

GRETEL AND HANSEL by The Little Company

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“Keeping Grimm’s Magic While Shining a New Light”

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 12 April 2019

Grimm’s tale of *Hansel and Gretel* is full of action, tension, and the cleverness of children outwitting horrible characters. But what significance does it hold for children apart from entertainment?

Perhaps playwright Suzanne Lebeau had a similar consideration when writing her adaptation, *Gretel and Hansel*.

The show throws a spotlight on Gretel and her resentment of having a younger brother, who seems to be getting all the attention. This resentment grows to a point in which Gretel even considers harming Hansel when they are both tricked by a witch. But Gretel soon sees that she is nothing without Hansel, and much of the original plot then plays out from there.

Lebeau succeeds in keeping the magic and grittiness of Grimm’s original, while introducing a topic that will be familiar to most children who have siblings. The only problem I have is that the sudden dissipation of animosity seems like a cop-out.

This is especially so when in an earlier scene, the siblings seemed to share a bond as neither of them ratted each other out to their mother after a fight. Additionally, why Gretel realises that she is nothing without her brother is also not made clear to the audience.

Apart from those minor flaws, Daniel Jenkin’s taut staging of the show makes this the second children’s show that I did not have to question if the seven-year-old me would have had a good time. (The first was *Charlotte’s Web*, also staged by The Little Company.) I thoroughly enjoyed the performance as an adult, and the eagerness of the 400-odd children in the theatre appears to be a resounding concurrence with my opinion.

I was surprised that the show was a two-hander. Where is the fun and excitement without having an actor playing the wicked witch? However, Tia Andrea Guttensohn and Joshua Lim as Gretel and Hansel are wonderful.

Both show a great deal of versatility in play-acting the other parts, such as manipulating costumes on hangers to represent their parents, or Guttensohn embodying the physicality of the witch, while a silhouette is projected onto a cloth. As the titular characters, Guttensohn has a lot of spunk, while Lim’s innocence is utterly endearing.

Despite the limitations of the relatively small stage, Petrina Dawn Tan's set design and Gabriel Chan's lighting design are ingenious. Flip half of the house like turning a page of a book and the children's house becomes the witch's candy house. Let Chan cast a swirling light pattern on it, and we sometimes forget that it is largely the same set. Need a forest? Simply draw a white curtain with motifs of trees on it, as Chan casts light to reveal and conceal what is behind.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to credit Leonard Augustine Choo's beautiful costumes, which are largely inspired by the 1940s, but with some modern touches to complete the look.

Gretel and Hansel is such a treat that I regret not bringing a child along to share the joy of this lovely show.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

GRETEL AND HANSEL by The Little Company.

13 March – 26 April 2019

KC Arts Centre – Home of SRT

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Isaac graduated from the National University of Singapore with a BA (Hons) in Philosophy, and he took Theatre Studies as a second major. He started reviewing plays for the student publication, Kent Ridge Common, and later developed a serious interest in theatre criticism after taking a module at university. He is also an aspiring poet and his poems have appeared in Symbal, Eunoia Review, Eastlit, and Malaise Journal.