



## Education Study Guide

# The Tales of Hoffmann

By Jacques Offenbach

First Performance February 10, 1881, Opéra-Comique Paris, France

Opera 101, Wednesday March 20, 2014 at 7:00pm

Performances March 21 & 22 at 7:30 pm. Matinée February 23 at 2:00 pm

At the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts

*Understand every word with English supertitles projected above the stage!*

### CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor: Christian Knapp\*

Olympia: Ashley Emerson\*

Director: Jay Lesenger\*

Antonia: Eleni Calenos\*

Hoffmann: Giuseppe Filianoti\*

Giulietta: Geraldine Chauvet\*

Four Villains: Mark Delavan

Nicklausse/The Muse: Irene Roberts

Four Servants: Matthew DiBattista\*

*\*Palm Beach Opera Debut*



Jacques Offenbach, Composer

## **SYNOPSIS**

For many years, Hoffmann has been obsessed by his stormy relationship with an opera singer, Stella. In his own mind, when he tells his tales, he separates the facets of her character into three distinct personalities: Olympia, the doll-symbol of woman as "object"; Antonia, the young singer starved for success but deprived by illness; and Giulietta, the courtesan who uses her beauty to seduce the unwary. Stella, the star of Hoffmann's life, the "perfect" woman, has the three faces of Eve; each time their love dies, he sees her dying too, and each time love is rekindled, he sees her in another guise.

While he fragments Stella's personality, he gives common characteristics to the various men whom he sees as his opponents; he embodies all of them in the lawyer, Lindorf, whose only real fault lies in the fact that he is another of Stella's admirers.

This fragmentation and combination of the personalities of others (he treats all the servant figures similarly) result in a division within Hoffmann's own persona which for some time has made him unable to write or reason clearly. He lives only through his fantasies, and the efforts of his conscience, his muse, to redeem him for his art only precipitate further disaster. Finally, however, Hoffmann rejects Stella; in so doing, he exorcises his fantasies, regains his soul, and is at last able to fulfill his destiny as a writer.

### **Prologue: Luther's tavern, the Opera Cellar**

Stella is singing Donna Anna in Don Giovanni. Hoffmann has left the performance early and is drinking heavily in Luther's Opera Cellar beneath the opera house. He believes that Stella has come to reclaim him. His better nature, his muse, is trying to rescue him from despair, and sees his rejection of Stella's performance as a step in the right direction.

Lindorf bribes Stella's servant, Andrés, to hand over her letter to Hoffmann with the key to her dressing room. Hoffmann's friends persuade him to sing them the legend of Kleinzach, a misshapen creature who loves beauty in vain. Hoffmann becomes lost in his own reveries about Stella, and the students accuse him of being in love himself. An altercation with Lindorf leads Hoffmann to accuse the lawyer of being the source of his misfortunes. He then tells the assembled company the story of his "three loves."

### **Act One: Spalanzani's house**

Spalanzani has "created" his daughter, Olympia, and Hoffmann is infatuated with her. His better nature tries to make him see her for what she is — a mindless, empty puppet of a girl — but when Coppélius, a strange purveyor of optical illusions, sells Hoffmann a special pair of spectacles which enhance his vision of his beloved, he becomes completely enslaved by her beauty. Spalanzani is not at all pleased to see Coppélius, who claims a share in Olympia's paternity, and packs him off with a bank draft in settlement of his debt.

Olympia makes her debut in Society and sings at Spalanzani's reception; Hoffmann persuades himself that she returns his love. Coppélius discovers that the bank draft has been drawn on a bankrupt moneylender and returns to revenge himself on Spalanzani by attacking his daughter. Hoffmann's spectacles are broken in the ensuing struggle and he finally realizes the hideous truth about his beloved Olympia.

### **Act Two: Crespel's house**

Years later, Hoffmann finds his next love, Antonia, in the house of her father, Crespel, who hopes to hide her from the world and from Hoffmann, whom he regards as an unfortunate influence. The young singer has fallen victim to the same consumption that afflicted her mother, a famous singer. In an attempt to shield his daughter from that fate, Crespel makes her promise never to sing again.

The misunderstandings of Franz, Crespel's deaf servant, allow first Hoffmann into the house, where he renews his relationship with Antonia, and then Doctor Miracle, the quack Crespel blames for the death of his wife. Hoffmann, in hiding, is horrified when Miracle treats the absent girl and forces her to sing. Hoffmann persuades Antonia, much against her will, to sacrifice her singing career to his love, and leaves her, promising to return. In his imagination he sees Miracle deriding Antonia's hopes for a happy marriage and inciting her to obey her mother's dying wish that she follow in her footsteps. These memories, and her own hunger for applause, spur Antonia on to excess, and when Hoffmann returns she collapses in his arms. Miracle reappears to pronounce her dead.

### **Act Three: Giulietta's palace**

Giulietta, a courtesan, lives under the protection of Captain Dapertutto, who relies on her to seduce wealthy young men who yield her first their pockets and then, in extremis, their souls. Peter Schlémihl, an officer, has lost everything — his shadow, his soul — to her; Pitichinaccio, Giulietta's lover, taunts him. Hoffmann, now at the lowest point of his life, is dangerously involved himself. He ignores the warning voice of reason, who accuses him of being in love once again, and pledges his soul to the devil if it should ever be true, which Dapertutto proceeds to arrange.

Giulietta offers Hoffmann her love in exchange for his soul, his reflection; Hoffmann believes her and is lost. Schlémihl discovers them in flagrante and challenges Hoffmann to a duel. Schlémihl is killed and Hoffmann has to defend himself against Dapertutto's murderous intentions.

### **Epilogue: Luther's tavern, the Opera Cellar**

Don Giovanni is over, Hoffmann's tales are told, and he is deep in drink and misery. When the students leave to escort Stella from the stage door, she comes to Hoffmann, followed by Lindorf, who has taken advantage of the stolen key. Stella attempts to rekindle Hoffmann's old passion for her, but he angrily rejects her and she leaves with Lindorf. In rejecting his past, Hoffmann has regained his soul. He is at last able to hear the call of his muse: "To know the pain of love, the passion of despair, is to learn the truth of life...let the poet live again!"



## Resources and Links

Piano-vocal score to Les contes d'Hoffmann in English and French:

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/bhr7120/large/index.html>

- Note that the Antonia and Giulietta acts are switched.

YouTube search for [Offenbach Hoffmann]:

[http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Offenbach+Hoffmann&search\\_type=](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Offenbach+Hoffmann&search_type=)

Original production photos from L'Opéra-Comique, 1881:

<http://opera.stanford.edu/Offenbach/Hoffmann/pix.html>

The Sandman, Hoffmann's tale of Coppélius:

[http://www.fln.vcu.edu/hoffmann/sand\\_e.html](http://www.fln.vcu.edu/hoffmann/sand_e.html)

Libretto of one version of the opera in French and English at Project Gutenberg:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15915/15915-h/15915-h.htm>

Hoffmann's story Don Juan—two different translations:

<http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/2007/06/translation-of-don-juan-by-e-t-hoffmann.html>

<http://global.csc.edu/engl/265/HoffmannDonJuan.htm>



Scene from The Tales of Hoffmann

# **Palm Beach Opera's**

## **Education Program: The Tales of Hoffmann**

### **The Tales of Hoffmann Classroom Activities 2013/2014 Season**

**Common Core Standards & Sunshine State Standards**

**STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math) Enhanced**

**Middle School & High School**

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### **LANGUAGE ARTS & TECHNOLOGY**

Who, What, When and Where: *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

Create a Television News Report on *The Tales of Hoffmann* using iMovie, Windows Moviemaker, or similar program. Create a news report for each act and the happenings in each. Include voiceovers that corresponded to the visual elements. You can use images found in research on the Internet or, take it a step further by re-creating the characters with fellow students and film them in an interview format.

*This activity can also be done as a writing assignment only.*

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### **VISUAL ARTS & TECHNOLOGY**

Create a 8 ½ x 11 promotional magazine ad completely in a digital program. Feature characters from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and include Palm Beach Opera's performance information. The characters can be images that are found online via research, or characters you digitally create yourself.

*This activity can also be done traditionally by drawing. For greater creative depth, allow the students to create a poster instead of a magazine ad.*



## **SCIENCE & MUSIC**

Music has a great effect on the brain. In *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Hoffmann thinks back on all of his loves, with the music he hears and sings affecting his thoughts, and more specifically his memories. Research the effects that music has on the brain. Then create a diagram of the human brain, highlighting the areas of the brain music effects the most. Take the activity further with multiple diagrams with various ages, gender, and ethnic backgrounds.

Another element you could research:

Including Opera, are there certain types of music that have a greater effect on the brain? If so, create multiple diagrams of the human brain comparing the effects of each type of music.

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## **ENGINEERING, MATH, VISUAL ART & MUSIC**

Create and engineer a mechanical mobile that includes Hoffmann in the center, and Stella, Olympia, Anotnia, and Giulietta spinning around him. Include a music box element, so as the mobile spins the music creates an illusion of the women dancing through Hoffmann's mind.

*This activity can be done without the mechanical and music elements, creating a mobile that is not engineered to move in a certain way.*

- *Special thanks to **Boston Lyric Opera** for use of their *The Tales of Hoffmann Educational Materials*.*