

Opera Oct. 1954  
(vol 5/No 10)

# 'The Tales of Hoffmann'

(i) *The Original Version*

by Edward Downes

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# OPERA

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**MR. FREDERICK GARDINER**

General Agent for the

**European Association of Metropolitan**

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He had, by this time, become world famous as a composer of highly-successful operettas. At one time he had his own theatre and three different operettas playing to full houses in Paris alone—to say nothing of performances in places ranging from Salt Lake City to St Petersburg. He was always hoping, however, for a success in the more serious world of the opéra comique—a success which did not come until after his death. He had appeared as an opéra comique composer four times—with *Barkouf*, *Robinson Crusoe* (with Galli-Marié, the original Carmen as Friday), *Vert-Vert* and *Fantasio*—and none of them had been a success. For this reason he had little hope that any serious work of his (and *Hoffmann* was his most serious) would have a chance of success in Paris. He therefore arranged with Jauner, the Director of the Imperial Opera in Vienna, for *Hoffmann* to be presented there.

Before this contract was finally signed and sealed Offenbach decided to give a private performance at his house of selections from *Hoffmann*. He used a vocal quartet and amateur chorus, and played the piano himself. The distinguished audience, which included all the influential musicians, theatre managers and critics of Paris, were so much impressed that the possibility of Paris losing this work to its great operatic rival, Vienna, was clearly unthinkable. Accordingly Carvalho, Director of the Opéra-Comique, secured the work on the spot and Jauner, as with *Carmen*, had to be content with the first production outside Paris.

The work was put into rehearsal almost immediately, but Offenbach became ill and was unable to take part. He had completed the vocal score with general indications for the orchestration, and had intended, as was his custom, to complete this orchestration, and make such minor alterations in

the music itself as might appear necessary during the rehearsal period. His illness became more severe and he died on October 5, 1880, at the age of 61. A few days before his death he had been carried to the foyer of the Opéra-Comique to hear a rehearsal of *Hoffmann*, and on his return home he had been heard to whisper to his greyhound, which he called Kleinzach, that his one wish was to live long enough to attend the first night, which he was sure would be an overwhelming success.

Ernest Guiraud was called in to complete the orchestration and supervise the remaining rehearsals. (Guiraud, an opera composer in his own right, is chiefly famous for having written the recitatives for *Carmen*, and for being Debussy's teacher of composition at the Conservatoire.) The general rehearsal of *Hoffmann* took place on February 1, 1881, with the composer's family and some members of the press attending. It was in five acts; Act I in Luther's Tavern (now the Prologue); Act II, Olympia the doll; Act III, Antonia the singer; Act IV, Giulietta the courtesan; and Act V (now the Epilogue) again in Luther's Tavern with Stella. Carvalho, with Offenbach's four previous opéra comique failures at the back of his mind, began to fear that *Hoffmann*, with its absolute originality and considerable length, might prove to be a fifth. He lost his nerve and decided to cut one act completely—the Venice Scene with Giulietta.

Now on the afternoon of November 18, 1880, six weeks after Offenbach's death, a memorial matinée had been organised by the newspaper *Figaro*. A bust of Offenbach had been unveiled and several of his works performed, including the first public performance of the Barcarolle, which was such an immediate success that it had to be repeated. Carvalho did not dare cut this Barcarolle, but since it came from the Giulietta scene, which he was determined to suppress, he had to find room for it elsewhere. Accordingly, he transferred the Antonia Scene to Venice (with a view of the Rialto from the window) and used the Barcarolle as an off-stage chorus during a soliloquy of Crespel. Similarly, he salvaged the tenor aria *O Dieu, de quelle ivresse* and the following duet, and put them into the epilogue, with Stella singing the former Giulietta music. To do this he had to suppress most of the original music of the Epilogue (or Act V).

In this reduced form *Hoffmann* came to its first performance at the Opéra-Comique on February 10, 1881 as an 'Opéra Fantastique en quatre Actes.' It was an enormous success and was given 101 performances in 1881—the first opera since the war of 1870 to have run for more than a hundred performances. A vocal score and a libretto of this Carvalho version were published (both now very rare) with the names of Barbier and Carré as librettists. In later impressions of this edition Barbier's name appears alone—Carré having disassociated himself from the piece as a protest against Carvalho's 'cookery.'

The first performance outside Paris took place in Vienna in December 1881, with the spoken dialogue replaced by recitatives written by Guiraud (as in *Carmen*). Jauner, the Viennese Opera Director, must have wondered whether it was a good idea after all to do *Hoffmann* in Vienna, since on the night of the second performance the Ringtheater, where it was being played, was burned down. As a result of this an operatic superstition arose associating *Hoffmann* with bad luck, and except for a few performances in Ham-

**Royal Opera Covent Garden**  
 Lessee and Manager . Mr. FRANK RENDLE  
*For Autumn and Winter Seasons*

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**THOMAS BEECHAM OPERA SEASON, 1910**

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THIS MORNING'S PERFORMANCE

**Wednesday, October 5th, at 2**

OFFENBACH'S OPERA

**TALES OF HOFFMANN**  
 (In English)

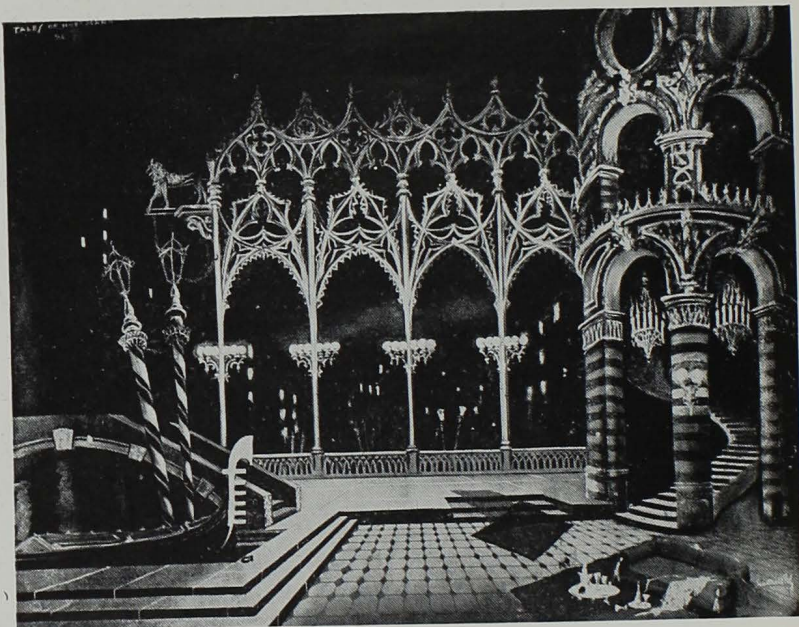
Hoffmann . . .	Mr. JOSEPH O'MARA
Nicklaus . . .	Miss STELLA GODWIN
Olympia . . .	Miss MIGNON NEVADA
Gulietta . . .	Mlle. ZELIE de LUSSAN
Antonia . . .	Miss RUTH VINCENT
Spalanzani . . .	Mr. D. BYNDON-AYRES
Crespel . . .	Mr. GASTON SARGEANT
Cocciniglia . . .	Mr. ARTHUR WYNN
Franz . . .	Mr. ARTHUR ROYD
Coppelius	} Mr. HARRY DEARTH
Dappertutto	
Miracle	
The Voice . . .	Miss CARRIE TUBB
Conductor	Mr. THOMAS BEECHAM

Stage Manager . M. LOUIS VERANDE

*Programme of the first Covent Garden performance of 'The Tales of Hoffmann'*

burg in the 1890's it was not performed in Germany for nearly 25 years.

In 1893 it was revived in Paris and the Gulietta scene restored—but in the wrong place, i.e., before, instead of after, the Antonia scene. This restoration necessarily depleted the Epilogue, since Carvalho had suppressed most of the original Epilogue music and inserted the best music of the Gulietta scene there. No doubt the Opéra-Comique would have been pleased to restore the original Epilogue music, but unfortunately the manuscript had been destroyed in the Opéra-Comique fire of 1887 (as a result of which fire, Carvalho, as Director, was sentenced to a heavy fine and a term of



George Wakhevitch's design for the Venice Scene for the new Covent Garden production of 'The Tales of Hoffmann' Photo Derek Allen

imprisonment). This 1893 version was also published (the orchestral score in the British Museum is of this version), but its success was in no way comparable with either the previous or the subsequent versions.

The version in which *Hoffmann* has become world famous received its first performance in Berlin in November, 1905. It was arranged by Maximilian Morris (a German, in spite of his name) in three Acts with a Prologue and an Epilogue. It was an immediate success and was quickly taken up by opera houses all over the world. It reached London in 1907 (in German) and was translated into English by Edward Agate for Beecham's performances in 1910. This is the version that is published as 'authentic' in England, France and the U.S.A., without any reference to the arranger—or, indeed, to the fact that there was an arranger. What Morris did was: (1) to use the recitatives of Guiraud (and some of his own) in place of the spoken dialogue; (2) to transfer the original Dapertutto aria (the 'Mirror' aria in E flat minor) to the Olympia scene, as an aria for Doctor Coppelius; (3) to retain the wrong order of scenes as in the 1893 version; (4) to give the Barcarolle to Giulietta and Nicklausse as a love duet (which is ridiculous, since they are enemies); (5) to introduce into the Giulietta scene the Dapertutto E major aria *Scintille, diamant*, from an operetta which Offenbach had earlier composed for Vienna; (6) to introduce in the Giulietta scene a Septet with new words, formed from



for the new Covent Garden  
Photo Derek Allen

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a quartet with chorus from the original Epilogue (this had received special praise in the press after the semi-private performance at Offenbach's house); (7) to alter completely the plot of the *Giulietta* scene, making it quite nonsensical; (8) to use the music of the tenor aria *O Dieu, de quelle ivresse* as a melodrama over which the Muse speaks in the Epilogue; and (9) to change the whole point of the opera by altering the story of the Epilogue.

Thus it will be seen that the opera as Offenbach wrote it and intended it has—until recently—never been performed. Indeed, so far as the Epilogue is concerned, a certain amount of conjecture must enter into any reconstruction, since most of the manuscripts of this section were destroyed. The new Covent Garden production will use a shortened form of the spoken dialogue and a version of the music as close as possible to that which Offenbach intended. The honour of having given the first performance of 'Offenbach's' *Hoffmann* as opposed to Carvalho's or Morris's, must go to the Carl Rosa Opera Company which produced the original version in 1952, under the direction of Arthur Hammond. It says a great deal for the integrity of Mrs Philips that, at a time when her company was entirely dependent on public support, she should have risked producing an unfamiliar version of a popular favourite.

## (ii) A Note by Philip Hope-Wallace

The fate of so many operas which first seized public fancy by reason of their tunes is that presently, though the tunes remain, the original frisson of novelty—and the case of *The Tales of Hoffmann* one is justified in speaking of a frisson—is forgotten. This opéra comique was a smash hit in 1881 in the year following Offenbach's death. But though it remained and remains in the repertory of the Salle Favart even today, its fortunes have been various and in some ways deforming. What one can call highbrow admiration for the work in this country dates, like so much else worth while in the operatic scene, from 'Mr' Beecham's enterprises in days before the first war: Covent Garden 1910, with among others Walter Hyde, Maggie Teyte, Mignon Nevada and Zélie de Lussan.

At the first performance Taskin (beloved baritone and hero of the burning down of the Opéra-Comique) was the baritone lead, Adèle Isaac did all the female incarnations, Olympia, Antonia and Stella (the woman with whom Hoffmann is in love and who is singing Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* while he tells his tales), and Talazac was the hero. Mr Downes has already discussed the original order of the scenes. I last saw it tried in Peter Diamand's production in Amsterdam, and one quickly saw both advantages and disadvantages. The truth is that though all the episodes are telling, that with Antonia is the only one which carries a romantic and emotionally erotic appeal in the way the cinema-goers understand Eros and Romance. The end of the other two is cynical, but tuberculous Antonia, losing her voice and dying, is *la petite cousine* of big, grieving Violetta and coughing Mimi. It is easy to see how the idea of using this episode third came about, especially when all the three roles were sung by the same diva, exhibiting her coloratura in the first, her voluptuous appeal and bold cynicism as the courtesan on the Grand Canal and finally her ingénue pathos. When under the influence of

the multistar gala system it began to be the fashion to get three different divas for the three roles (Hoffmann is always I think constant, and usually, but not always, the bass-baritone evil-genius is too) there must sometimes have been heart searchings about whether the Antonia or the Giulietta was to carry the audience to the finale.

I think, too, that the Antonia episode is undoubtedly the most eerie of the three; the moment when Dr Miracle makes Antonia sing from another room by mesmerism never fails to make my flesh creep and the climax is, if less brilliant than the ironical 'sell' of the Venetian scene, a most agitating finale, quite able to stand up to comparison with the trio *Anges purses, anges radieux* of Gounod's prison finale in *Faust*—to which, of course, it owes something.

The three tales of Hoffmann on which these episodes are built up are *Der Sandmann* for the tale of the automaton, which of course links up with Coppélia, *Rat Krespel* for Antonia's tale, and *Die Geschichte vom verlorenen Spiegelbild* for the mirror business of the Venice scene. There are other references to Hoffmann's works too, including his novel *Kleinzach*, which, of course, emerges as the famous *légende* in the opening prelude in Luther's wine cellar in Nuremberg.

Offenbach, who was born in 1819 in Cologne (not Offenbach-Frankfurt as is sometimes said) was by origin the son of a Hebrew cantor and named Juda Eberscht (or Levy). At what point he fell in love with E. T. A. Hoffmann as a writer I have not been able to discover. Hoffmann (1776-1822) was himself a musician, a composer as well as a poet and a writer of tales of mystery. He led a tormented existence in the best Romantic tradition of despair and distress. His stories were probably well known to Offenbach as a child, though he moved to Paris when only a boy. Their impact on the French imagination, so practical that morbid fantasy always excites it—witness the effect of Edgar Allan Poe in France—is part of the long and curious history too detailed to recall here in which the 'gothic' features of German, English and Scottish folklore were turned to account by the Romantic Movement as it affected the lyric theatre in Paris. From *Der Freischütz* onwards (given as *Robin des Bois* in Paris), the influences multiplied amazingly and came out—now it seems rather charmingly as we look back—in such forms as the Walter Scott operas which swept Europe on a flood of emotion, Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*, Gounod's *Faust* and so on. Hoffmann's spooky stories must have appealed as operatic material somewhat as Kafka does to a modern composer. The difference was perhaps only that Offenbach was a popular composer of the most popular, so that it might be as if Jerome Kern or Rogers decided to set Kafka's *The Trial*. Listened to in the perspective of that strange history of taste then, *The Tales of Hoffmann* may appear as something more than a first-rate opéra comique from the Parisian eighties. Not that it needs more recommendation.

P.H.-W.

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There are two corrections to be made to the September number of OPERA. The Glyndebourne performance of *Cenerentola* at the Berlin Festival are conducted by Joan Pritchard, not Vittorio Gui as stated on page 529. The producer of *The House of the Dead* at the Holland Festival was Heinrich Altmann, not Abraham Van der Vies as stated on page 546. We apologize for any inconvenience that may have been caused to these four artists.



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