Characters: (All characters have singing parts.)
Margaretha—A peasant woman, mother of Hansel and Gretel.
Johann—A broom maker, father of Hansel and Gretel
Gretel—A peasant girl. Can be played by ages 10 to 20.
Hansel—A peasant boy, Gretel's younger brother. Can be played by ages 10 to 20, and by either a male or female.
Witch—A witch. Can be played by any age, male or female, but requires a tenor or soprano voice.
Gingerbread Children—Ages 8 -12ish.

Scene 1: The Broommaker's Cottage

The interior of a small cottage. The door upstage leads outdoors. Offstage right is the sleeping room. There is a fireplace, but no fire, a table, and two stools. Beside the fireplace is a row of pegs holding jackets, knit hats and mittens. Under a window stage L of door is a small cupboard. An evergreen tree is far stage L.

1. Margaretha enters through the door with a pitcher.

MARGARETHA: Gretel! Gretel, it's time to get up. (She puts the pitcher down carefully on the table.) Where is that girl? She and Hansel sleep the day away. (Walks restlessly back and forth.) At least when they are sleeping, they aren't eating. I know they are hungry. But the cow had some milk this morning—I can make a pudding for supper. (Calling into the other room.) Gretel!

GRETEL: (Offstage R.) Coming! (She stumbles into the room sleepily, tying her apron.) I'm hungry! What's for breakfast?

MARGARETHA: Breakfast! It's practically midday! Wake up that lazy brother of yours. I need for you to go look for firewood. We have none in the house. (Turns Gretel around and pushes her back into the bedroom.) Now, get him out of bed and into his clothes. I'm going to see if I can borrow a little honey from Frau Schmidt, to make a pudding with the milk. (She pulls her shawl around her shoulders, and goes out of the house.)

GRETEL: (Offstage R.) Hansel, get up! Put on your shoes. Mother wants us to look for firewood.

HANSEL: (Offstage R.) All right! I'm coming.

GRETEL: (Coming back into the kitchen.) Hurry!

HANSEL: (Coming in with his sweater half on.) What's for breakfast?

GRETEL: I don't know if we have anything.

HANSEL: (Looks at pitcher.) What's this? (Sticks his finger in and sucks it}
Milk—cream!

GRETEL: *(Slapping his hand.)* Stop! Mother will make pudding for dinner tonight. She has gone to borrow some honey.

HANSEL: But I'm hungry now. And cold.

GRETEL: I know what will warm you up. We can dance.

HANSEL: Dance! I don't know how to dance.

GRETEL: It's easy! I can teach you.

*(SonGRETEL: “Brother, Come and Dance with Me.” Humperdinck score pp. 24.)*

GRETEL: Brother, come and dance with me.

It's as easy as can be. 
This way first, that way then--
Round about, and back again.

HANSEL: I am just a clumsy fool,
No more dancer than a stool!
Therefore show me what to do
So that I can dance with you.

GRETEL: With your foot go tap, tap, tap.
With your hands go clap, clap, clap.
This way first, that way then--
Round about, and back again!

HANSEL: With your foot go tap, tap, tap.
With your hands go clap, clap, clap.
This way first, that way then--
Round about, and back again!

*(The music repeats the first verse, as the two children dance around the kitchen more and more wildly, until Hansel bumps against the table, knocking over the pitcher and spilling the milk. Both children stop in horror; then Gretel grabs a rag from the cupboard under the window and begins to wipe the milk up, just as Margaretha comes through the door. As she sees what has happened, she sets a small jug down on the cupboard abruptly.)*

MARGARETHA: What have you done? *(Picks up the pitcher and looks inside.)* Only a few drops left! That was to be our Christmas Eve supper! You naughty children!

GRETEL: We were just dancing to keep warm!

HANSEL: It was an accident! I didn't mean to!

MARGARETHA: Well, you can do your dancing outside! Get your hats and mittens, both of you. I want you to go out and not come back until you each have an armload of firewood. When your father returns from trying to sell his brooms, he should at least be able to get warm.

*(She snatches the rag from Gretel.)* Go! Now!
(Both children retrieve knitted hats, mittens, and jackets from the pegs.
Margaretha shoos them out the door, slams it, sets the rag and pitcher on the cupboard under the window, and collapses on a stool. The children appear from behind the house, stage left.)

HANSEL: We haven't even had breakfast! Why is she being so mean?
GRETEL: There isn't anything for breakfast. I hope Father brings something good home from the village.
HANSEL: Well, at least we don't have to sit around in the house. I'm not going to come home until the sun is going down. Maybe we can find a pond and slide on the ice.
GRETEL: Mother said we should bring back firewood.
HANSEL: She said not to come back until we each had an armload of firewood. It may take me a long time.
GRETEL: Hansel....
HANSEL: Catch me, sister! (He runs off.)
GRETEL: Hansel! That's the path to the deep woods! You know father doesn't want us to go there!
HANSEL: (From offstage L.) You can't catch me!
GRETEL: Hansel, come back! (She runs off stage after him.)

MARGARETHA: (Raising her head from her hands.) I didn't even have a piece of bread and cheese to give them. My poor babies! And now, nothing for supper!

(There is a short pause while she sobs, and then begins wearily to mop up the last of the milk. From offstage, we hear Johann singing “Hunger is the Poor Man's Cook.”)

JOHANN: Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-lie!
Hola, Mother, it is I!
Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la!
I bring luck, sing gloria!

(Johann opens the door and enters. He carries a large sack, which he drops on the floor next to the cupboard.)

For the poor, it's always been--
So, today, as it was then:
Holes in sack, and holes in shoe,
And a hole in the stomach, too.

Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la!
Hunger is the poor man's cook!
Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la!

Page 3
Hunger is the poor man's cook!

Margaretha! Good morning, my dear!

MARGARETHA: What's good about it? The only milk the cow has given for days, spilled. Nothing in the larder. Nothing to feed the family. And the children so hungry--

JOHANN: Ahh, but one's supper tastes so much better when one is hungry. *(He continues singing, without accompaniment.)*

MARGARETHA: How can you sing about having nothing to eat?

JOHANN: Ahh, but I didn't sing about having nothing to eat. Just look what I have here. *(He puts his bundle on a stool and begins to pull out food and put it on the table.)* Potatoes. Carrots.

MARGARETHA: Sausages! Flour....


MARGARETHA: And eggs! Oh, Johann! How did you possibly get so much? You didn't—you didn't steal....?

JOHANN: Margaretha!

MARGARETHA: How, then?

JOHANN: I had used almost all of my broom twine, remember? So, I used some of your leftover bits of yarn to make the twine last longer. At the Christmas fair, everyone said I had Christmas brooms, with the bright binding! They paid nearly twice as much as for my ordinary brooms!

MARGARETHA: It's a Christmas miracle!

*(The two sing together)*

Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la!
Hear the chorus that we sing!
Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la!
For tonight we'll feast like kings!

JOHANN: I even had enough to buy little Christmas presents for the children. *(He pulls two small parcels wrapped in brown paper from the empty sack.)* I'll have to hide them somewhere—somewhere they won't look.

MARGARETHA: Put them in the bottom of the cupboard. Then I'll put the new sack of flour on top. They'll never look there—only at the food that's ready to eat.

JOHANN: Perfect! *(He opens the cupboard, places the parcels inside, and Margaretha puts the flour sack on top.)* Where are the children? It's awfully quiet.

MARGARETHA: I sent them out to bring in firewood. They had been dancing around the kitchen, and Hansel bumped into the table and spilled the pitcher of milk. *(Self-accusingly.)* I was so cross with them, Johann.
Johann: We'll call them back and you can fry them some apples with whatever wood they have gathered. *(He goes through the door and around the back of the house into the yard.)* Hansel! Gretel!

Margaretha: *(Coming out of the house in turn.)* Gretel! Hansel! Come back at once! Your father has brought such lovely things.

*(They wait a few seconds—no reply.)*

Margaretha: Hansel! Gretel! Where are you? *(To Johann.)* They don't usually go far.

Johann: Children! *(He walks off stage left slowly, and then comes running back.)* Margaretha! I've found Gretel's hair ribbon.

Margaretha: She's always losing them.

Johann: *(Sounding worried.)* I found it on the path to the right. They must have gone into the deep woods. We must go after them at once.

Margaretha: Is it dangerous?

Johann: They say a witch lives there.

Margaretha: Do you believe that?

Johann: I've never seen her. But . . . do you remember little Lisbet Braun, who disappeared a year ago? And Arnold Miller before her? People said they had gone into the deep woods, and were never seen again.

Margaretha: Oh, Johann! *(Running into the house, and calling back as she does so.)* I'll just get my shawl! Surely we can find them—they haven't been gone that long!

Johann: *(Starting off stage left.)* Hansel!

Margaretha: *(Running after him.)* Gretel! Hansel! Come home!

*(Lights down.)*

**Scene 2: In the Deep Woods**

*(Before the curtain. Tree branches make shadows on the stage and the curtain. The lights come up bright, but almost immediately begin a slow fade.)*

Hansel: *(From off stage right.)* You can't catch me! *(He runs on stage, and collapses in the center, laughing and panting.)*

Gretel: *(Running on from stage right. She is missing one hair ribbon.)* Yes, I can! *(She grabs his arm.)*

Hansel: Only because I stopped running.

*(Gretel sits down also, pushes her hair back, and discovers that she is missing a ribbon.)*

Gretel: I've lost a ribbon! It must have been caught on a branch.

Hansel: Braid your hair up, and I'll tie it together with the other one.
(Gretel begins to braid her hair. Hansel gets up, stands behind her, and unties the other ribbon. He holds the ends of both braids and ties them together.)

HANSEL: If I weren't so hungry, I'd say this has been the best day of my life. I had so much fun sliding on the ice!
GRETEL: Yes, and you fell down so many times! You were lucky not to break the ice.
HANSEL: You fell down, too.
GRETEL: Only when you pushed me. And you made me drop all of the firewood I had picked up.
HANSEL: It will be easy to find more. (He looks around.) It's beginning to get dark. I suppose we should find the firewood and go home. (He starts off stage left.)
GRETEL: I don't think that's the right way.
HANSEL: Well, which way is the right way, then?
GRETEL: (Looking around.) I'm not sure.

(There is a loud "cuckoo" noise.)

GRETEL: What's that?
HANSEL: Just a bird—I think. Here, we'll go this way, then. (He starts toward stage right. There is another "cuckoo" from a different direction.)
GRETEL: That doesn't look right, either.
HANSEL: Well, where, then? (The "cuckoo" calls again.)
GRETEL: I don't know! (She takes a few steps, first in one direction, than in another.) Hansel, I think we're lost! (The "cuckoo" calls again.)
HANSEL: It really is getting dark. (The two children huddle together in the center of the stage.) If we start walking in the dark, we might go in circles. Father has told me that.
GRETEL: Then what shall we do?
HANSEL: We'll just have to sleep here in the woods. In the morning, we can find our way home. It will be an adventure! (The "cuckoo" calls again, and Hansel clutches at Gretel.) I'm scared!
GRETEL: (Being the big sister.) Don't be scared. I'm here. (An owl hoots; the children shiver.) We'll sleep close together, to keep warm. And we should say our prayers, and ask the angels to watch over us.

(Hansel and Gretel get down on their knees as the introduction to the "Evening Prayer" begins. The stage has become almost completely dark, except for a special on the children.)

When at night I rest my head,
Fourteen angels guard my bed.
Two my head beside,
Two my feet to guide,
Two are at my right hand,
Two are at my left hand.
Two will covers make me,
Two who will awake me,
Two who when I come to die
To paradise will take me.

(The children lie down, snuggled together.)

HANSEL: Good night, Gretel.
GRETEL: Good night, Hansel.

(Lights out.)

Scene 3: The Witch's Cottage

(When the lights come up, Hansel and Gretel are still sleeping center stage.
Hansel rolls over and stretches, then sits up.)

HANSEL: Gretel! It's morning.
GRETEL: (Sitting up and rubbing her eyes.) It doesn't seem so frightening
in the daylight. (She stands up.) Let's go this way—slowly—and
look around carefully as we do. We should be able to find the stream,
and then the path to our house.
HANSEL: (Stands up.) Right! We'll hold hands so that we don't get
separated.

(The two take hands and go off stage left.)

HANSEL: (Offstage.) Gretel! I think I see a path!
GRETEL: (Offstage.) Already? We haven't found the stream yet.
HANSEL: (Offstage.) Here—look.
GRETEL: (Offstage.) Be careful! Don't trip over that fallen tree.

(The curtains open. Up stage left is a gingerbread cottage with a practical
door. To stage left of the cottage is a brick baking oven, with a large door
that extends down to the ground. On the side of the house next to the bake
oven is a stack of wood. There is a ring mounted on the wall of the house
under the upstage window. A small twig is pre-set on the ground under the
ring. On either side of the cottage is a fence made out of gingerbread
children with their hands touching. Hansel and Gretel enter stage right.)

HANSEL: Gretel! Do you see what I see?
GRETEL: Can it be real?
HANSEL: The walls are gingerbread.
GRETEL: That's not snow on the roof, it's sugar frosting.
HANSEL: The stones in the fireplace look like marzipan.
GRETEL: Spun sugar for the windows.
HANSEL: A peppermint door.
GRETEL: It must be a dream.

(Throughout these lines the children have been moving closer and closer to the house. Hansel reaches out to the edge of one wall, breaks off a tiny piece, and tastes it.)

HANSEL: It's not a dream! Gretel, just taste it!
GRETEL: (Breaking off a piece of her own.) It's delicious!
HANSEL: And I was so hungry. What a breakfast! (He takes another piece.)

WITCH: (From offstage, singing—starting at page 123 of the score.)
    Nibble, nibble mouse-kin,
    Who's nibbling at my house-kin?

(The two children freeze, and look at each other.)

HANSEL: Did you hear that? (After a moment, singing.)

HANSEL & GRETEL:
    The breeze, the breeze,
    That blows in the trees!

(They wait for a moment, then resume breaking off bits to eat.)

WITCH: (From offstage, singing.)
    Nibble, nibble mouse-kin,
    Who's nibbling at my house-kin?

(The two children freeze, again, and then answer as before.)

HANSEL & GRETEL:
    The breeze, the breeze,
    That blows in the trees!
    
GRETEL:
    Wait, you naughty mouse!
    Soon comes the cat from the house!

HANSEL:
    Run away home,
    And leave me alone!

GRETEL:
    Not so fast, Sir Mouse, Sir Mouse!

HANSEL:
    I'll have my fill--you do what you will!

(During the previous lines, the Witch has opened the cottage door and come upstage corner. Eating bits of the house is mimed.)

Introductory note for “Nibble, Nibble, Mousekin”

Stop at upstage corner. Eating bits of the house is mimed.

To Hansel, mock-angrily. Both children are now facing away from the house, down C.

The Witch opens the cottage door and comes outside.

Gretel snatches a piece of cookie from Hansel.

Hansel snatches it back.
outside. She walks with the aid of a crooked stick. She now grabs Hansel by the hand, and both children freeze again, but turn heads to look at her.)

WITCH: Well, well, well! A little bigger than a mouse! Two lovely children, come to visit me. And hungry children, as well.
HANSEL: Please--we didn't mean any harm!
GRETEL: We took only a little!
WITCH: Why, you didn't take nearly enough! Those bits couldn't satisfy growing children like you. You need much more to become nice and fat.
GRETEL: We don't want to be a bother--
HANSEL: But I am hungry.
WITCH: Of course you are. You must stay a while.
GRETEL: We should be going home.
WITCH: I insist. I have all sorts of nice food inside. Marshmallows--and butter cookies--and chocolate cake.
HANSEL: Chocolate cake! Oh, Gretel--
WITCH: There, you see, Gretel? Your brother--what is your name, my lovely?
HANSEL: Hansel.
WITCH: Hansel wants to stay. (She sings, starting on page 132 of the score.)

Witch focuses her attention on Hansel, who is slowly hypnotized by her gestures. Gretel keeps trying to get his attention, unsuccessfully.

Come, little mouse-kin,
Stay here at my house-kin.
You'll eat well at my table,
Eat as much as you're able.
Chocolates, tarts, and marzipan,
Gooey filled cakes and caramel flan,
Sweet rice pudding and raisin bread
And sugar rolls as big as your head.
There's raisins and figs, and dates and almonds too.
They're all in the house for you.
Yes, all for you!

GRETEL: But our parents will worry. (She takes Hansel's hand, pulling him with her toward stage right.) Come on, Hansel!

(The Witch gestures with her stick.)

WITCH: Hocus, pocus, bonus jocus! Feet, be still! (The two children freeze in place.) Hansel wants to stay--(She slips a rope around his wrists and ties it, then knots the other end around a ring in the cottage wall)--and stay he shall.
GRETEL: What are you doing? Let him go!
HANSEL: Why have you tied me up?
WITCH: I wouldn't want you to go before you have had enough to eat.
Now, both of you stay here while I go get some food. *(She goes into the house.)*

HANSEL: Gretel, help me!
GRETEL: I'll try--

*(The witch comes back outside with a plate of cookies—not real ones, perhaps styrofoam.)*

WITCH: Now, then. You eat, Hansel. Your sister can help me with a few chores.
GRETEL: *(Whispering to Hansel.)* I'll see what she wants. But I don't trust her. Better just pretend to eat.
HANSEL: But I'm still hungry.
GRETEL: Hansel, please!
WITCH: Come along, Gretel. I want you to help me with my oven.
GRETEL: I'm coming. *(She goes over to the oven with the Witch.)*
WITCH: Open the oven door.
GRETEL: How?
WITCH: Turn the handle and pull, you stupid girl.
GRETEL: Like this? *(She opens the oven door.)*
WITCH: The fire is nearly out. Put some more wood in.
GRETEL: Where is the wood?
WITCH: There next to the house. *(Gretel begins putting sticks into the oven.)* Only a little at a time. You'll put the fire out. Now close the door. It will take a while for the oven to get hot enough.
GRETEL: Hot enough for what?
WITCH: To bake my supper. Now, let's see how your brother is doing. Where is my stick? *(She looks around nearsightedly.)*
GRETEL: Here it is. *(She knocks it to the ground.)* Oh, I knocked it over.
WITCH: Pick it up and give it to me.

*(Gretel takes the plate from Hansel, quickly brushes the cookies off of it, and hands it to the Witch.)*

WITCH: Have you eaten everything? Give me the plate.

*(Gretel takes the plate from Hansel, quickly brushes the cookies off of it, and hands it to the Witch.)*

WITCH: Good, good. A clean plate means a clear day tomorrow. Now hold out your finger and let me see how fat you are.

*(Gretel snatches up a twig from the ground and gives it to Hansel, who holds it out in his hand. The Witch feels it.)*

WITCH: Hmm, not very much flesh on those bones. Still, it may have to do. *(Aside.)* I'm rather hungry myself! Gretel, go see if my oven is
hot yet.
GRETEL: I don't know how.
WITCH: It's easy, stupid girl. Open the door and put in your head.
GRETEL: (Goes over to the oven door and opens it.) I've opened the door.
WITCH: Yes?
GRETEL: But how do I put in my head?
WITCH: Don't you know how to do anything?
GRETEL: I'm sorry I'm so stupid. Perhaps you could show me?
WITCH: (Going to the oven.) You simply lean down, like this--(She puts down her stick and bends over)--and put your head inside....

(Gretel pushes the Witch into the oven and slams the door. We hear the Witch scream, and the lights go out. After a moment, they come back up. The gingerbread children in the fence have been replaced with real children, holding hands, but their eyes are closed.)

GRETEL: Hansel! (She runs to him and unties his hands.)
HANSEL: Is she dead?
GRETEL: I think so. (She turns to look at the oven, and then turns back, sees the gingerbread children, and puts her hand to her mouth.) Hansel, look at the gingerbread children!
HANSEL: That's Arnold Miller!
GRETEL: And that's Lisbet Braun! And Irma Holtz! Hansel, they are all children from our village!
HANSEL: But they aren't moving. Isn't there something we can do?

(Gretel thinks for a moment, and then picks up the Witch's stick. She walks to one end of the line of children, and touches the first child on the shoulder as she speaks.)

GRETEL: Hocus pocus, bonus jocus.

(The child's eyes pop open, but it doesn't move. Gretel goes down the line, doing the same thing for each child, until all the children's eyes are open. Gretel backs downstage a little, and then suddenly all the children shout “Hurray!” and run to Hansel and Gretel. There is a melee of hugs, handshakes, and noise, interrupted from offstage.)

JOHANN: Hansel! (Johann and Margaretha run on stage from stage right.)
MARGARETHA: Gretel! Is that you?
JOHANN: I was afraid you would meet the Witch.... (His voice trails off as he takes in the gingerbread house and the other children.)
HANSEL: We did! And she was horrid! I think she was going to eat me.
But Gretel fooled her.
MARGARETHA: Gretel, what did you do?
GRETEL: I pretended to be stupid, and then—shoved her into the oven.
MARGARETHA: And all of these—why, that's Lisl!
JOHANN: They are all the children who have disappeared from our village.
GRETEL: The Witch baked them all into gingerbread.

(The two children at the oven shout “Look!” and pull from the oven a gingerbread Witch. Everyone points, laughs, and sings.)

Ginger children now are free--
Hear us singing joyfully.
We can go home again
Through the woods and back again.

(Margaretha) There is no more need to fear
In the trees and pathways here
If you do the things you should,
And don't lose your firewood....

(She pretends to swat at Hansel, then turns it into a hug.)

(All) For the witch is dead, dead, dead!
Turned to ginger bread, bread, bread!
We will leave her behind
For the birds to find.

(Gretel) Everyone, come dance with me.
(Hansel joins in.) It's as easy as can be.
(Everyone) This way first, that way then--
Round about, and back again.

(The music continues to play, repeating the chorus.)

JOHANN: Let's go back to the village!

(With Gretel in the lead, everyone joins hands and skips in a spiral across the stage and off stage right. The child who has been carrying the gingerbread Witch leans it against the house and runs after the others. Lights down.)

End of Play