theatre.

Ella Vaughn (Gretel)
Ella's previous roles include the title role in *Cendrillon* and Elaine in *Later the Same Evening* with Oberlin Opera Theater, as well as Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the Chautauqua Opera Conservatory. Ella studies with Dr. Katherine Jolly.

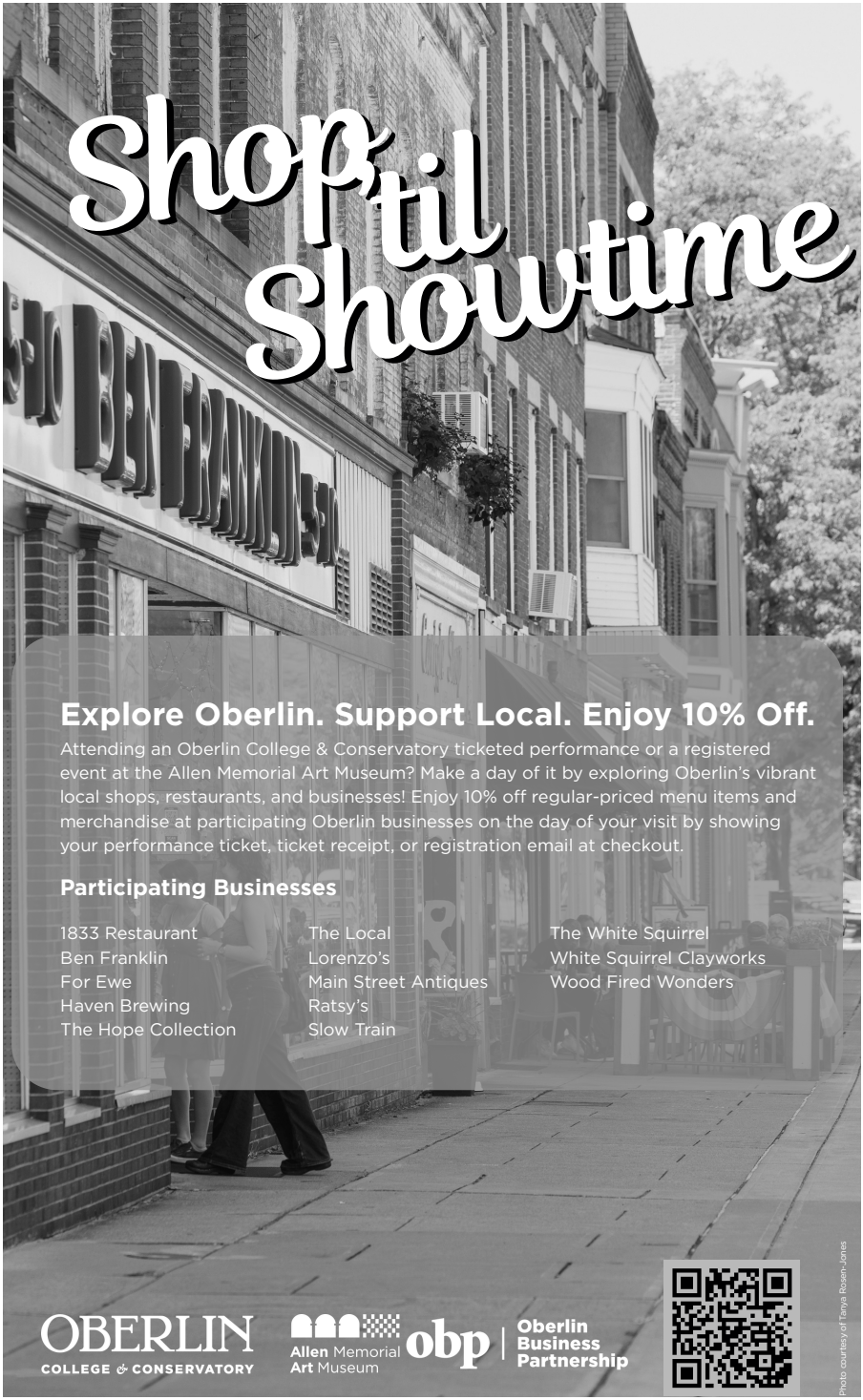
Maverick Williams (Peter, der Vater)
Maverick's previous roles include Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* with Prague Summer Nights, Joe Harland in *Later The Same Evening*, Bastianello the Elder and Frediano in *Bastianello*, Ophémon in *L'amant anonyme*, and Nardo in *La finta giardinera* with Oberlin Opera Theatre. Maverick studies with Professor Salvatore Champagne.

Eva Yang (Die Knusperhexe)
Eva Yang's previous roles include the Sixth Spirit in *Cendrillon* and Pastore in *L'Orfeo* with Oberlin Opera Theater, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* with the Mediterranean Opera Studio & Festival, and the roles of Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Charlotte in *Werther*, and Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* in opera scenes with Oberlin Opera Theater. Eva Yang studies with Professor Mathilda Edge.

ABOUT OBERLIN CHORISTERS

Founded in 1990 by the late Katherine Plank (1952-2025), Oberlin Choristers is a children's choral program for singers in Kindergarten through 12th grade, now with opportunities for adults to continue singing through adulthood. Our mission is to provide the highest quality choral music education and performance opportunities to the culturally and economically diverse children, youth and adults of northeast Ohio. Our current 2026-27 season, "A Mosaic of Song", includes our weekly choral program with 4 grade-based choirs (September-April), with concerts in December, February, and April, two one-day outreach programs, and our annual World Music Camp in June for children finishing Kindergarten through 8th grade.

Oberlin Choristers is grateful to be a part of this year's production of *Hänsel und Gretel* - much gratitude to Marie Cox, our singers & their families, Timothy LeFebvre, Kevin Newbury, Robert Pierce, Kyung-Eun Na, Chris Flaharty, and everyone else at Oberlin for making this happen!



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For Ewe
Haven Brewing
The Hope Collection
The Local
Lorenzo's
Main Street Antiques
Ratsy's
Slow Train
The White Squirrel
White Squirrel Clayworks
Wood Fired Wonders

OBERLIN
COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Allen Memorial Art Museum

obp | Oberlin Business Partnership

Photo: courtesy of Tanya Rosen-Jones

OBERLIN COLLEGE AND CONSERVATORY

Oberlin College and Conservatory uniquely combines a world-class conservatory of music with a top-ranking college of arts and sciences. The Conservatory of Music, a recipient of the National Medal of Arts, was founded in 1865, making it the oldest continuously operating conservatory in the United States. Oberlin provides the highest level of pre-professional music training, leading to lives of impact in classical, contemporary, jazz performance, composition, and electronic music.

Conservatory alumni enjoy illustrious careers in all aspects of the music world, achieving prominence as performers, conductors, composers, music educators, scholars, and arts administrators. Their work has been honored with Grammy, Tony, and MacArthur awards, Pulitzer and Rome prizes, and Guggenheim Fellowships.

Deeply committed to academic excellence, Oberlin's College of Arts and Sciences offers a rich and balanced curriculum in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences.

As an independent institution in Ohio, Oberlin was the first college to grant undergraduate degrees to women in a coeducational program and, historically, has been a leader in the education of African American students. The Oberlin community is known for its commitment to social and global engagement and diversity. Oberlin aims to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives essential to confront complex issues and to create change and value in the world.