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Gretel! The Musical

Book by

**JASON TREMBLAY
and SUZAN ZEDER**

Music by

JENN HARTMANN LUCK

Lyrics by

**JENN HARTMANN LUCK, SUZAN ZEDER
and JASON TREMBLAY**

Cello Arrangements by

NORA KARAKOUSOGLU

Dramatic Publishing Company

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Music by JENN HARTMANN LUCK
Lyrics by JENN HARTMANN LUCK,
SUZAN ZEDER and JASON TREMBLAY
Cello Arrangements by NORA KARAKOUSGLOU

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(GRETEL! THE MUSICAL)

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Book by Jason Tremblay and Suzan Zeder

Music by Jenn Hartmann Luck

Lyrics by Jenn Hartmann Luck, Suzan Zeder and Jason Tremblay

Cello Arrangements by Nora Karakousoglou

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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

Gretel! The Musical was initially created with Theatre Heroes in Austin, Texas, with developmental support from MINDPOP and the Village of the Arts at Cunningham Elementary School and presented by the Paramount Theatre. *Gretel! The Musical* premiered at the Paramount Theatre on Jan. 7, 2019.

CAST AND MUSICIANS

Gretel.....Estrella Saldaña
ManJason Phelps
Woman Veronica C. Williams
Cello..... Nora Karakousoglou
Guitar Adam Sultan

PRODUCTION

DirectorNoel Gaulin
Musical DirectorJenn Hartmann Luck
Stage ManagerRachel Dendy
Sound & Media Design.....K. Eliot Haynes
Media Design Chris Owen
Silhouette Designer.....Julia M. Smith
Costume Design.....Kelli Bland
Theatre Heroes Managing Director Sheila Tremblay

First Stage Milwaukee provided additional opportunities for development in their Foundry Stage Series, preceding their regional premiere production on Feb. 21, 2020. The show was directed by Artistic Director Jeff Frank.

In memory of Jason Tremblay
1977 – 2017

For Oliver Tremblay
“His story will live on in you”

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When I heard that my former student Jason Tremblay was in hospice, I had just enough time to write an email to him days before he passed away from liver cancer at age 39. I told him the two words came to mind when I thought of him were gratitude and grace.

Gratitude because he had given me the greatest gift a student can give a teacher, the gift of his own excellence as a playwright and a human being. I was grateful for our work together on his thesis play, *Katrina: The Girl Who Wanted Her Name Back*. A truly marvelous play that deserves to be produced by every TYA company in the country!

The word grace came because that was how Jason lived his life; making bold, brave theatre of unlimited imagination from classic sources for his company, Theatre Heroes. What I did not know at that time was that Jason would leave behind a beautiful wife, Sheila, a two-year-old son, Oliver, and an unfinished play.

It was only when I heard Jenn Hartmann Luck sing “Survive,” the first and only song then written for this piece, that I knew that this play, that song, and Jason’s story had to survive as well. So, I offered my help and began to follow the breadcrumbs. Eleven drafts and thirteen songs later *Gretel! The Musical* has finally come into her own.

Jason’s original inspiration was the Russian folk tale *Vassalisa, The Beautiful*, which is actually the origin story for *Hansel and Gretel* and features a vibrant, clever, indomitable young female protagonist and one of the grandest, most enigmatic witches in all of literature, Baba Yaga. Borrowing elements from both tales and adding thematic echoes from about a dozen other folk and fairy tales, we have woven a new story to

speak to contemporary audiences about the strength, tenacity, kindness and compassion of women ... young and old.

At every stage of her journey, *Gretel! The Musical* has been given what SHE needed. The persistence of Director Noel Gaulin, who shepherded us through two years of workshops, allowing the piece to grow beyond Jason's original vision, expanding the capacities of his company. Jenn Hartmann Luck's rich, melodic folk/rock score is the heartbeat of the piece. Nora Karakousoglou's magnificent and moving cello arrangement provides the emotional tone and texture for songs and underscoring. The encouragement of Sheila Tremblay has been an emotional anchor for all of us as she watched the piece transform from something Jason glimpsed into something he might have dreamed about. It has been a privilege for us to bring our best game to this process, but this experience has given me personally as much or more than I have given it.

Gretel! The Musical has renewed my faith in the power of stories filled with darkness and light, humor and humanity to transcend the polarity of life and death! As Gretel discovers the positive power of her anger, the comfort of her compassion and the gift of her grief, she teaches herself and us how to survive!

“This story will live on in you!”

—Suzan Zeder

COMPOSER'S NOTES

In October 2016, Jason Tremblay asked me if he could share a new script he was working on. In my role as education director at the Paramount Theatre, we had just come off of a successful run of his play *Call of the Wild* for our family and school series. I was eager to hear about his next project. He sent his first draft of *Gretel*. At that time, it was an unfinished, one-person play that he hoped might have some lovely underscoring.

After blazing through the draft for the first time, Gretel's voice literally leapt off the page and into my heart. Gretel demanded to sing. I asked Jason if he'd mind me taking a stab at a song, and he was incredibly gracious. I also happen to be a songwriter and a passionate advocate for strong, female protagonists in work for young audiences. I asked him to send me a list of words and images that resonated for him when thinking about his heroine ... and I wrote the song "Survive."

"Survive" is the song Jason would tell me over and over again how much he loved. The song he'd text me about, saying how it was helping him get through difficult hospital stays, the song Sheila, his wife, would eventually ask me to sing at his memorial celebration on the Paramount stage in April 2017, and the song I would sing one week later at the TYA/USA One Theatre World conference in Berkeley, Calif., under the music direction of Deborah Wicks La Puma. It was there that my former teacher, playwright Suzan Zeder, would hear "Survive" for the first time and offer, on the spot, to help in any way she could. It was also there that Jeff Frank, artistic director of First Stage Milwaukee, would hear the song and introduce himself. None of us knew what was next, but it was clear that Gretel had plans. Gretel wanted to survive.

The journey of getting this new musical to this point has been nothing short of magical. Suzan and I began a working relationship that has blossomed into new projects. Theatre Heroes' artistic director, Noel Gaulin, provided support and space for us to find Gretel's voice through multiple workshops. He introduced to me to cellist Nora Karakousoglou, the game changer, who brought her stunning gifts to the cello arrangements. The music in this piece would not be as dynamic if it weren't for the hours upon hours Nora dedicated to helping me tell Gretel's story through song. I am very proud of my songs in this show, but the cello part is truly something not to be missed. In addition, it is important to thank Benjamin Roberts and Adam Sultan for their invaluable support throughout this process.

After one of our workshop rehearsals, I saw Sheila Tremblay in the corner just smiling, and I asked her what she thought Jason would think about all this. She responded, "Well ... Jason hated musicals." I was stunned. "But this isn't just a musical. This is something else. This is special. And I think he'd absolutely love it." That's all I needed. Sheila's blessing to allow *Gretel! The Musical* to become exactly what she was always meant to be.

I hope you and your audiences absolutely love this piece the way we do. We can't wait to see how Gretel's story and her song, "Survive," live on in you and your audiences for years to come.

—Jenn Hartmann Luck

Gretel! The Musical

CHARACTERS

MAN: Also plays Stepmother, Malfusa, Black Knight, Goose, Father and Doll.

WOMAN: Also plays Mother and Baba Yaga.

GRETEL

TIME: A long time ago.

PLACE: A small village near a forest at the foot of the Baltic Sea.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Cast size can be as few as 3 and as many as 10, depending on doubling. If using more actors, DOLL may be voiced by additional narrators or even a musician.

It is strongly recommended that this piece be done with live musicians.

Additional production notes can be found in the back of the book.

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Gretel! The Musical

(In darkness, the sound of wind.

MAN and WOMAN enter.)

(#1: “The Beginning”)

MAN & WOMAN. Listen. Listen.

WOMAN. Listen to the words on the wind.

MAN. This is our story that we tell as true.

WOMAN. Written by one who may be gone.

MAN. But the story lives on and on.

WOMAN. Because you are here with us.

MAN. And we are here with you.

WOMAN. The story will survive forever.

MAN. The story will outlive the teller.

WOMAN. But only ...

MAN. Only ...

MAN & WOMAN. Only if it lives in you. Listen.

I. The Story Begins

MAN. A long time ago in a small village by a forest
At the foot of the Baltic Sea, a child was born.
Her mother and father named her Gretel.

(GRETEL enters.)

(#2: “Gretel’s Entrance)

WOMAN. She grew up fast but friendless.
For the village was so small that there were no children her
age for her to play with.
All the others grew up, were gone, or ...
MAN. Mysteriously disappeared.
MAN & WOMAN *(whispering)*. There were rumors of a
witch who was fond of children ... for dinner.
WOMAN. But, what Gretel most longed for was ...
GRETEL. Mother, please may I have a brother?
MOTHER. Someday, Gretel. Someday.
MAN. Her family was very poor. Her father was a salesman
who was constantly trying to sell things that everyone
already had or no one needed.

(#3: “Father”)

FATHER. I am off to sell water to the fish.
GRETEL. But Father, there is water in the ponds, streams and
all of the sea!
FATHER. Then, I shall sell air to the birds.
GRETEL. But Father, air is free!
MAN & WOMAN. No wonder they were poor.

FATHER. I must go to the city to see if anyone there needs water or air.

GRETEL. Will you be gone long?

FATHER. Probably!

WOMAN. And he was!

Leaving Gretel and her mother alone.

Leaving the brunt of all the chores

On their shoulders!

MAN. But they didn't mind!

(GRETEL and MOTHER shoot him an "Oh yeah?" look.)

MAN *(cont'd)*. It gave them time to go to the forest and pick mushrooms and hunt for hedgehogs.

WOMAN & GRETEL. Hedgehogs???

MOTHER. Come along, Gretel! I shall teach you which roots and berries to pick and which mushrooms will make you sicker than a fish in the desert!

GRETEL. I want to stay here.

MOTHER. I will teach you to climb trees and swing on vines.

GRETEL. I don't want to go to the forest!

MOTHER. Why not?

GRETEL. Because it is filled with things that go too fast and places that are too dark. It makes me feel like I am all alone.

MOTHER. But I will be with you ... Right there beside you.

GRETEL. Promise?

MOTHER. Promise.

(GRETEL and MOTHER enjoy a lovely moment of play together before MOTHER falters and stops.)

(#4: “My Child”)

MAN. Unfortunately, when Gretel was eight years old, and the days were getting shorter and the sun began to fade quickly over the horizon, Gretel’s mother grew very ill. And before many days, it was plain to see that she would die.

MOTHER.

**I HAVE LOVED YOU EVERY MOMENT
SINCE YOU WERE BORN.**

GRETEL.

YOU HAVE LOVED ME AND HELD ME CLOSE

MOTHER.

**WE TWO TOGETHER,
WE HAVE WEATHERED EVERY STORM.**

GRETEL.

**BUT NOW YOU ARE FADING
MOTHER YOU’RE FADING**

MOTHER.

**DON’T BE SCARED
DON’T BE AFRAID
HAVE NO FEAR
MY CHILD
DON’T BE SCARED
DON’T BE AFRAID
HAVE NO FEAR
MY CHILD.**

YOU MUST BE BRAVE NOW

GRETEL.

I WILL KEEP YOU RIGHT HERE.

MOTHER.

**YOU MUST BE BRAVE NOW,
I WILL ALWAYS BE NEAR.**

MOTHER & GRETEL.

ONE DAY I KNOW I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN.

GRETEL.

BUT TILL THEN ... UNTIL THEN ...

MOTHER.

**DON'T BE SCARED
DON'T BE AFRAID
HAVE NO FEAR
MY CHILD**

MOTHER.

**DON'T BE SCARED
DON'T BE AFRAID
HAVE NO FEAR
MY CHILD.**

GRETEL.

**WHO WILL HOLD ME CLOSE
WHEN I AM AFRAID
AND I'M FILLED WITH FEAR
I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU**

MOTHER. My child ... come closer.

GRETEL. I am right here.

MOTHER. Take the comb from my hair and the kerchief
from my neck and keep them with you.

GRETEL. Yes, Mother.

MOTHER. In my apron pocket, you'll find my blessing ...

GRETEL. This little doll?

MOTHER. Carry him always in your pocket and never show
him to anyone. When evil threatens, or sorrow befalls, give
the doll something to eat and a drop to drink, and he will
comfort you and keep you safe.

GRETEL. Does he have a name?

MOTHER. I gave him the name of the brother we always
hoped you would have.

GRETEL. Pray, then tell me.

MOTHER. Hhhhhhh ...

MAN. She used her last breath to whisper the name so softly that Gretel could not hear it.

And then she slipped away.

GRETEL.

**ONE DAY I KNOW I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN
I DON'T KNOW HOW. I DON'T KNOW WHEN.
BUT I WILL GAZE AT THE STARS EVERY NIGHT.
PERHAPS YOU'LL BE THERE IN THEIR LIGHT.
PERHAPS YOU'LL BE THERE ...**

MAN. Gretel's mother became a single beam of light that transformed into a star.

(MOTHER disappears and GRETEL grieves.)

WOMAN. Gretel grieved and grieved, so much that she could neither eat nor sleep. She lay in her bed and wept until she remembered the little no-name doll.

(#5: "The Doll")

MAN. She gave him a crumb of bread and a drop of water and the doll's eyes glowed.

DOLL. Grief is greatest at night. But morning is kinder than night. Shut your eyes and sleep will comfort you.

GRETEL. Tell me your name, little doll, so I may thank you.

DOLL. Although my name I do not know, if you say it, I will tell you so.

GRETEL. Hugo?

DOLL. No.

II. Step Problems.

WOMAN. Time passed, and Gretel's father decided to remarry ...

WOMAN. To a widow with a cold, cruel face.

FATHER. She'll be a good housekeeper and a kindly stepmother ...

STEPMOTHER (*very sugary*). Dear little stepdaughter, Gretel!

GRETEL (*whispers to FATHER*). Father, why does she smile with her voice and frown with her face?

WOMAN. She had a daughter named Malfusa.

FATHER. She'll be a sweet sister for you.

MALFUSA (*very nasty*). Dear little stepsister, Gretel.

GRETEL (*whispers to FATHER*). Father, why does her voice sound like grinding glass?

FATHER. I must leave immediately on another business trip.

GRETEL & WOMAN. And so, he did.

WOMAN. For a little while, things weren't completely terrible. But then ... they were.

STEPMOTHER. Gretel!

(#6: "Chores")

GRETEL. Yes, Stepmother.

STEPMOTHER. There are a few things we need done around the house.

GRETEL. Of course.

STEPMOTHER.

SWEEP THE HEARTH—

GRETEL.

YES, MA'AM

STEPMOTHER.

COOK THE BREAKFAST

GRETEL.

MY PLEASURE

STEPMOTHER.

SCRUB THE FLOOR

GRETEL.

I WILL DO IT

STEPMOTHER.

BEAT THE RUGS

GRETEL.

RIGHT AWAY

STEPMOTHER.

DO THE WASHING

GRETEL.

I'M ON IT

STEPMOTHER.

AND THE MENDING

GRETEL.

FOR SURE

STEPMOTHER.

THEN THE FOLDING

GRETEL.

TAKEN CARE OF

STEPMOTHER.

AND THE HEMMING

GRETEL.

WITHOUT DELAY

STEPMOTHER.

*AND DON'T
FORGET
TO MAKE
THE BEDS*

GRETEL.

YES, YES, YES!

MALFUSA.

**GRETEL, FIX MY HAIR
DO MY NAILS
FIND MY FAN
DARN MY SOCKS
SHINE MY SHOES
SCRATCH MY BACK**

GRETEL.

THAT TOO?

STEPMOTHER.

COOK THE DINNER,

MALFUSA.

SET THE TABLE

STEPMOTHER.

SERVE OUR MEAL

MALFUSA.

DO THOSE DISHES

STEPMOTHER & MALFUSA.

AND ALL BEFORE NIGHTFALL.

STEPMOTHER. Is something the matter?

GRETEL. No. I'm just a little tired is all ...

STEPMOTHER. Hmmmmm ...

WELL, YOU STILL NEED TO HOE THE GARDEN

MALFUSA.

YOU STILL NEED TO PULL THE WEEDS,

STEPMOTHER.

YOU STILL NEED TO FETCH THE WATER,

MALFUSA.

AND YOU'VE YET TO HARVEST THE BEANS

STEPMOTHER.

YOU BETTER TRIM THE HEDGES

MALFUSA.

AND YOU KNOW TO TURN THE SOIL

STEPMOTHER.

YOU MUST WATER THE CABBAGES

MALFUSA.

DON'T LEAVE THE SPROUTS TO SPOIL

STEPMOTHER. And be sure it's all done by morning.

GRETEL. But it's night!

STEPMOTHER. Night is a very good time for gardening.

GRETEL. But ...

STEPMOTHER & MALFUSA.

NO SLEEP FOR YOU UNTIL YOU'RE DONE!

STEPMOTHER. And hurry it up, you useless girl!

WOMAN. They slammed the door and locked her out.

MAN. Gretel saved her crust of bread from dinner and drew a cup of water from the well.

GRETEL. Little doll, little doll. Tell me how to bear these burdens.

MAN. The doll's eyes began to shine like glowworms.

DOLL. Rest now, Gretel. Morning is more productive than night. Sleep in the root cellar, and by morning all will be well.

WOMAN. Gretel bedded down on soft sacks of wheat and rice and barley, and the moonlight shone upon the jars of jams and jellies and all the preserves Gretel's mother had put up for the winter.

MAN. And all through the night, the doll worked and worked

...

DOLL.

**I SWEEPED THE HEARTH.
DID THE DISHES
WASHED THE CLOTHES.
HOED THE GARDEN
FETCHED THE WATER
LIT THE FIRES
BAKED THE BREAD
MADE THE BEDS
AND BY MORNING ALL WAS WELL!**

WOMAN. And so it went, day after day, night after night.

But the stepmother and Malfusa grew greedier and greedier,
and they ate up ...

MAN.

ALL THE JAMS

WOMAN.

ALL THE JELLIES.

MAN.

ALL THE PICKLES

WOMAN.

AND PRESERVES

MAN.

ALL THE MEATS

WOMAN.

AND DRIED PORK BELLIES

MAN.

ALL THE BARLEY,

WOMAN.

AND THE TURN ...

MAN.

UPS—

WOMAN. And the doll kept up as best he could, BUT ...

DOLL. I may be magic, but even I can't make something out of nothing.

GRETEL. They are eating us out of house and home.

DOLL. And not only that,

GRETEL & DOLL.

THEY USED UP ...

ALL THE LAMP OIL

ALL THE KINDLING

ALL THE TORCHES

ALL THE LANTERNS

ALL THE TAPERS

ALL THE PAPERS

NOT A CANDLE LEFT TO FLICK

NOT A WILLOW, NOT A WICK.

WOMAN. They were all plunged into darkness.

MAN. And everyone was hungry.

WOMAN. So, Gretel took the last crumb of bread and the last sip of water and ...

GRETEL. Little doll, little doll. We are starving and cold, and there is no light, I think, left in the world. Can you make morning more hopeful than night?

DOLL. Don't bet on it. I'm just a doll. I don't even have a name.

GRETEL. Is it Hector?

DOLL. Nope.

(GRETEL holds the DOLL close and sleeps.)

WOMAN. Indeed, morning was not more hopeful than night for when the Stepmother and Malfusa awoke they started right in on Gretel again.

STEPMOTHER. You are a lazy—

MALFUSA. Sniveling—

STEPMOTHER. Spoiled girl.

Now that the root cellar is empty, we can't last much longer with neither food nor light.

GRETEL. But we can't just sit around here waiting. We must DO something, or we shall all starve!

STEPMOTHER. What an excellent idea!

MALFUSA. So glad *you* thought of it.

GRETEL. What?

STEPMOTHER. You will want to leave first thing in the morning.

GRETEL. Where am I going?

STEPMOTHER & MALFUSA. Why to Baba Yaga, of course!