



# TALES OF HOFFMANN

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# THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

By

Jacques Offenbach

Libretto by

Jules Barbier

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

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# The Tales of Hoffmann

## Premiere

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

## Cast of Characters

<b>Hoffmann</b> , a poet.....	Tenor
<b>The Muse of Poetry</b> and <b>Nicklausse</b> , Hoffmann's friend.....	Mezzo-Soprano
<b>Lindorf</b> , a public councilor.....	Bass-Baritone
<b>Stella</b> , an opera star.....	Soprano
<b>Andres</b> , her servant.....	Tenor
<b>Luther</b> , a tavern-keeper.....	Bass
<b>Nathanaël</b> and <b>Hermann</b> , students.....	Tenor and Baritone
<b>Spalanzani</b> , an inventor.....	Tenor
<b>Cochenille</b> , his servant.....	Tenor
<b>Olympia</b> , Spalanzani's "daughter," a wind-up doll.....	Soprano
<b>Coppelius</b> , a maker of eyes.....	Bass-Baritone
<b>Antonia</b> , Crespel's daughter.....	Soprano
<b>Crespel</b> , a violinmaker.....	Bass
<b>Frantz</b> , his servant.....	Tenor
<b>Dr. Miracle</b> , a physician.....	Bass-Baritone
<b>A Ghost</b> , the voice of Antonia's mother.....	Mezzo-Soprano
<b>Giulietta</b> , a courtesan.....	Soprano
<b>Schlemil</b> , Giulietta's current lover.....	Baritone
<b>Pitichinaccio</b> , a servant.....	Tenor
<b>Dapertutto</b> , a sorcerer.....	Bass-Baritone
<b>Invisible Spirits, Students, Waiters, Guests of Spalanzani, Guests of Giulietta</b> .....	Chorus

**Note:** In many productions of **THE TALES OF HOFFMANN**, a single singer plays several roles, giving continuity to the stories. The following roles are frequently sung by the same performer:

Stella / Olympia / Antonia / Giulietta are sung by the same soprano.

Lindorf / Coppelius / Dr. Miracle / Dapertutto are sung by the same bass-baritone.

Andres / Spalanzani / Frantz / Pitichinaccio are sung by the same tenor.

Nathanaël / Cochenille are sung by the same tenor.

Luther / Crespel are sung by the same bass.

Hermann / Schlemil are sung by the same baritone.

The Muse of Poetry, Nicklausse and the Ghost are sung by the same mezzo-soprano.

## Brief Summary

**Settings:** A Nuremberg tavern; an inventor's house; a house in Munich; a Venetian palazzo

The Muse of Poetry has come to Luther's tavern to watch over Hoffmann who is melancholy over his love, Stella. The Muse transforms herself in the young student Nicklausse to be at Hoffmann's side. Hoffmann's rival is Lindorf who enters the tavern bragging that he has the power of the devil in getting what he wants. Boisterous students coax Hoffmann into telling one of his stories. When they ask why he loves Stella, he replies that he loves three women and begins to tell the story of his three loves.

The first story is about Olympia, the daughter of the inventor Spalanzani. Hoffmann has been invited to a party where Spalanzani's beautiful daughter will be presented. Hoffmann is entranced by Olympia and falls in love with her. Nicklausse warns him there is something strange and lifeless about the girl. The eye-maker, Coppelius, arrives during the party to claim a share in Spalanzani's newest invention. Spalanzani buys him off and gives him a check. Olympia performs for the guests, singing a florid aria, which greatly impresses everyone. As the guests go to dinner Hoffmann tries to express his love to Olympia but she runs away from him. Olympia and Spalanzani return with the guests for dancing. Hoffmann dances gracefully with Olympia until she begins to spin about madly. She knocks Hoffmann to the floor as Coppelius returns, furious that Spalanzani's check was worthless. With murder in his eyes he follows Olympia out of the room and returns carrying her mutilated body. As Coppelius throws Olympia's arms and legs around the room, Hoffmann realizes that his beloved girl was nothing but a mechanical doll.

After losing Olympia, Hoffmann becomes a composer. He now loves Antonia, a frail girl with a beautiful voice who yearns to be a great singer like her mother. Her father Crespel has forbidden her to sing because she has a weak heart and singing will worsen her condition. Hoffmann and Nicklausse visit Antonia while her father is out and they sing a love song that Hoffmann has composed. The singing exhausts her. When Crespel returns, Hoffmann hides so that he can remain and find out why Crespel has forbidden Antonia to sing. The strange Dr. Miracle arrives to examine Antonia. Crespel is horrified because he believes Miracle was responsible for his wife's death. Miracle wants Antonia to sing. Crespel drives him away. Hoffmann now understands that if Antonia sings she will die. He asks Antonia to marry him and promise never to sing again. Antonia agrees but is saddened. Alone, Antonia is torn between love and a singing career. She hears Miracle's voice in her head encouraging her to sing and invoking her mother's spirit. Her mother's portrait begins to glow and her mother's voice speaks to her. Antonia begins to sing passionately. The phantom Miracle plays a demonic accompaniment on a violin. Antonia sings until she falls to the floor. Crespel and Hoffmann rush in but Antonia dies in her father's arms. Dr. Miracle returns to pronounce her dead.

Hoffmann, now disillusioned with romantic love, is only interested in wine and women. At an orgy at the Venetian palace of the courtesan Giulietta he says he scorns love but feels jealousy when he meets Giulietta's lover, Schlemil. Nicklausse warns him against falling in love with Giulietta, but Hoffmann scoffs. The sorcerer Dapertutto emerges from the shadows and uses a magic diamond to summon Giulietta who is hypnotized by the jewel. He directs her to seduce the poet and capture his reflection in a mirror. Giulietta does as she is bidden. Hoffmann falls in love with her and seems to

lose his soul. He kills Schlemil in a duel and tries to claim Giulietta, but she laughs mockingly at him as she and Dapertutto float away on the Grand Canal.

His stories over, Hoffmann continues to drink at the tavern. Nicklausse says that all three women are different aspects of Stella. Hearing Stella's name, Hoffmann rages and downs more drink. Stella enters the tavern but Hoffmann is drunk. She leaves on Lindorf's arm. Nicklausse turns back into the Muse and declares her eternal love for the poet. Hoffmann awakens, inspired, and knows that his pain and suffering will fuel his genius and his poetic art will flourish.

# THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

## Full Plot Synopsis and Musical Highlights

### Prologue

Luther's tavern is empty, illuminated only by a ghostly ray of moonlight. An invisible chorus of spirits is heard singing of the magical powers of wine and beer, "Glou, glou, glou" (Glug, glug, glug). The Muse of Poetry emerges from a barrel with the aria, "La vérité, dit-on, sortait d'un puits" (Truth, it is said, came out of a well). The Muse has come to watch over her charge, the poet Hoffmann, whose talent she protects and nurtures. She declares her jealousy of the beautiful opera singer Stella with whom Hoffmann was once involved. Stella is performing this very evening in the opera house next to the tavern. The Muse fears that Hoffmann will become infatuated once again with the diva and distract him from his artistry. The Muse vows that she herself will claim the poet's soul tonight. 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. In the aria, "Dans les rôles d'amoureux languoureux" (In the role of a languishing lover) he claims to have the power of the devil in getting what he wants and vows to triumph over the poet whom he despises as a foolish drunkard.

Luther, the tavern keeper, enters with his waiters to greet the horde of boisterous students that pour in. The jolly mood is broken when Hoffmann arrives in a melancholy state having just watched Stella at the opera. His friends manage to coax him to telling a favorite story – that of the grotesque dwarf Kleinzach in the aria, "Il était une fois à la cour d'Eisenach," (There was once at the court of Eisenach). But Hoffmann cannot keep his mind from thoughts of Stella's beauty. When the students tease him about being in love, he protests vehemently. 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.

### ACT I OLYMPIA

Hoffmann has apprenticed himself to the mad scientist Spalanzani in order to meet his beautiful daughter Olympia. On this day Spalanzani is giving a party to present his daughter to the public. After Hoffmann arrives he sings, "Allons! Courage et confiance...Ah! vivre deux!" (Come now! Courage and confidence!...Ah!, to live together). Nicklausse appears and sings, "Une poupée aux yeux d'émail" (A doll with enamel eyes). She 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 Coppélius arrives and convinces

Hoffmann to buy a pair of magical glasses guaranteed to make Olympia appear more beautiful than ever in the aria, "J'ai des yeux, de vrais yeux," (I have eyes, real eyes). When Spalanzani comes in he is shaken to find Coppelius who has claimed a share in the scientist's new invention. Spalanzani writes out a check and buys all rights from Coppelius, who then leaves.

The servant Cochenille enters and announces the arrival of guests, all of whom have come to meet Olympia. They enter to the sounds of a minuet. As Spalanzani accompanies her on the harp, Olympia sings a florid coloratura aria called The Doll Song, "Les oiseaux dans la charmille," (The birds in the arbor). Everyone is greatly impressed. While the guests go off to dine, Hoffmann remains alone with her and expresses his love in a romance, "Doux aveu, gage de nos amours" (Sweet avowal, pledge of our 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.

## **ACT II                      ANTONIA**

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 following in her late mother's footsteps and 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 sits at the piano and sings, "Elle a fui, la tourterelle," (The turtle-dove has flown). When she finishes she is exhausted. Her 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, keeping her in seclusion.

Hoffmann has traced Antonia's whereabouts and arrives in Munich with Nicklausse. While Crespel is out, the elderly, befuddled servant Frantz enters and sings, "'Jour et nuit je me mets en quatre," (Day and night I wear myself out). Frantz unwittingly admits Hoffmann into the house. Antonia is overjoyed to see her love again, but is unable to explain her father's reasons for forbidding her to sing. She joins Hoffmann briefly in a favorite love song that he has composed, "J'ai le bonheur dans l'âme!" (My soul is filled with happiness). The duet exhausts her almost to the point of collapse. 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. Miracle tells Crespel that the girl will die unless he can treat her, "Pour conjurer le danger," (To avert the

danger). When he produces his strange and horrible phials of medicine the terrified Crespel drives him from the room in a frenzy.

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 Miracle who has materialized but is invisible to the girl. He sings, "Tu ne chanteras plus?" (You will not sing anymore?) His words begin a trio, which includes Antonia and the voice of her dead mother. When Antonia tries to deny these thoughts Miracle invokes the spirit of her mother. The mother's portrait begins to glow and seemingly comes to life. Antonia's mother urges her daughter to sing, "Chère enfant que j'appelle," (Dear child to whom I call). As the voices of Miracle and her mother become more insistent, Antonia's resistance crumbles and she sings passionately and feverishly, as if possessed. Miracle picks up a violin and plays a demonic accompaniment. As the girl's voice rises to a climax, Antonia falls to the floor. When Crespel, Frantz, Hoffmann and Nicklausse enter the room they are too late. Antonia dies in her father's arms singing the words of Hoffmann's love song. Agonized, the poet screams for a doctor. Dr. Miracle enters and pronounces the girl dead.

### **ACT III      GIULIETTA**

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 orgy. She is assisted by a grotesque hunchback named Pitichinaccio. Giulietta, Nicklausse and Hoffmann sing a seductive barcarolle about the pleasures of love, "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour" (Lovely night, O night of love). Hoffmann responds with a hedonistic drinking song, "Amis, l'amourtendre et rêveur, erreur!" (Friends, tender and dreamy love is a mistake!), scorning love and celebrating the virtues of wine. Schlemil arrives and is displeased to find his mistress in the midst of a bacchanal. She mocks him and introduces Hoffmann. 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. Hoffmann denies that he has any feelings for Giulietta and drags Nicklausse off to the card game. His exiting words are, "May the devil take me if I fall in love again!"

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. Dapertutto takes out a magical diamond and uses it to summon the courtesan, "Scintille, diamant" (Sparkle, diamond). Hypnotized by the jewel, Giulietta appears and agrees to seduce the poet and capture his reflection in a mirror. She has already stolen the shadow of Schlemil in this way.

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, "Ô Dieu, de quelle ivresse embrases-tu mon âme,"

(O God! With what rapture you set my soul aflame). 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**

Back in Luther's 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 they reach the door Hoffmann stops them with a final mocking verse about Kleinzach, then, falls insensible to the floor. 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.

# THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

## Historical Background

Jacques Offenbach enjoyed great popularity as the adopted French genius of comic operas and operettas. Considered a part of the glamorous and frivolous world of Paris, the composer turned out a brilliant series of comic hits that made him the toast of Paris for many years. As Offenbach grew older and lost much of his fortune in unsuccessful investments, he became a recluse and avoided his former friends and colleagues. His health was poor and the broad popularity of the French operetta was beginning to wane, particularly after the French loss in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871. The frivolity of the earlier period no longer fit the times. Throughout his career Offenbach had the ambition to move beyond operetta and establish himself as the composer of serious opera. The last few years of his life were devoted to achieving this goal.

In searching for a suitable libretto Offenbach remembered a popular play he had seen years before in 1851. The play was titled *Les Contes Fantastiques D'Hoffmann* and was a dramatization of the novels by E.T.A. Hoffmann, a writer who was exceedingly popular in France. Offenbach had been impressed by the play's novel approach where Hoffmann himself was the hero of three of his love stories. E.T.A. Hoffmann was a charismatic individual as compelling as the fantastic and fanciful short stories he created. As a writer he was instrumental in the development of German Romanticism, launched the fantasy genre, and was the forerunner of Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Dickens. As a composer he set a milestone in the development of German romantic opera with his *Undine* (1816), and as a designer he was well known for his witty caricatures. However, for all his significance, E.T.A. Hoffmann still owes a considerable part of his immortality to Jacques Offenbach.

Offenbach decided to make *Les Contes Fantastiques D'Hoffmann* into a grand opera. The two authors of the play were Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, the two men who produced the *Faust* libretto for Gounod. Offenbach worked closely with Jules Barbier to produce the libretto for his grand opera. As in the play, Hoffmann, himself, stars in his own stories which follow the path of the creative artist as he becomes disillusioned in his search for love and the ideal woman. The ultimate message is that the experiences of life are enriching and can play a role in creating great art.

THE TALES OF HOFFMANN was Offenbach's final work. He died while the opera was in rehearsal but before all the final details were complete. The composer Ernst Guiraud was asked to "finish" the opera for its premiere on February 10, 1881, four months after Offenbach's death. He orchestrated some sections of the score and eventually added recitatives to the work. Because of its "unfinished" state, particularly in Act IV and the Epilogue (Act V), and the unavailability of some original Offenbach manuscripts, the opera was performed for many years in a somewhat altered form from Offenbach's original intentions. Continuing research and 20<sup>th</sup> century discoveries of Offenbach manuscripts has had a significant impact on productions in recent years and has created a more cohesive and complete opera both musically and dramatically. Two important adjustments are the increased emphasis on the dual role of the Muse/Nicklausse and the placement of the Giulietta Act as the third of the three tales rather than the second.

The original staging of the opera scored an immediate success at its premiere, achieving over 100 performances during its first season. The spread of its popularity in Europe was slowed somewhat after the disastrous Ringtheater fire in Vienna on December 8, 1881, which broke out just as the curtain was rising on its second performance in that city. Several hundred people died, creating a superstitious reluctance to stage the work, particularly in German-speaking countries, for some twenty years.

# THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

## The Life of Offenbach

Jacques Offenbach began life as a German in the city of Cologne on June 20, 1819. His father was a music teacher, composer and cantor who also worked at bookbinding. Required by law in 1807 to have an inheritable family name, his father had changed his name from (Isaac Juda) Eberst to Offenbach, the name of the town near Frankfurt where he had been born.

Music lessons for Jakob and his siblings began early. He began with the violin but by the age of nine had switched to the cello. The Offenbach children formed a family trio of the violin, cello and piano and performed professionally in many local engagements. When Jakob was fourteen his father took him to Paris to attend the Conservatoire and further his study of the cello.

After leaving the Conservatoire he found employment in the orchestra of the Opéra Comique while continuing his study of the cello. He also pursued his interest in composition by becoming a student of opera composer Fromental (Jacques) Halévy. During these early years in Paris, Jakob adopted the French spelling of his name, Jacques. By the time he left the Opéra Comique orchestra he was one of the finest cellists in Europe and was additionally composing larger, more complex works.

In the next stage of his life he traveled and established a lucrative performance career. He formed a partnership with the composer/pianist Friedrich Von Flotow and also performed with Franz Liszt and Anton Rubenstein. In 1844 he traveled to London and performed a series of concerts with Felix Mendelssohn. That same year he converted to Catholicism and married. A few short years later he moved his family to Cologne for more than a year to escape the social upheaval associated with the revolution in 1848.

After returning to Paris, Offenbach became the conductor of the orchestra of the Théâtre Français in 1850. Offenbach also continued his practice of composing short musical works for the theater. His music was very well received. In 1855 he formed his own theater company, the Opera Bouffes, and began forging a new career composing and staging popular musical theater works called operettas. His first major success was *Orpheus in the Underworld*, which premiered in October 1858. Other popular operettas, among more than 90 works, were *La Belle Hélène* (1864), *Barbe-bleue* (1866), *La Vie Parisienne* (1866), *La Grande-duchesse de Gerolstein* (1867) and *La Périochole* (1868). Offenbach is credited with creating the operetta genre and also influenced such composers as Johann Strauss II, Franz Lehár and Arthur Sullivan. He became a French citizen in 1860.

The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 ushered in a more somber period in French theater where the lighthearted frivolity of Offenbach's operettas were now not well received. He was almost ruined financially and was not able to recover for several years. In 1876 he made a highly successful concert tour of the United States. His great popularity in America helped him recoup his financial losses. He also staged many of his works in Great Britain to public acclaim.

In the later years of his life Offenbach focused on demonstrating his ability to write serious music for the opera stage. He chose as his subject the German writer and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann and some of his fantastical stories. He collaborated with librettist Jules Barbier who, along with Michel Carré, had written a play about Hoffmann

that Offenbach admired. Offenbach was still in the process of composing THE TALES OF HOFFMANN when he died on October 5, 1880. He had completed most of the opera, but in a piano vocal score form. His friend, composer Ernest Guiraud, prepared the opera for staging and orchestrated the piano score. In the process, some of Offenbach's original intent was lost.

In recent years the discovery of some of Offenbach's original manuscripts have made it possible for the opera to be presented in a form more closely aligned with the composer's desires. THE TALES OF HOFFMANN successfully premiered some three months after Offenbach's death. He is buried in the Montmartre Cemetery in Paris. THE TALES OF HOFFMANN established Offenbach's legacy as the composer of serious opera as well as light-hearted operettas, all of which are still performed regularly today.

# THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the role played by the Muse of Poetry in the opera.
2. Why does Hoffmann appear melancholy at the beginning of the opera during the Prologue?
3. What is the poet Hoffmann seeking as he relates his stories?
4. Name the four women involved with Hoffmann and discuss the connection between them.
5. Why does the same singer portray all four women?
6. How do Hoffmann's motivations change over the course of the three love stories?
7. There are several multiple character roles in the opera. Discuss how one singer changes his/her characterizations both musically and dramatically to portray different characters as the opera progresses.
8. Cite examples in the opera where music helps set the tone and mood for a particular scene.
9. What part does the lighting play in conveying the macabre/gothic elements in Hoffmann's stories?
10. What similarities are there between Hoffmann's stories and some of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories? Is their use of fantasy and the macabre the same?
11. An outside evil force always separates Hoffmann from his love in each of the three stories. What prevents Hoffmann from pursuing Stella?
12. Who does Stella represent? Is she attracted to Hoffmann?
13. Is Nicklausse the "voice of reason" of the Muse or is it Hoffmann's own inner voice?
14. Is Hoffmann on a "coming of age" journey, a rite of passage? Is he coming to terms with himself and his creative artistry?
15. Does Hoffmann resolve his sense of disillusionment? What advice does the Muse provide at the end of the opera?



## A Short History of Opera

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata*, which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*), which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias*, which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian and championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led the adaptation by the French, which ranged from the *opera comique* to the grand full-scale *tragedie lyrique*. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed spectacles unified through the use of the *leitmotif*. The English *ballad opera*, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *operetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment, which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form, which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.



# The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>Soprano</i>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b>Verdi Baritone</b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b>Buffo Bass</b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b>Basso Cantate</b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team, which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.



As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.