

The Tales of Hoffmann

“Les Contes d’Hoffmann”

**A French opera in three acts
with a Prologue and Epilogue**

Music

by

Jacques Offenbach

**Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré
after their own play**

**Premiere at the Opéra-Comique, Paris,
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Burton D. Fisher**

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Principal Characters in the Opera***Prologue: Luther's Tavern***

Hoffmann, a poet	Tenor
Nicklausse, Hoffmann's friend, and muse	Mezzo-soprano
Lindorf, a counsellor of Nuremberg	Baritone
Andrès, a servant	Tenor
Hermann, a student	Baritone
Luther, an innkeeper	Bass
Nathaniel, a student	Tenor

Act I: Spalanzani's studio

Spalanzani, an inventor	Tenor
Cochenille, his servant	Tenor
Coppélius, rival to Spalanzani	Baritone
Olympia, a mechanical doll	Soprano

Act II: Venice – Giulietta's house

Giulietta, a courtesan	Soprano
Schlemil, her lover	Bass
Pitichinaccio, an admirer	Tenor
Dapertutto, a magician	Baritone

ACT III: Crespel's House in Munich

Antonia, a singer	Soprano
Crespel, Antonia's father	Baritone
Franz, his servant	Tenor
Dr. Miracle	Baritone
Voice of Antonia's mother	Mezzo soprano

Epilogue:

Stella, an opera singer	Soprano
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TIME: 19th century

Story Synopsis

Les Contes d'Hoffmann, "The Tales of Hoffmann," is based on bizarre stories by the poet, musician, and philosopher, E. T. A. Hoffmann: the opera is designated an *Opéra fantastique*, a blend of tragedy and farce that combines German Romanticism with French irony. The poet Hoffmann himself is the central figure in each of the story's episodes.

Hoffmann seeks the ideal love but continually fails, finding himself trapped in a diabolical fantasy: a nightmarish, hallucinatory world in which he is surrounded by four villainous adversaries bent on his destruction; Lindorf, Coppélius, Dr. Miracle, and Dapertutto.

Defeated, he declines spiritually and morally: he is continuously drunk, and borders on insanity.

In the prologue, in Luther's Tavern, while Hoffmann awaits his ideal love, the opera singer, Stella, he relates the tales of three successive amours, each of which was frustrated by the interference of an evil rival.

Hoffmann's first tale narrates his frivolous infatuation with a mechanical doll, Olympia; his second with the courtesan, Giulietta; and his third, with the singer, Antonia.

The women in Hoffmann's tales are illusions, imagined projections of his conception of the eternal, ideal woman: all are unattainable, and all blend into the single personality of Stella, the opera singer; Hoffmann yearns to possess Stella, the incarnation of his three imagined loves.

In the Epilogue, Hoffmann's friend, Nicklausse, his constant companion on his amorous adventures, transforms into Hoffmann's muse: Nicklausse redeems and inspires Hoffmann toward his poetic destiny.

Story Narrative and Music Highlights

Prologue: Luther's tavern near the opera house in Nuremberg.

Casks and bottles line the walls of the tavern: tables and benches are scattered about.

Hoffmann's Muse bemoans the poet's dissolute life; in an attempt to redeem the errant poet, the Muse assumes the identity of his student friend, Nicklausse.

The evil Counsellor Lindorf, a powerful local politician, is Hoffmann's rival for the prima donna opera singer, Stella.

Lindorf: the theme of the villains

Allegro poco moderato



Andrès, Stella's stammering servant, arrives to deliver a letter to Hoffmann, but Andrès betrays Stella and sells the letter to Lindorf.

Lindorf reads Stella's letter which invites Hoffmann to rendezvous with her after her performance that evening: the letter also contains a key to her room; Lindorf pockets the key and gloats over his prize. He then awaits his rival for Stella: Hoffmann will become the unsuspecting victim of Lindorf's villainy.

Students invade the tavern and order beer and wine. Hoffmann arrives with his friend, Nicklausse, and although he seems agitated, he is persuaded to relate the spirited ballad about the hideous dwarf, Kleinzach.

Hoffmann: Il était une fois à la cour d'Eisenach!

Allegro non troppo
HOFFMANN



Hoffmann's thoughts stray to visions of a beautiful woman whose love he seeks: he is uninspired to continue his ballad, and calls for the punch bowl to be lit: drinks.

Hoffmann notices that in his presence is the evil genius, Lindorf, his perpetual adversary who has been obstructing his romantic adventures. Lindorf antagonizes Hoffmann, insinuating that he is futilely in love again. Hoffmann hesitates, but then admits that his new love is indeed the opera singer, Stella, the incarnation of three idealized women: she is artist, young and beautiful, and a courtesan.

Luther announces that the curtain of the adjoining opera house is about to rise, and then the students prevail upon Hoffmann to relate the tales of his loves.

The students refill their glasses and settle down for Hoffmann's tales.

The poet begins: "The first was Olympia!"

Act I: The laboratory of the inventor Spalanzani.

The eccentric scientist, Spalanzani, hopes that his latest invention, a mechanical doll, will earn him enough money to recoup the losses he sustained from the insolvency of his banker, Elias. His primary worry is that his former partner and rival, Dr. Coppélius, will claim part of the proceeds.

Hoffmann arrives, seeking to be accepted as Spalanzani's pupil. Spalanzani tells Hoffmann that he has a beautiful daughter, Olympia, but fails to tell him that she is a mechanical doll. When Spalanzani leaves to prepare for the arrival of his guests, Hoffmann becomes smitten after he peeks behind a curtain and sees the beautiful sleeping figure of Olympia. Nicklausse warns Hoffmann of danger, vainly attempting to dissuade him from his infatuation, but left alone, Hoffmann enters a trance and falls rapturously in love with Olympia.

Hoffmann's fascination with Spalanzani's "daughter" is interrupted by the arrival of Coppélius, one of Lindorf's evil incarnations: he displays a collection of optical instruments, including a pair of magical spectacles which he claims will enable Hoffmann to see into one's soul. Hoping to learn Olympia's true essence, Hoffmann purchases the glasses.

Spalanzani returns, and Coppélius confronts him with demands for his share of the profits from the mechanical doll, owed to him because he had furnished its eyes. To get rid of him, Spalanzani gives Coppélius a note – worthless – and suggests that he will back up the note by betrothing Olympia to his wealthy new student: Hoffmann.

Guests enter Spalanzani's ballroom, and he presents his “daughter” Olympia to the admiring throng. His assistant Cochenelle fetches a harp, and when it is played, the doll suddenly comes to life and begins to sing. From time to time the doll pauses, prompting Cochenelle to wind the spring in its back and restore its mechanical energy.

Olympia: Les oiseaux dans la charmille

Moderato
OLYMPIA



Supper is announced, and all the guests depart to dine.

Hoffmann remains alone with Olympia, his newly acquired “magic” spectacles deceiving him into believing that Olympia is human. Completely bewitched by her beauty, he sings a rapturous romance to her, and then yearns that she respond to his love: the doll can only respond to his appeals with a simple “yes.”

Hoffmann presses her hand and accidentally releases a spring. Olympia rises abruptly, flutters about the room, and then disappears behind curtains. Fearing that he has offended her, Hoffmann pursues her in spite of Nicklausse's attempts to dissuade him and bring him to his senses.

The guests return from dinner and begin waltzing. Suddenly they are interrupted by Coppélius, furious because he has discovered that Spalanzani's note is worthless: he vows revenge against Spalanzani.

Meanwhile, Olympia and Hoffmann dance about the room: the whirling exhausts Hoffmann; he falls, and then breaks his glasses. Spalanzani

orders Cochenille to remove the doll and bring it to its room. A crash is heard: it is the sound of breaking machinery. Coppélius, in revenge against Spalanzani, destroyed the doll: he then bursts into devilish laughter as the two inventors confront and curse each other.

Reality overcomes Hoffmann. He becomes pale and terrified, realizing that he has been the victim of deceit: the beautiful woman he loved was merely a mechanical doll.

All the guests gather around Hoffmann and mock his foolishness.

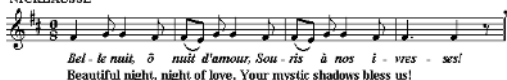
ACT II: Giulietta's House in Venice

The strains of a Barcarolle are heard: *Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour*. A gondola arrives bearing Nicklausse to the house of the courtesan, Giulietta, where a party is in progress.

Barcarolle:

Moderato

NICKLAUSSE



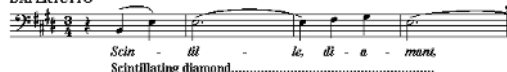
Hoffmann arrives and sings a vigorous toast to love: *Amis, l'amour tendre et rêveur, Erreur!*, “A love that is timid and shy, must die!” Giulietta, intentionally provoking her current lover, Schlemil, greets Hoffmann warmly. Hoffmann become senchanted with Giulietta despite Nicklausse’s warnings against her cunning and wiles.

The evil magician, Dapertutto, another incarnation of the diabolic Lindorf, implores Giulietta to steal Hoffmann’s reflection, or soul, just as she had captured Schlemil’s reflection for him: in return, he offers her a magnificent diamond.

Dapertutto: Scintille diamant

Andante poco mosso

DAPERTUTTO



Hoffmann proves an easy prey for Giulietta's seduction and temptation: he immediately expresses his new-found passion for her: *Ô Dieu! de quelle ivresse, embrasestu mon âme!*. "Your words caress my soul and hold my heart enraptured!" Giulietta begs Hoffmann for his reflection so she can remember him. Hoffmann, overcome with passion, agrees, and afterwards, he is shocked to find that he is no longer visible in the mirror.

When Schlemil arrives, Hoffmann demands that he give him the key to Giulietta's bedroom. Schlemil erupts into outrage and jealousy, and then challenges Hoffmann to a duel: Dapertutto offers Hoffmann his sword. While the Barcarolle echoes in the distance, Hoffmann kills Schlemil. He then seizes the key to Giulietta's boudoir from around Schlemil's neck, and rushes to her.

However, Giulietta has vanished: Hoffmann becomes dejected when he sees her in her gondola in the arms of her servant, Pitichinaccio. Hoffmann realizes that he has been deceived. As Nicklausse drags him from the murder scene, Dapertutto, again victorious in frustrating Hoffmann, gloats and laughs mockingly.

Act III: A room in Crespel's house in Munich

The walls of Crespel's house are decorated with musical instruments, and a portrait of his recently deceased wife. His daughter, Antonia, is seated at the piano singing a plaintive ballad about a beautiful, vanishing dove.

Antonia: Elle a fui, la tourterelle

Andante
ANTONIA



Antonia collapses, exhausted from singing. Crespel arrives, and with great anxiety, reminds Antonia that she has inherited her mother's fatal illness: if she continues to sing, it could be fatal to her.

Crespel has transplanted his family to Munich to protect Antonia from her lover, Hoffmann. He has instructed his servant, Frantz, not to open the door for anyone, but Frantz is deaf, heedless in noticing the arrival of Hoffmann and Nicklausse. While Nicklausse tests a violin, Hoffmann sits at the piano and sings a love song.

Hoffmann: C'est une chanson d'amour

Moderato
HOFFMANN



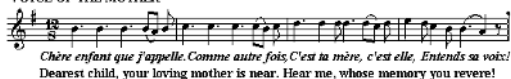
Despite her father's warnings, Antonia joins Hoffmann in song, both rejoicing in the prospect of their marriage. But the singing proves too much for the delicate Antonia: she collapses, and immediately afterwards, her father reappears.

The mysterious Dr. Miracle arrives, another incarnation of the evil Lindorf. While Hoffmann hides, he overhears their conversation, Dr. Miracle's claiming that he alone has the power to cure Antonia. Crespel is wary of the strange doctor, suspecting that he was responsible for his wife's death, and he now fears that he will bring about his daughter's death as well.

Dr. Miracle administers a diabolical cure for Antonia: he urges her to sing. As she sings, Dr. Miracle conjures up Antonia's deceased mother, her voice heard as an apparition from her potrait

Antonia: Chere enfant

Molto moderato
VOICE OF THE MOTHER



Dr. Miracle seizes a violin and leads Hoffmann and Antonia in a frantic trio: Antonia becomes exhausted and faints; Dr. Miracle takes Antonia's pulse and pronounces her dead. Crespel arrives and accuses Hoffmann of killing his daughter: Hoffmann, in despair, cries out: "Antonia!"

Epilogue: Luther's tavern in Nuremberg

At the end of his melancholy tale about the history of his amours, Hoffmann, in despair, has turned to wine to seek solace.

From the neighboring theater, applause is heard for the opera singer, Stella. Shortly thereafter, Stella, fresh from her triumph, arrives at Luther's tavern. However, she notes Hoffmann's bedraggled state, and leaves with Lindorf: Hoffmann, spurned and rejected by Stella, sinks into a drunken stupor.

Hoffmann is now alone with Nicklausse, thoroughly dejected and distraught. Nicklausse, his faithful friend and protector during his adventures, metamorphoses into Hoffmann's Muse, urging him to rekindle the fires of his creative genius, pick up his pen, and return to writing: *Des cendres de ton coeur*.

A final chorus is heard proclaiming the soul of *The Tales of Hoffmann* story: humanity becomes enriched by love, as well as sadness.

Offenbach.....and The Tales of Hoffmann

Jacques Jacob Offenbach (1819-1880) was born in Cologne, Germany, but later migrated to Paris where he became a naturalized French citizen, eventually receiving the accolade of *Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur*. Offenbach became a French composer to the core, his most significant achievements, the overwhelming successes of his satirical operettas known as *bouffes*. Offenbach's last and only serious stage work, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, "Les contes d'Hoffmann," remains one of the most popular French operas in the world, proof that with more creative time he might have become one of the foremost French composers of serious dramatic opera.

Offenbach inherited his musical talents from his father, Isaac Judah Eberst, a teacher of music and composition. In 1800, his father left his native Offenbach-am-Main to become a synagogue cantor in Cologne: he was known as *Der Offenbacher*, a sobriquet adapted from his German town of origin which was later simply shortened to "Offenbach."

All of the Offenbach children displayed exceptional musical gifts. At the age of nine, the young Jacob's cello virtuosity was immediately recognized, and he often performed in trios with his brother and sister; brother Julius playing violin, and sister Isabella, the piano. At 14, his father took his gifted son to Paris to begin studies at the Paris Conservatory, his talent so exceptional that the rule forbidding foreigners was waived for his benefit. Nevertheless, after one year, Jacob, now Jacques, rebelled, unable to cope with the school's discipline: he immediately found a position in the orchestra of the *Opéra-Comique*.

In those early years, Offenbach's compositional talents were developed in studies with the acclaimed composer, Jacques Halévy (*La Juive*, 1835). He then began performing his own compositions for cello and piano at Paris salons where he became acquainted with such renowned artists as Anton Rubinstein and Franz Liszt. After his marriage to Herminie d'Alcain, Offenbach became a Roman Catholic. His new wife's close relationship with leading concert agents eventually

produced concerts with contemporary superstars such as Joachim and Mendelssohn in both London and at Windsor Castle. Later, he was appointed music director of the *Comédie Française*, and then, principal conductor at the Théâtre Français.

Recognition and extraordinary success marked most of Offenbach's career. After he encountered problems in having his own stage works performed at the *Opéra-Comique* for the Exhibition season of 1855, he rented the Salle Lacaze located in the Champs-Élysées where he began to produce short comic pieces: his *Bouffes-Parisiens*. With the sensational success of these musical satires, he obtained the wherewithal to transfer to the much larger quarters at the Salle Choiseul.

At the Salle Choiseul, Offenbach performed his own works as well as those of Adam, Delibes, Duprato, Gastinel, and Jonas, and adaptations of Mozart and Rossini operas. A year later, he sponsored a competition for young composers that attracted 78 entrants: the joint winners of that competition were Bizet and Lecocq with their settings of *Le Docteur Miracle*.

Offenbach wrote 25 stage works for the Salle Choiseul theater within a three year period: comic musical satires, farces, and parodies. His works would parody everything, from the respectable to the sacred: as the laughter reached its crescendo, Offenbach's fame reached a fortissimo. Perhaps his greatest achievement was his *opéra bouffe*, *Orphée aux Enfers*, "Orpheus in the Underworld" (1858), its underlying story a blasphemous profanation and satire of the Olympian gods that not only piqued curiosity, but translated into crowded houses. Offenbach's musical satires became extraordinary successes, satisfying his contemporary society's craze for pleasure during those feverish times: *La Belle Hélène* (1864), a barbed satire about existing abuses of the government; and *La Vie Parisienne* (1866), a satire about contemporary society, conventions, and politics.

Other stage works which are still performed with much frequency in the contemporary repertory are *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), *La Périhole* (1868), and works composed during his

last years, *Madame Favart* (1878) and *La fille du tambour-major* (1879).

Offenbach was a poor businessman. In 1873, while he was manager of the Théâtre de la Gaîté, he produced lavish theatrical spectacles: new versions of *Orphée aux enfers*, *Geneviève de Brabant*, the vaudeville, *La Haine*, and *Whittington*. His excesses caused the theater to fail, and Offenbach himself was forced into bankruptcy. Shortly thereafter, in an attempt to recoup some of his losses, he undertook an American tour for the World Exhibition of 1876, giving some 40 concerts as well as performances of *La Vie parisienne* and *La Jolie Parfumeuse* in both New York and Philadelphia.

After his return from the American tour, Offenbach entered the last phase of his composing career, bringing to the world his only serious opera, and ultimately, his most popular work: *The Tales of Hoffmann*, “Les Contes d’Hoffmann,” the final gift from one of France’s foremost composers.

Offenbach excelled in composing light music, and in particular, was a proven master of French comic opera: his works were always filled with exuberance, verve, spontaneity, wit, and satire, all combined with a constant flow of musical inventions that were exceptionally tuneful and easily singable.

Although simple, Offenbach’s music is ingeniously devised. Like his illustrious predecessor in comic opera, Rossini, many of his tunes are often built upon a rising phrase in a major key. He achieved a remarkable variety of mood through variation in rhythmic patterns, and to generate climactic excitement, he gradually accelerated the music as it approached the act’s finale.

Offenbach’s vocal writings are not only rambunctiously comic, but they are also outstanding examples of lyricism that possesses sensitively shaped phrases: the tenor’s aria, *Au Mont Ida* in *La Belle Hélène*, as well as all of the arias in *La Périochole*, the latter, initially composed for the renowned, superstar soprano, Hortense

Schneider, who, during the 1860s, enjoyed immense personal success in Offenbach's operettas.

In his orchestrations, Offenbach would generally employ his brass writing to heighten the impact and excitement of climaxes; nevertheless, he took exceptional care to insure that the volume of his orchestra did not obscure the words. His overtures have never failed to excite audiences, reaching their quintessence in *Orphée aux Enfers* and its famous *can-can*, in the sparkle of *La Vie Parisienne*, in the charm of *La Périhole*, and in the brilliance of *La Belle Hélène*.

Offenbach was well served by skilful and exceptionally talented and witty librettists, among them, Ludovic Halévy, nephew of the renowned composer of *La Juive* (1835), and a leading French theatrical writer of the era. But he also possessed sound theatrical judgment, particularly in his understanding of the appeal of his satirical treatment of familiar stories and well-known French subjects. Offenbach's music is unpretentious and is rarely subtle: at times he achieves his trademark satirical effects through irreverent allusions and quotations of other composer's familiar music. As such, in his *Ba-ta-clan*, he musically alludes to Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*; in *Orphée aux Enfers*, he includes the aria *Che farò* from Gluck's *Orfeo*; and in *La Belle Hélène*, he parodies the patriotic trio from Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. Offenbach's "naughtiness" in plagiarizing existing music evoked considerable disapproval and resentment in his times: in particular, from the bombastic Richard Wagner whom he parodied in his revue, *Le Carnaval des Revues* (1860); in retaliation and revenge, Wagner condemned Offenbach's music as the "warmth of the dung-heap."

Another effective "Offenbachian" comic device was his composition of musical roles for animals (*Barkouf*), or the setting of unintelligible chatter (*Ba-ta-clan*). Nevertheless, Offenbach's satirization achieved its ultimate peak in the gross exploitation and sheer blasphemy he expressed in the famous *cancan* for the gods in *Orphée aux Enfers*, as well as in the setting of the phrase *Un*

vile séducteur to an uplifting waltz tune in *La Belle Hélène*, building a grandiose operatic ensemble around the phrase *L'homme à la pomme*.

Skepticism, envy, jealousy – and controversy – are the expected byproducts of extraordinary success and fame. During Offenbach's illustrious career, there were antagonists who considered his *bouffes* vulgar, lacking in style or passion, and often a satirical exploitation that was manipulated to exact humor at the cost of propriety, reverence, and taste. Nevertheless, Offenbach's comic operettas possess an irrepressible gaiety and tunefulness, and a genuine wit in their librettos, certainly ample justification and explanation for their continued presentation in the contemporary repertory of theaters throughout the world.

Offenbach's fame and fortune as Napoleon III's musical "court jester" came to an end in 1870 with the Empire's defeat at Sedan: the Franco-Prussian War. Suddenly, the political climate and public tastes changed, and Offenbach's star began to fade.

During the twilight of his career, his major preoccupation became the completion of his *opéra fantastique*, his final opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*. In 1880, while working on this score, his worsening health forced him to return to Paris after rehearsals began. Shortly thereafter, Offenbach died from gout and heart complications. At the request of his family, the final shaping of the score was undertaken by Ernest Guiraud, a composer who had earlier been commissioned to write the accompanied recitatives for dialogue passages in Bizet's *Carmen*.

The Tales of Hoffmann is an outstanding serious opera, proof that Offenbach was indeed a genius capable of composing weighty music with profound passion. Although the opera story's appeal is certainly elevated by its spectacle and supernatural imagery, the opera would not have survived its initial incompleteness without its extraordinary musical depth and invention; despite

posthumous tampering with the score and its legacy of bad luck for producers and productions, *Hoffmann* has become a unique masterpiece, one of the most popular of all French operas.

In its simplest interpretation, Hoffmann is a charming, amusing, and touching score saturated with ingenious melodic inventions. However, it relates a profound story: it symbolizes man's dreams, aspirations – and frustrations – in his quest for the ideal, perfect love.

The genesis of the opera story is as fantastic as the *Tales* themselves. The spirit and soul of the illustrious and charismatic E.T.A. Hoffman definitively haunts the work: credit belongs to Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, the creators of its imaginative libretto from portions of Hoffmann's writings, and to Offenbach, the composer of perhaps the best music he ever penned; an opera he never lived to hear.

E. T. A. Hoffmann is the story's hero. The real-life Hoffmann was one of the most original and creative, if not completely integrated artists of the early 19th century Romantic period in Germany, a movement from which he was both product and archetype. Hoffmann's supernatural, fantastic, and hallucinatory literary works intrigued and fascinated his contemporary audiences, and his exploration of the subconscious anticipated intuitively and by a century the discoveries of Freud and the psychiatrists, as well as those of the surrealists and post-modernists.

E(rnst) T(heodor) A(madeus) Hoffmann was born in Königsberg, Germany, in 1776: he died in Berlin in 1822. Hoffmann speaks to posterity primarily through his legacy of literary works, as well as from the immortality Offenbach provided him in his *Tales*. Hoffmann's life was dominated by his passion for music, especially the works of Mozart: in homage to his idol, he dropped his middle name, Wilhem, in favor of Amadeus, thus, becoming known to the world as E. T. A. Hoffmann.

Hoffmann was a consummate creative artist: a Renaissance man; the artistic incarnation of the "man for all seasons." He was a prolific writer of fantastic imagery, a poet, a distinguished critic of

music and drama, a stage director and designer of scenery, a mural painter, and in his character, a dreamer, philosopher, and metaphysician. He was initially trained in law, and when he did practice, he demonstrated extraordinary gifts of conscientiousness and brilliancy. However, the legal profession only served him as a vehicle of last resort in order to subsist. While practicing law in Posen, he penned caricatures and satirical renderings that were so offensive that they lost him his first legal position. Nevertheless, later in his career, he was appointed a Supreme Court judge.

Hoffmann's prominence as a writer made him very much in demand: he contributed prolifically to German Romantic literature with such works as *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (1814–15), *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815–16), *Die Serapions-Brüder* (1819–21) and *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* (1820–21).

Hoffmann's exceptionally gifted musical talents were recognized at an early age: he was immediately directed toward piano studies, harmony, and counterpoint. Eventually, he composed music for the church scene of Goethe's *Faust*, a number of masses, vocal pieces, chamber music, and a symphony in Eb which he conducted himself in Warsaw. After the French invasion of Warsaw in 1806, he became music director of the Bamberg theatre, a post he earned after he submitted as his credentials, his opera, *Der Trank der Unsterblichkeit*.

To Hoffmann, music and the human spirit were synonymous: there was no distinction between life and art. He noted, "I associate Rhine wine with church music, Burgundy with tragic opera, champagne with comic opera, and punch with a highly romantic work like *Don Giovanni*."

Hoffmann based his own musical compositions entirely on the works of Mozart and Gluck: two masters, who, besides Beethoven, he acclaimed and most often mused about in his writings; he followed Gluck's models for reform which stressed musico-dramatic integrity. Like so many of his German Romantic contemporaries,

Hoffmann's dramatic music seriously depicted a natural and demonic world. In emulating Mozart, he infused his characters with insightful depth and feeling, and from Beethoven, his orchestra achieved a strong prominence and grandeur. His ensembles were grand in scope, his compositions always providing a prominent role to the chorus.

Hoffmann's lighter operas helped to transform the popular Italian *opera buffa* genre into German *singspiel*: his "song plays" contributed significantly to the maturity of the genre through his astute craftsmanship, acute theatrical instincts, and textual and musical integrity. *Undine* (1816), his opera based on Fouqué's imaginative story about elemental watersprites, earned him praise by no less a figure than Karl Maria von Weber who lauded its swift pace, its dynamic dramatic action, and its restraint in avoiding excessive and inappropriate melody. After Hoffmann's death, a fire destroyed the score, and like most of Hoffmann's music, particularly the 10 operas he composed, it passed into oblivion.

In the history of German Romanticism, there is a consistent development from Weber, Hoffmann, Spohr, Marschner, and then to Wagner: it can be hypothesized that it is only a short step from Hoffmann's *Undine* (1816), to Weber's *Euryanthe* (1823), and concluding with Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850).

The history of modern opera traces its evolution from the early 17th century Camerata: the operas of the pioneering composer, Claudio Monteverdi (*L'Incorazione di Poppea* in 1642); Alessandro Scarlatti who introduced the *da capo* aria; the Italian dramatist, poet and librettist, Pietro Metastasio, (1698-1782), who established the rules, guidelines, and standards for the 18th century *opera seria*; and Christoph Willibald Gluck (*Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Alceste*), who introduced reforms that further established music drama as the quintessential means to artistically express human emotions and passions.

Hoffmann followed his 17th and 18th century

predecessors, playing a crucial role in contributing to the theory and practice of 19th century Romantic opera. Principally, his theories were concerned with the musical articulation of the subject matter within the drama, and the overall dramatic effect created by the synthesis of words fused with the emotive power of music. In particular, he espoused the theory that opera should convey an “overall imaginative idea,” consequentially, serving to make manifest the influence of “higher natures” on human life. In essence, Hoffmann was theorizing a new set of ground rules for the development and evolution of 19th century music drama.

Hoffmann deemed Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, “the opera of all operas,” considering the character of Don Giovanni himself, the ideal, archetypal model for all opera: Giovanni was the character who indeed made a profound “total effect”; he was the character who could “transport the spectator ... to the fantastical land of poetry.”

Hoffmann heavily indulged in analyzing the interaction between words and music. In his conception of music drama, words were deemed superficial, superceded by the drama. Hoffmann posed the argument in the short story, *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, “The Writer and the Composer”: the composer argues that “a true opera seems to me to be the one in which the music springs directly from the poem as a necessary product of the same.”

The argument concerning the weight and balance between words and music in opera endures. In 1942, Richard Strauss composed *Capriccio*, an entire opera in which a poet and a composer debate the respective merits of their arts. Nevertheless, much of the underlying fabric of Hoffmann’s theoretical dissertations on the textual-musical relationship in opera seems to have influenced and inspired Richard Wagner who later elaborated and developed those identical subjects in his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (1850).

Hoffmann paved the way for operatic stories involving the supernatural and the dramatic fairy-tale: the essence of Romantic era themes and subjects.

After Hoffmann assumed the duties of Kapellmeister in the New Theater in Leipzig, he befriended Wagner's father, his brother, his uncle Adolph, as well as Ludwig Geyer, the man who would eventually marry Wagner's widowed mother, and become Wagner's step-father.

The young Richard Wagner had a voracious appetite for Hoffmann's stories, and they strongly influenced him throughout his entire life. Hoffmann wrote stories about medieval Nuremberg and its mastersingers, described mines and spirits, song contests, fairytale motifs, and the supernatural world of dreams: all of his stories were saturated with a mood of world weariness that was synonymous with German Romanticism's perception of the artist's role in society.

Wagner certainly shared Hoffmann's love of Mozart and *Don Giovanni*, however, they were at opposite poles with respect to Beethoven: Wagner ennobled the 9th symphony and even considered himself the heir to Beethoven; Hoffman viewed the symphony as a vast, fantastic, and unfathomable aberration of a deaf and perhaps mad genius. In particular, Wagner was certainly influenced by Hoffmann's opera, *Undine*, in which the hero Huldbrand suffers what is described as a *liebestod*: perhaps an ancestor of all those Wagnerian heroes redeemed through love. Leitmotifs dominated Hoffmann's operas, and he was the first to dispense entirely with the end-rhyme technique: likewise, Wagner embraced leitmotifs, and eliminated the end-rhyme in his early operas: *Das Hochzeit*, *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*.

Hoffmann not only strongly influenced Wagner, but also such renowned writers as Gautier, Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe. Tschaikovsky's ballet, *The Nutcracker and the Mouseking*, is based on a Hoffmann story, and Robert Schumann became inspired by Hoffmann's whimsical fictional character, Johannes Kreisler, and based his fantasy for piano on the tale: *Kreisleriana*.

Hoffmann extraordinary artistic talents, ideas, and theories, had a potent influence on the budding 19th century Romantic movement. But it was particularly his supreme fictional talents, his

fantastic imagery, clairvoyance, and exploration of the senses, that opened a new world to poets, writers, and musicians.

In 1810, at the age of 34, Hoffmann met the woman who inspired the noblest and most intense of his many love-affairs: it was an unfulfilled romantic encounter that weaves through almost all of his stories, becoming the emotional and psychological leitmotif for Offenbach's opera composed in his name.

Hoffmann's mysterious love was Julia Marc: she was 15 years old when Hoffmann, a married man, became her teacher, musical mentor, and intimate friend. Although Hoffmann hesitated and initially negated the possibility that their relationship would evolve into romantic passion, he nevertheless became possessive toward Julia while he formed her musical taste, and dedicated vocal compositions and serenades to her. Julia is reputed to have possessed a beautiful voice: they worked together and sang together, Hoffmann falling hopelessly in love with her, and ultimately, having to subdue that love and return to the service of his art.

Offenbach's opera, taking the sum total of its three acts, mirrors Hoffmann's amorous adventure with Julia Marc. Julia appears as the three women-in-one of the opera: she is the dancing doll, Olympia, the courtesan Giulietta, and the frail and doomed Antonia: Hoffmann's last and purest love.

Hoffmann's affair with Julia came to a sudden and painful end when a marriage was arranged between Julia and a wealthy merchant: the tormented and despairing Hoffmann departed and never saw her again. Nevertheless, her image remained engraved in his psyche and dreams for the rest of his life.

All of Hoffmann's personal life experiences appear in variously metamorphosed and magnified forms in his writings: they all reflect his richly imaginative, hypersensitive, and ego-centric persona, but many center around his relationship with Julia; its tension, desire, and ultimately, its failure to be fulfilled.

In Julia, Hoffmann had found the ideal woman,

but like Dante and Beatrice, her loss haunted his memories throughout his entire life, her images appearing to him in a variety of guises: innocent, good, evil, and satanic.

In 1851, twenty-eight years after Hoffmann's death, two young French dramatists, Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, wrote a play for performance at the formidable Odéon Theater that was based on the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann: *Les Contes Fantastiques d'Hoffmann*, "The Fantastic Tales of Hoffmann." Hoffmann, the charismatic hero and central figure in their play, was portrayed in successive scenes as he pursued his adventures in quest of the ideal woman. The play, as well as the opera libretto eventually adapted from it, represents a remarkable achievement by its authors who demonstrated an astonishingly detailed knowledge of Hoffmann the man, as well as Hoffmann the writer and artist.

In Offenbach's opera, the specter of Mozart's ghost seems to haunt the story: the opera contains many subtle associations with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the real-life Hoffman's quintessential "opera of all operas." Hoffmann had written a story called *Don Juan* in which a traveler wanders into a private box at the opera at which *Don Giovanni* is being performed: the box is somehow connected to his bedroom. In the box, he finds Donna Anna, and they kiss. When the traveler awakens in the morning, he learns that after the performance of *Don Giovanni* in the opera house, the soprano singing Donna Anna died mysteriously during the night.

In *The Tales of Hoffman*, the hero stumbles through his adventures, all of which contain subtle associations with the *Don Giovanni* story: Hoffmann has a Leporello-type character constantly at his side (Nicklausse); Hoffmann pursues three loves just as Don Giovanni pursued Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina; and Hoffman has a supernatural "Commendatore" awaiting his soul; Nicklausse transformed in to Hoffmann's Muse.

Barbier and Carré drew many personages and episodes for their drama from various Hoffmann

tales. The Olympia-Doll episode is based on Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, "The Sandman," a phantasmagoric tale that deals with eyes as a metaphor for seeing into one's soul. Hoffmann's *Sandman* is a sinister departure from a benign old fairy tale: his *Sandman* is evil, induces slumber, and also scatters sand into children's eyes until they fall out.

In both the opera and Hoffmann's literary story, the mechanical doll Olympia is the invention of the pseudo-scientist, Spalanzani, its eyes created by the evil crack-pot, Dr. Coppélius: Spalanzani and Coppélius quarrel over the ownership of the eyes.

Coppélius sells Hoffmann a pair of special glasses through which the poet can see into the doll's soul and perceive the ultimate embodiment of womanhood. Inevitably, the two enemies destroy their doll and Hoffmann mourns his lost love. (In the original tale, the hero looks down from a high tower through tinted glasses, glimpses Coppélius in the crowd below, and then plunges to his death.)

The Venetian-Giulietta act is based on Hoffmann's *Das verlorene Spiegelbild*, "The Lost Reflection in the Mirror." It presents the Venetian siren and "devil-woman," Giulietta, dominated by the mysterious "Mephistophelian" magician, Dr. Dapertutto, in the literal Italian, "Dr. Everywhere." Under Dapertutto's influence, Giulietta persuades her German lover, Emmanuel Spikher, to part with his shadow; symbolically, the soul itself. She also demands that Spikher murder his wife and child, but Spikher refuses. Nevertheless, Spikher is now shadowless, and by implication, an outcast. He returns to Germany and meets yet another man without a shadow in a dismal tavern: Peter Schlemil, the hero of a famous tale by Hoffmann's real-life friend, Adelbert von Chamisso, a character the author appropriated in a gracious literary salute.

In the opera, Hoffmann is the incarnation of Spikher, likewise seduced by Giulietta and surrendering his shadow: there is no suggestion of family liquidation since Hoffmann travels as a bachelor. Schlemil appears in Venice, now Giulietta's despairing ex-lover whose shadow is now in the possession of the devil: his death is

absolutely certain from the time his rival and successor, Hoffmann, sets foot on the scene. In Hoffmann's story, *Das verlorene Spiegelbild*, Giulietta, after betraying Hoffmann, feels remorse, gives herself to him for a moment, and dies suddenly through the magic of Dapertutto. However, in the opera, Giulietta spurns Hoffmann and is borne away over the waters of the lagoon while embracing the dwarf, Pitichinaccio.

The Antonia act is based on Hoffmann's *Rath Krespel*, "Councillor Krespel," the story of a government official who is also a highly skilled restorer of violins. His doomed daughter, Antonia, helps in his search for the ideal sonority: they take violins apart and then glue them together.

Antonia is a singer who has inherited her mother's beautiful voice, and perhaps, her mother's illness that could cause her death. Her father, Krespel, forbids her sing, fearing that because of her frail physique, she will become exhausted, vulnerable, and will die. A young composer, her lover, Theodore (Hoffmann's second Christian name), is forbidden to enter Krespel's house, the father fearing that he will tempt his daughter to sing. Nevertheless, Theodore has worked his way into Krespel's confidence, and inspires the frail Antonia to sing. One night, in a dream, Krespel sees his daughter rapturously singing in the arms of her lover. When he awakens, he finds her reaching for the highest note, and then she expires. Simultaneously, Krespel's prized Cremona violin shatters by itself into a thousand pieces.

In the Barbier-Carré-Offenbach operatic version, the fiendish Dr. Miracle character is introduced: he is nonexistent in any of the Hoffmann tales, however, a more diabolic, evil, and Hoffmannesque figure than any other in the story. Dr. Miracle enters through walls when the door is denied him, and professes his wish to cure Antonia, but he carries with him deadly vials of poison – just as Dr. Dapertutto carried a vial of fatal cyanide in the story of the lost reflection. Dr. Miracle ignites the scene with hair-raising terror, seizes the Cremona violin from the wall, conjures up an apparition of Antonia's mother, persuades Antonia to sing, and then Antonia dies.

After Offenbach returned to Europe from his American tour in 1876, he entered the last four years of his life in declining health and growing operatic ambition. He had truly lorded over the amusements of the Paris of his day as the composer of gay and sinful operetta prototypes for a society that had become notoriously materialistic, extravagant, and corrupt. Nevertheless, Offenbach was obsessed to compose an opera that would perpetuate his fame, at the same time, leaving an operatic legacy beyond the frothy pieces of his lighter comic operas and *bouffes*. He regarded *The Tales of Hoffmann* as his last chance for recognition as a composer of serious and dramatic musical theater, ultimately becoming obsessed to compose the opera.

Offenbach had heard about the Barbier-Carré play, *Les Contes fantastiques d'Hoffman*, read it enthusiastically, and was determined to secure its rights for his opera story. Unfortunately, Barbier had sold the play to Hector Salomon, the chorus master of the Opéra, who had his score nearly completed: nevertheless, to his eternal credit, Salomon recognized that Offenbach's genius was far greater than his own, and relinquished his rights to the libretto. Offenbach set feverishly to work on his opera, devoting his entire energies to what were to prove the last musical inventions of his life.

Offenbach's hour glass was running out of sand and he knew it well: he was racing against time. His musical ideas began to flow faster than he could write them down, yet he knew too well that the end was near. Indeed, he was forced to bed often during the opera's composition.

Offenbach's dilemma became that great blur between art and life, between illusion and reality. It was the Antonia story that affected him most: if Antonia sings, she must die. The composer, like Antonia, knew he had to sing again, even if death awaited him.

In 1879, Leon Carvalho, director of the Opéra-Comique, promised to premiere Offenbach's new opera for the 1880-81 season. But in June of 1879, the frail Offenbach went into seclusion: he had become a skeleton with blazing eyes, himself an

apparition from one of Hoffmann's fantastic stories, a man who now shivered in the heat of July, and hobbled to the piano and pecked at it with emaciated fingers. He was struggling furiously to live, hoping that a Dr. Miracle would not get him before the premiere of his opera.

Tragically, Offenbach died while the opera was in rehearsal, leaving a bewildering mass of yet uncompleted material for his opera: the music and the orchestration were apparently conceived in their entirety, but many details had not been completed. Ernst Guiraud, the man from New Orleans who wrote the recitatives for Bizet's *Carmen* for its Vienna production, wrote the final version and completed the orchestration in Offenbach's style. Nevertheless, successive editions of the score have provided varying texts.

Dissatisfaction with aspects of the *Giulietta/Venetian* act caused its deletion at the première, some of its music dispersed to the other acts. Even when the *Giulietta* act was finally performed and published, it was placed before the *Antonia* act, perhaps to mask its less than fully finished state.

The premiere of *The Tales of Hoffmann* took place at the *Opera-comique* on Feb 10, 1881, four months after Offenbach's death. In its first year, the opera enjoyed 101 performances. Ever since its premiere, in which the *Giulietta* episode was omitted, there has been controversy about the proper placement of the *Venetian* act: it appeared as the last act in the original Barnier-Carré play, but if the key words uttered by Hoffmann in the prologue, and repeated by Nicklausse in the epilogue, are taken literally, the sequence of Hoffmann's adventures are: the doll Olympia, the maiden Antonia, and the courtesan *Giulietta*. As such, *Giulietta* would be the last of his amours, and quite naturally, the last act of the opera.

The *Giulietta-Venetian* act contains the famous *Barcarolle*, a piece which more than any other single page Offenbach ever penned, opened for him the "Portals to the Pantheon of Operatic Fame," a place which his 100 cynical, melodious, and satirical operettas had denied him.

The history of the *Barcarolle* in Offenbach's career bears as much curiosity as its momentous musical legacy. Offenbach and Richard Wagner detested and hated each other. Wagner had designated Orpheus as "a dunghill in which all the swine of Europe wallows." So, it must have been a great satisfaction for Offenbach when in 1863, the Vienna Court Opera, having turned down Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* for a world premiere, primarily because the musicians had inadequate rehearsal time to overcome its difficulty, invited Offenbach to compose a "romantic grand opera for its patrons." The opera became *Rheinnixen*, not Rhinemaidens, but Rhine nixies, or water sprites from German Romantic literature. Offenbach's replacement opera was a devastating failure.

Nevertheless, one number survived and was singled out by the well-known critic, Eduard Hanslick, who had become by that time, Wagner's severest critic: he praised this passage for its "lovely, luring sensuousness.": the passage was the *Goblin Song* from *Rheinnixen*, the music that Offenbach transplanted into *Tales* and titled the *Barcarolle*.

Since its premiere, Offenbach's *Tales* has been haunted by strange events and bad luck which has affected its reputation, and caused superstitious managers to become fearful that the work was jinxed. Its aura of misfortune began with a production at the Ring-Theatre in Vienna on Dec 7, 1881: just before its second performance, the theater caught fire, destroyed Guriand's original scores, and caused the theater to close its doors forever. Similarly, there was a fire at a performance at the Salle Favart in May 1887. Misfortune has haunted the opera, not only in the adventures of its hero, Hoffmann, but for its composer as well: Offenbach died before its premiere.

The Tales of Hoffmann represents a stark contrast to the frivolous *bouffes* that represent Offenbach's other claims to enduring fame, but the composer's thorough craftsmanship and technique, his popular touch, and the particular appeal of the Hoffmann creation, have combined to provide a work of endless fascination to

audiences.

In the opera, the spirit of Hoffmann's friend Nicklausse is the essential thread of the story. Does Nicklausse really exist in the flesh, or is he some fantasy, apparition, or projection of Hoffmann's imagination?

Nicklausse continuously saves Hoffmann from disaster: in the Olympia act, realizing that Hoffmann is in love with an illusion, he rescues him; in the Giulietta act, he provides the escape after Hoffmann kills Schlemil; and in the Antonia act, he saves Hoffmann from death after the vengeful Crespel threatens to kill him.

As the gradual emergence of more and more of the original opera story becomes apparent, it has been concluded that it was the original intent of Offenbach and his librettists that Nicklausse represents the embodiment of Hoffmann's muse. Today, there is no longer doubt, and that last chapter in the Hoffmann-Offenbach mystery has been solved: in its final moments, the transformation of Nicklausse into Hoffmann's muse unites the story and brings it to a satisfying conclusion.

The transformation occurs in the Epilogue at Luther's tavern when the muse addresses the bedraggled, despairing Hoffmann:

"And I? I, the faithful friend, whose hand wiped your tears? By whom your latent sorrow exhales in heavenly dreams? Am I nothing? May the tempest of passion pass away with you! The man is no more; the poet revives! I love you, Hoffmann! Be mine! Let the ashes of your heart fire your genius, whose serenity smiles on your sorrows. The Muse will soften your blessed sufferings."

On est grand par l'amour et plus grand par les pleurs!

"One is great by love but greater by tears."

Hoffman, redeemed and reconciled with his soul, picks up his pen, and becomes inspired to his artistic destiny: the glorious music that underscores his awakening is ironically, the love music from the Giulietta act.

The real-life E. T. A. Hoffmann was a man in despair because he could not fulfill his yearning and desire for love. Jacques Offenbach was also a man in despair, seeking to prove to the world that he was a true operatic genius.

Both men were in search of their muse: both men were enthralled and inspired by the genius of Mozart. Hoffmann, the master teller of imaginative tales, finally found his muse: his literary art. Offenbach, a master of the lyric theater, also finally found his muse; ironically, from the inspiration of the charismatic E. T. A. Hoffmann.

With *The Tales of Hoffman*, Offenbach may have proven the profound truth in Rossini's sobriquet more than he could have ever imagined: Rossini commented that Offenbach was truly the "Mozart of the Champs-Élysées."

