

LAKES AREA MUSIC FESTIVAL

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LAMF Brings a Fairytale Forest to Life in *Hänsel & Gretel*

August 9 and 10 performances reimagine a classic tale in the Minnesota North Woods with acclaimed cast and local youth choruses.

Brainerd, MN (July 24, 2025) – The Lakes Area Music Festival (LAMF) continues its 2025 MYTHS & MAGIC season with a fully staged production of Engelbert Humperdinck’s *Hänsel & Gretel*, a heartwarming opera for audiences of all ages. Performances take place Saturday, August 9 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, August 10 at 3:00 p.m. at the Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts in Brainerd.

Set in Minnesota’s enchanted North Woods, this new production is directed by Justin Lucero, a nationally acclaimed Latinx director and Artistic Director of Theater Latté Da, whose vision brings whimsical storytelling and theatrical flair to the stage. Conducted by Christian Reif and featuring a lush, Romantic score, *Hänsel & Gretel* promises musical enchantment for opera lovers and young audiences alike.

This year’s cast includes rising stars and celebrated guest artists. Ariana Wehr (Gretel), praised for her “vibrant lyricism” by *Opera News*, stars alongside LAMF-favorite Abi Levis (Hänsel), the Joy in Singing Foundation’s “Debut Artist of the Year.” Contralto Sara Couden returns to LAMF in the role of the Witch, joined by John Taylor Ward (Father), Amy Guarino (Mother), and members of the LAMF Opera Residency. Rounding out the magic are youth performers from the Legacy Chorale of Greater Minnesota and Northfield Youth Choirs, who form the production’s charming children’s chorus.

“Hänsel & Gretel is an opera rich in imagination, humor, and heart,” said LAMF Artistic Director Taylor Ward. “This production blends local talent and national artistry in a way that truly represents our Festival’s mission.”

Part of LAMF’s 17th anniversary season, *Hänsel & Gretel* joins a vibrant lineup of concerts, opera, chamber music, and community events running July 25–August 17.

Saturday’s performance is sponsored in part by Victual; Sunday’s performance is sponsored in part by Gull Lake Resort. Tickets and full program details available at lakesareamusic.org.

CAST

Hänsel – Abi Levis

Gretel – Ariana Wehr

Witch – Sara Couden

Father – John Taylor Ward

Mother – Amy Guarino

Sandman – Jillian Tate
Dew Fairy – Sarah Rachel Bacani

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor – Christian Reif
Stage Director – Justin Lucero
Lighting Designer – Jennifer Fok
Costume Designer – Arian Marie Moye
Hair and Makeup Designer – Emma Gustafson
Choreographer – Hannah Benditt
Chorus Masters – Michelle Bendett (Northfield Youth Choirs), Kennedy Niska (Legacy Chorale)
Principal Coach – Bretton Brown
Stage Manager – Kate Fehan

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About the Lakes Area Music Festival

The Lakes Area Music Festival is Minnesota's summer home for world-class opera, orchestra, and chamber music. Celebrating its 17th anniversary season, more than 200 artists from the nation's top orchestras and opera companies will present 60 concert, education, and community outreach activities this July and August. Founded in 2009, the Lakes Area Music Festival sparks connections between its central Minnesota community and the nation's top classical performers to create transformative musical experiences. The Lakes Area Music Festival is a 501c3 non-profit based in Brainerd, MN. To find out more visit lakesareamusic.org or call 218-ASK-LAMF (218-275-5263).