

The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Rodney Stringer

Prologue

Maître Luther's tavern.

To distract the poet Hoffmann from mundane blandishments and persuade him to devote himself entirely to his art, the Muse has resolved to stay constantly by his side, assuming the likeness of his trusted friend, Nicklausse. Hoffmann spends his time overwhelmed by gloomy thoughts, devoured by a passion for the singer Stella. Not insensitive to his attentions, Stella has sent him a note inviting him to a nocturnal rendezvous. But her letter has fallen into the hands of the evil councillor Lindorf, who has decided to take the place of the poet and go himself to the appointment. Unaware of the humiliating trick about to be played on him, Hoffmann tells the tale of his unhappy loves.

Act I (Olympia)

The richly appointed laboratory of a physics professor.

The physicist Spalanzani has constructed a mechanical doll, named Olympia. From this amazing invention which he publicly presents as his own daughter, Spalanzani hopes to make a huge fortune. He was helped in the making of Olympia by the diabolical Coppélius, who supplied the doll's eyes. But Spalanzani now wishes to get rid of this man, so he gives him a large sum of money, in the form of a banker's order. Despite warnings from Nicklausse, Hoffmann has fallen in love with Olympia. At a coming-out party given by Spalanzani for his daughter, Hoffmann woos her and declares his love. Coppélius, who has realized in the meantime that he has been swindled, is determined to punish Spalanzani. As soon as Olympia leaves her guests, he destroys her machinery. Only then does Hoffmann bitterly understand that the girl he loves is nothing but a mechanical doll.

Act II (Antonia)

In Munich, at Crespel's house.

Antonia, daughter of the lute-maker Crespel and of a celebrated singer who

recently died, possesses an outstanding voice. However, her health is undermined by a mysterious disease that makes it dangerous for her to sing. Only to her beloved Hoffmann, who knows nothing of her precarious physical condition, can she express her love by singing. But even on this occasion Antonia is soon forced to stop, overcome by pain. Keeping a careful watch on his daughter lest Hoffmann should incite her to sing, Crespel receives a call from Miracle, the satanical doctor already responsible for the death of Antonia's mother. Miracle has no hesitation in asking him to entrust the young woman to his magic cures. But Crespel refuses and chases him off. Hoffmann has heard of the illness that is wearing down Antonia's health, and tells her not to sing any more. The girl, who is convinced that he has taken this decision after conferring with her father, mournfully agrees. Left alone, Antonia encounters Miracle, who promises her a brilliant career as a singer. Conjuring up the ghost of her mother, he induces her to sing until her strength is exhausted. Her father tries in vain to resuscitate Antonia, and she dies in his arms. In desperation, Crespel attacks Hoffmann, whom he holds guilty of his daughter's death. Only the prompt intervention of Nicklausse saves the poet from paternal revenge.

Act III (Giulietta)

In Venice: the gallery of a palace on the Grand Canal.

During a reception, the courtesan Giulietta has enthralled Hoffmann, arousing the jealousy of Schlémil, her previous lover. When the guests have taken their seats at the gaming tables, the mysterious Dapertutto orders Giulietta to seduce the poet, in order to steal his reflection. Exploiting her beauty, the courtesan quickly complies. Hoffmann not only gives her his image but declares his everlasting love to the woman. The meeting is interrupted by the

arrival of Schlémil, followed by Nicklausse and Dapertutto. When he realizes that he has lost his reflection, Hoffmann curses love. However, disregarding Nicklausse's advice, and determined to follow his beloved Giulietta, he mortally wounds Schlémil who has obstructed his departure. But all to no avail, for the courtesan has already disappeared, leaving the poet in the darkest despair.

Epilogue (Stella)

Maître Luther's tavern.

Hoffmann has concluded his unhappy tales, and now he recognizes in Stella all the three women he has loved. But his time for adventures is over by now, and the Muse appears to the poet. She alone can bring him the peace and serenity that he has sought in vain in the world.