



OPERA**COLORADO**

THE TALES OF
H**FFMANN**

GUIDEBOOK

09 | 10 SEASON

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OFFENBACH'S
THE TALES OF
HOFFMANN

Music by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Libretto by Jules Barbier

After a play by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré
based on the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann

First performance on February 10, 1881, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, France

List of Characters

Hoffmann.....a poet..... *tenor*
(OFF-mahn)

Olympia..... a mechanical doll built by a genius inventor..... *soprano*
(oh-LAM-pee-a)

Antonia.....a seriously ill girl..... *soprano*
(ahn-TOH-nee-a)

Giulietta.....a Venetian courtesan..... *soprano*
(jhoo-lee-EH-tah)

Stella.....a diva with whom Hoffmann is in love..... *soprano*

Nicklausse.....Hoffmann's friend..... *mezzo-soprano*
(NEE-clouse)

Lindorf/Coppélius/ the villains who
Dr. Miracle/Dappertutto..... plot against Hoffmann..... *baritone*

Les Contes d'Hoffmann (les cohntz DOFE-mahn) takes place in Germany and Italy during the 19th century.

The Story



Prologue (Act 1):

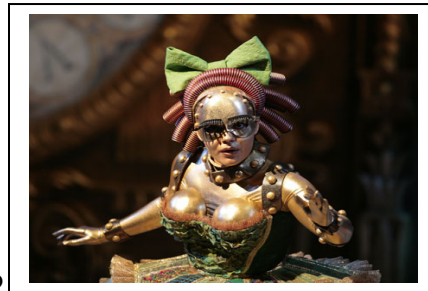
In a German tavern next to an opera house, the poet Hoffmann is pining for Stella, the diva who refuses to acknowledge him. The Muse of Poetry has come to watch over Hoffman, whose talent she protects and nurtures. The Muse is jealous of Hoffman's love for Stella as the famous singer serves to be a great distraction from Hoffman's writing. Encouraged by drink and friends, he recounts the tales of his prior loves. To keep close watch over him she transforms herself into a young student named Nicklausse who is one of Hoffmann's friends.

Councilor Lindorf arrives at the tavern followed by Stella's servant, Andres. He has a deep desire for Stella and has bribed Andres to give him a note that Stella intended for Hoffmann. The note encloses a key and promises Hoffmann that she will meet him in her dressing room after the performance. Lindorf pockets the key and declares that he, not Hoffmann, will open the door to the prima donna's boudoir and vows to triumph over the poet whom he despises as a foolish drunkard. Meanwhile Hoffmann cannot keep his mind from thoughts of Stella's beauty. Lindorf, who has been watching from a corner, confronts the poet and mocks him. Hoffmann tells his friends that he believes Lindorf to be the devil because the councilor's presence always seems to bring him misfortune. When asked why he loves Stella, Hoffmann replies that he loves not one, but three women. Hoffmann begins to tell the story of his three loves.

First Love (Act 2):

Hoffmann has apprenticed himself to the mad scientist Spalanzani in order to meet his beautiful daughter Olympia. Nicklausse appears and warns Hoffmann that there is something strange and lifeless about the girl, but the infatuated poet ignores his friend's warning.

The bizarre eye-maker Coppelius arrives and convinces Hoffmann to buy a pair of magical glasses guaranteed to make Olympia appear more beautiful than ever. When Spalanzani comes in he is shaken to find Coppelius who has claimed a share in the scientist's new invention. Spalanzani pays Coppelius off and he leaves.



Olympia sings a florid coloratura aria called The Doll Song leaving all of the guests greatly impressed. While the guests go off to dine, Hoffmann remains alone with her and expresses his love. She replies in monosyllables. When Hoffmann tries to touch her, she runs away.

Spalanzani returns with his guests and Olympia and all begin to waltz in the finale scene. At first everyone remarks on Olympia's gracefulness as she dances with Hoffmann. Soon, however she begins to spin about him madly, moving so quickly that he falls to the floor unconscious and breaks his glasses. Meanwhile, Coppelius has returned furious that Spalanzani has paid him with a worthless check. With murder in his eyes he follows Olympia as she leaves. When he returns he is carrying her mutilated body and strews her arms and legs about the room. Hoffmann realizes the absurd and terrible truth - that his beloved was nothing but a mechanical doll.



Second Love (Act 3):

After the loss of Olympia, Hoffmann has forsaken his scientific studies and turned to the world of music, becoming a composer. He has met and fallen in love with the frail Antonia, a young girl who dreams of becoming a great singer. The girl's father, the violin maker Crespel, fears that Antonia may have inherited the fatal heart ailment that killed her mother. Antonia's illness is aggravated every time she sings, and Crespel has therefore made her promise never to sing again. Afraid of Hoffmann's influence, Crespel has secretly moved his daughter to Munich.

Hoffmann has traced Antonia's whereabouts and arrives in Munich with Nicklausse. Antonia is overjoyed to see her love again, but is unable to explain her father's reasons for forbidding her to sing. Hearing her father return, Antonia hurries back to her room. Hoffmann hides himself, determined to solve the mystery.

Crespel is horrified by the arrival of Dr. Miracle, the frightening, maniacal physician who attended his wife at her deathbed. Crespel believes that Miracle murdered his wife and will do the same to his daughter. The doctor uses his supernatural powers to hypnotize Crespel and then conducts a bizarre "examination" in his presence. Miracle conjures the soul of Antonia from her room, speaks to the phantom girl, takes her pulse, and urges her to sing. After a brief outburst of song the phantom Antonia returns to her room.

Hoffmann, who has observed all from his hiding place, now understands Crespel's motives for silencing Antonia. If she sings, she will die. Hoffman asks Antonia to marry him on the condition that she give up her dreams of a career and never sing again. Love will be enough he says. Bewildered and saddened by the prohibition, Antonia nonetheless consents to his proposal. Once Hoffmann leaves, Antonia is tortured by her decision. Although she tries to remain firm in her resolve to accept love rather than a career, she hears a strange voice in her head reminding her of the glories of the stage and the drab routine of domestic life. It is the voice of Dr. Miracle who has materialized but is invisible to the girl. His words begin a trio, which includes Antonia and the voice of her dead mother. Antonia's mother urges her daughter to sing and as the voices of Miracle and her mother become more insistent, Antonia's resistance crumbles and she sings passionately and feverishly, as if possessed. As the girl's voice rises to a climax, Antonia falls to the floor. Antonia dies in her father's arms singing the words of Hoffmann's love song. Agonized, the poet screams for a doctor. Dr. Miracle.

Third Love (Act 4):

The poet Hoffmann is now disillusioned with romantic love and has dedicated himself to the pleasures of wine and women. He is a guest at Schlemil's sumptuous Venetian palazzo whose mistress, the beautiful courtesan Giulietta, is hosting a decadent party. Schlemil arrives and is displeased to find his mistress in the midst of other men. A tension between the two men instantly emerges. Nicklausse privately tells Hoffmann that he fears trouble if they remain in Venice and warns him against falling in love with a courtesan.

As if on cue, the sorcerer Dappertutto emerges from the shadows. As the devil it is his desire to capture the soul of Hoffmann. He will use his accomplice Giulietta as the bait.

Giulietta plays upon Hoffmann's sympathies, confessing that she is lonely and yearns for a man who



will rescue her from the unhappy life she is leading. At first Hoffmann resists. After she feigns tears, however, he falls into her trap and succumbs, passionately declaring his love for her. Giulietta promises that she will escape Venice with him, but first he must get rid of Schlemil. As proof of his love Giulietta begs Hoffmann to leave his reflection in her mirror. Intoxicated by her persuasive charms he embraces her passionately, unwittingly surrendering his soul.

Dapertutto arrives with Schlemil and Pitichinaccio. The sorcerer comments on how pale Hoffmann has become and bids him to look in the mirror. Hoffmann is amazed to see that his reflection has disappeared. Nicklausse urges his friend to flee, but the poet remains to fight a duel with Schlemil. After killing his rival Hoffmann removes a key from Schlemil's body and rushes off to Giulietta's boudoir. After finding her room empty, he returns and is horrified to see the courtesan in a gondola with Dapertutto and Pitichinaccio, mocking and laughing at him as they drift away down the Grand Canal. Once again, Hoffmann has lost his love.



Epilogue (Act 5):

Back in the tavern, the students have listened spellbound to Hoffmann's stories. Nicklausse, always the voice of reason, points out that the three women in Hoffmann's tales all represent different aspects of the same woman – Stella. The drunken Hoffmann flies into a rage at the mention of the diva's name, and demands more to drink. He is on the verge of collapsing when Stella enters the tavern. In a drunken stupor, Hoffmann barely recognizes her, vaguely connecting her with Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta. Lindorf steps forward to escort her away. As he has in each of his stories Hoffmann has lost his real-life love to his nemesis. Left alone with Hoffmann, Nicklausse changes back into the character of the Muse. In her true guise she

declares her eternal love for the poet. Hoffmann begins to awaken, feeling inspired as the various characters in his imagination join the Muse in a chorus. They urge the poet to let his genius be reborn from the ashes of his sufferings. All is not lost, for through his pain Hoffmann's poetic art will flourish.

Meet the Composer

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)



Jacob Offenbach, as he was known as a child, played trios in Cologne bars with his violinist brother Julius and pianist Sister Isabella. In 1833 their father took Jacob and Julius to Paris for further study, where they joined a synagogue choir, their names became Jacques and Jules, and they continued studying and performing as a cellist and violinist.

As a cello virtuoso, Offenbach performed with Anton Rubinstein (Paris, 1841), Franz Liszt (Cologne, 1843), and Joseph Joachim and Felix Mendelssohn (London, 1844).

As an entrepreneur-conductor of the Bouffes-Parisiens (1855-62), Offenbach led works by Mozart, Rossini, Adolphe Adam, and Léo Delibes. He sponsored a competition for young composers in 1856, won by Bizet and Lecocq.

Offenbach's output as a composer includes about 100 operettas, vaudevilles, and opéracomiques, many of which incorporated myths, fairy tales, and satire, including:

- 1858 (revised 1874): *Orphée aux enfers* ("Orpheus in the Underworld")
- 1860: *Daphnis et Chloé*
- 1864: *La belle Hélène* ("The Fair Helen")
- 1866: *Barbe-bleue* ("Bluebeard")
- 1867: *Robinson Crusoé*

Offenbach's incidental music includes Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* and *Beaumarchais' The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, all 1852. His vocal music includes many works for men's chorus from the late 1840s, plus sacred and secular works for mixed voices and several dozen solo songs. Offenbach composed four ballets, dozens of shorter dance pieces and cello works, as well as a few orchestral selections.

Offenbach conducted extensively in France (especially Paris), Vienna, London, New York, and Philadelphia, where he visited the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, gave 40 concerts, and wrote a book of impressions after his trip.

Les contes d'Hoffmann was Offenbach's final work. The opera achieved Offenbach's goal of respectability as a serious opera composer, though he died of complications of gout while it was in rehearsal. He never saw the premiere.



Three Writers: One Opera

E. T. A. Hoffmann, Jules Barbier, and Michel Carré

Ernst Theodor Willhelm Hoffmann (1776-1822) was an important German Romantic writer and thinker, as well as a minor composer. While enrolled in law school by family tradition, he was allowed to continue studying painting, piano, and composition. He married Marianna Thekla Michaelina Rorer in 1802. In 1812 he wrote in his diary of his hopeless love for Julia Mark, his 16-year-old student. While navigating the pitfalls of forbidden love, Hoffmann read de la Motte-Fouqué's *Undine*, the same story that would later inspire Dvorák's *Rusalka*. Hoffmann's opera *Undine* opened successfully in 1816 and played 14 performances before the theatre burned down.



Drawing of E.T.A. Hoffman

Hoffmann clearly admired Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, he said, was the “opera of all operas.” His admiration of Mozart was so great that around 1813 he changed his third name to Amadeus in tribute. Hoffmann also paid homage to his idol in several works: In *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, Stella is performing in *Don Giovanni*. In Hoffmann’s story *Don Juan*, a traveler wanders from his hotel into a box at the opera house, where *Don Giovanni* is being performed. Mysteriously, the box connects to his bedroom, where he finds Donna Anna. They kiss. The next morning, the traveler learns that the singer playing Anna died late that night.

Hoffmann’s literary work includes two novels and about 50 short stories, often vivid, grotesque, and mysterious. He also wrote an important review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in which, along with analyzing the work, he discussed the stylistic roles of Haydn, Mozart, and especially Beethoven himself. Other composers took note of Hoffmann’s works and were inspired by them to write operas and ballets in addition to Offenbach’s *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, such as:

1851: Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, librettists, worked with virtually all the major French composers during their professional lifetimes. In 1851, 28 years after Hoffmann’s death, Barbier and Carré wrote a “fantastic drama in five acts” called “*Les contes d’Hoffmann*”. Twenty-nine years later, Barbier adapted their play for Offenbach’s opera.

1868: Richard Wagner used stories from Hoffmann’s collection *Die Serapionsbrüder* (“The Serapion Brotherhood”) in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

1870: Léo Delibes based his ballet *Coppélia* on *Der Sandmann* (“The Sandman”), one of the three tales also adapted by Offenbach.

1892: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky based his ballet *The Nutcracker* on Hoffmann’s story *Nußknacker und Mausekönig* (“The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”)

1926: Paul Hindemith used stories from *Die Serapionsbrüder* in *Cardillac*.



Going back to the source...

Here is an excerpt of “Der Sandmann” (“The Sandman”) written by E.T.A. Hoffmann. The story of Olympia in act 2 is adapted from this Hoffmann tale. The character Nathaniel is linked with the character of Hoffmann in the opera.

“The concert had finished, the ball began. 'To dance with her - with her!' That was the aim of all Nathaniel's desire, of all his efforts; but how to gain courage to ask her, the queen of the ball? Nevertheless - he himself did not know how it happened - no sooner had the dancing begun than he was standing close to Olympia, who had not yet been asked to dance. Scarcely able to stammer out a few words, he had seized her hand. Olympia's hand was as cold as ice; he felt a horrible deathly chill thrilling through him. He looked into her eyes, which beamed back full of love and desire, and at the same time it seemed as though her pulse began to beat and her life's blood to flow into her cold hand. And in the soul of Nathaniel the joy of love rose still higher; he clasped the beautiful Olympia, and with her flew through the dance. He thought that his dancing was usually correct as to time, but the peculiarly steady rhythm with which Olympia moved, and which often put him completely out, soon showed him that his time was most defective. However, he would dance with no other lady, and would have murdered anyone who approached Olympia for the purpose of asking her. But this only happened twice, and to his astonishment Olympia remained seated until the next dance, when he lost no time in making her rise again.

Had he been able to see any other object besides the fair Olympia, all sorts of unfortunate quarrels would have been inevitable. For the quiet, scarcely suppressed laughter which arose among the young people in every corner was manifestly directed towards Olympia, whom they followed with very curious glances - one could not tell why. Heated by the dance and by the wine, of which he had freely partaken, Nathaniel had laid aside all his ordinary reserve. He sat by Olympia with her hand in his and, in a high state of inspiration, told her his passion, in words which neither he nor Olympia understood.

Yet perhaps she did; for she looked steadfastly into his face and sighed several times, 'Ah, ah!' Upon this, Nathaniel said, 'Oh splendid, heavenly lady! Ray from the promised land of love - deep soul in whom all my being is reflected!' with much more stuff of the like kind. But Olympia merely went on sighing, 'Ah - ah!'

'Parting - parting!' he cried in wild despair; he kissed Olympia's hand, he bent towards her mouth, when his glowing lips were met by lips cold as ice! Just as when he had touched her cold hand, he felt himself overcome by horror; the legend of the dead bride darted suddenly through his mind, but Olympia pressed him fast, and her lips seemed to spring to life at his kiss. Professor Spalanzani strode through the empty hall, his steps caused a hollow echo, and his figure, round which a flickering shadow played, had a fearful, spectral appearance.

'Do you love me, do you love me, Olympia? Only one word! Do you love me?' whispered Nathaniel; but as she rose Olympia only sighed, 'Ah - ah!'

'Yes, my gracious, my beautiful star of love,' said Nathaniel, 'you have risen upon me, and you will shine, for ever lighting my inmost soul.'

'Ah - ah!' replied Olympia, as she departed...

THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

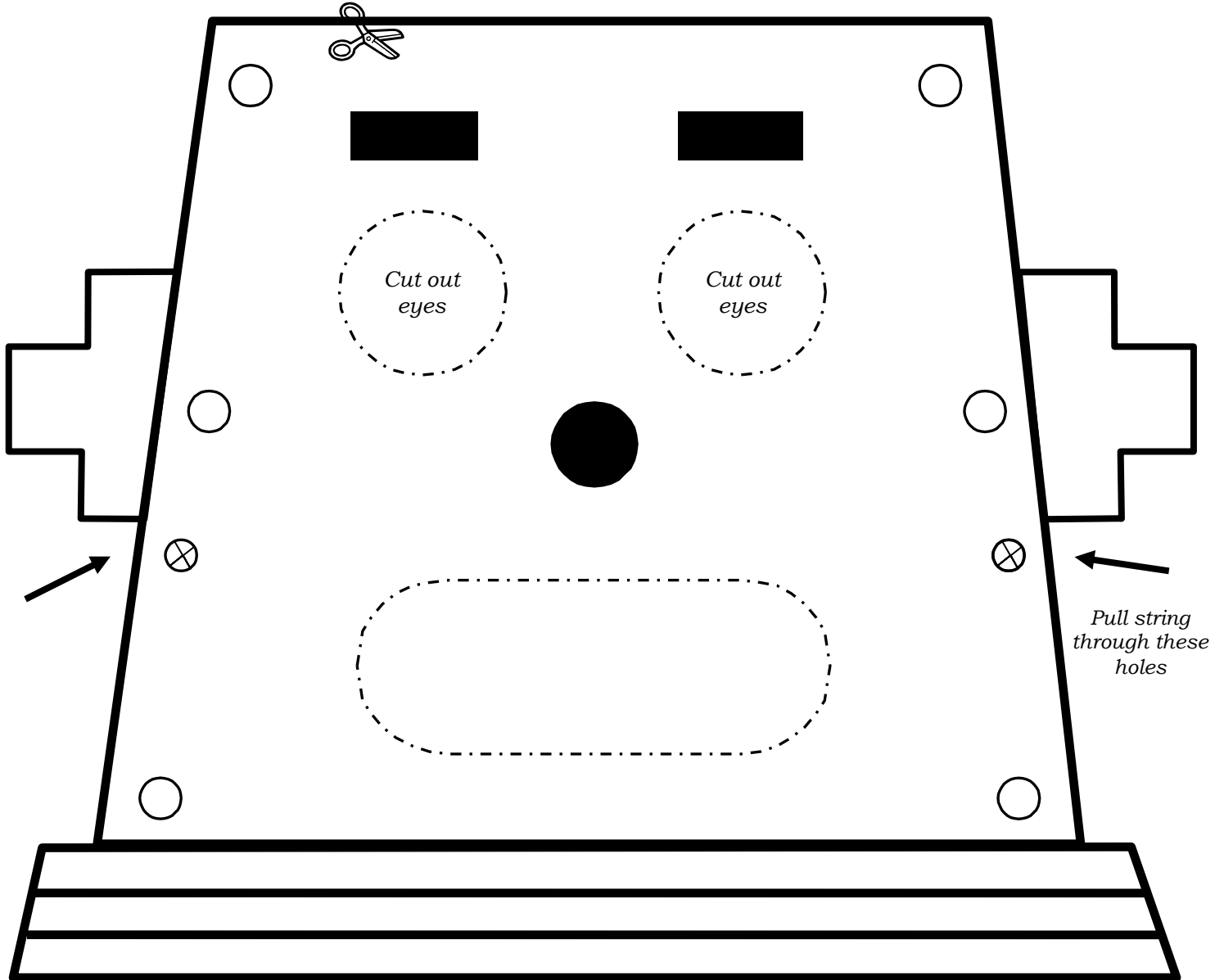
Did you know?

- Offenbach died about 4 months before the premiere of the opera. Since he didn't finish the music, several different versions of the opera emerged. Ernest Guiraud composed the music used at the opera's premiere.
- Some productions change the order of the opera; in this production, the order of the women is Olympia, Antonia, and Guilietta, which was Offenbach's original order.
- Some productions change the number of singers. While Offenbach intended that the four soprano roles and the four bass-baritone roles be performed by one singer, often the vocal demands are difficult to tackle, especially for the soprano roles. Famous sopranos who have attempted to sing all the roles include Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, and Catherine Malfitano.
- Offenbach is the composer of "Galop infernal," from *Orpheus in the Underworld*. This piece is more commonly referred to as a 'cancan,' which is a Parisian dance derived from Algeria.
- ETA Hoffmann's short stories have influenced other works, including Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.



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