

**A BEAUTIFUL MECHANICAL DOLL. AN IRRESISTIBLE COURTESAN.** A visit from beyond the grave—or is it just an illusion? All these, plus an imaginative hero who never gets the girl, show up in the charming, creepy, deeply moving tales of Hoffmann. The Met’s new production of Jacques Offenbach’s masterwork has been inspired by a variety of influences that reflect the opera’s multiple dramatic layers—including Kafka, classic Hollywood cinema, and even Woody Allen.

Like Kafka and Allen, the real-life E.T.A. Hoffmann was a writer—the creator of the *Nutcracker* as well as the stories on which *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* (“The Tales of Hoffmann”) is based. But in the operatic version, Hoffmann doesn’t simply write stories: he lives them. That’s why, beneath the enchantment and the quirky robotics, *Hoffmann* is a psychological drama. Tony Award winner Bartlett Sher (*South Pacific*) returns after the triumph of his Met *Barber of Seville* to direct. He calls Hoffmann a “magical journey in which the title character works out different manifestations of his psyche.”

Each of Hoffmann’s tales is a stop along the way, adding up to a complex narrative structure. “Rather than a linear narrative,” Sher explains, “the opera is made up of poetic representations of the state of the character’s mind.” Four villains, all played by the same performer, are obviously one: Hoffmann’s nemesis. The same may be true, psychologically, of the four women Hoffmann loves, though the Met’s production highlights their individuality, casting three singers in four roles. And then there’s Hoffmann’s muse, who, right at the beginning, announces that she’s going undercover as the writer’s young (male) sidekick.

The Met has assembled a first-rate cast for this new production. Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja sings the title role, opposite star soprano Anna Netrebko, who plays Antonia. Alan Held portrays the four villains, and the Met’s Music Director James Levine conducts.

This guide offers a peek into the “anything can happen” world of *Hoffmann*. It can also help you and your students examine the timeless concerns that power the tales. The full-length Classroom Activity investigates how the writers of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* created a formal innovation—by introducing ironic humor to opera. Shorter activities look closely at Offenbach’s creative decisions in setting E.T.A. Hoffmann’s tales to music. By familiarizing young people with the operatic Hoffmann, his exploits and his obsessions, the guide seeks to heighten their enjoyment of the Met’s *Live in HD* presentation.

## THE WORK

### *LES CONTES D’HOFFMANN*

Composed by Jacques Offenbach  
(1819–1880)

An opera in three acts, with a prologue and epilogue, sung in French

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (based on stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann)

First performed on February 10, 1881 in Paris, France

## NEW PRODUCTION

James Levine, Conductor

Bartlett Sher, Production

Michael Yeargan, Set Designer

Catherine Zuber, Costume Designer

James F. Ingalls, Lighting Designer

Dou Dou Huang, Choreographer

## STARRING

Kathleen Kim (Olympia)

Anna Netrebko (Antonia)

Ekaterina Gubanova (Giulietta)

Kate Lindsey (Nicklausse/The Muse)

Joseph Calleja (Hoffmann)

Alan Held (Four Villains)



Joseph Calleja



Anna Netrebko



Alan Held

Production underwritten by the Hermione Foundation

The guide includes four types of activities:

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:** one full-length activity, designed to support your ongoing curriculum

**MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS:** opportunities to focus on excerpts from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* to cultivate familiarity with the work

**PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:** to be used during the *Live in HD* transmission, calling attention to special aspects of this production

**POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:** a post-transmission activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into students' views of the performing arts and humanities

(Reproducible student resources for the activities are available at the back of this guide.)

The activities in this guide address several aspects of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*:

- Irony as a narrative and textural device
- The inner lives of Offenbach's characters
- The opera as a commentary on the performing arts
- The relationship between art and autobiography
- The new Met production as both a faithful and an innovative interpretation of the opera

The guide is designed to provoke interest in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, whether or not your students have any prior acquaintance with opera. It can help you prompt them to think about opera—and the performing arts in general—as a medium of entertainment and of creative expression.



Michael Yeargan's set design for the prologue is seen here in an early technical rehearsal.

PHOTO: ALISON CHERRY/METROPOLITAN OPERA TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT

**Prologue** Luther's tavern in a German city, early 19th century. The poet Hoffmann is in love with Stella, the star singer of the opera. Lindorf, a rich counselor, also loves her and has intercepted a note she has written to Hoffmann. He is confident to win her for himself ("Dans les rôles d'amoureux languoureux"). Entering with a group of students, Hoffmann sings a ballad about a disfigured dwarf named Kleinzach ("Il était une fois à la cour d'Eisenach"). During the song, his mind wanders to recollections of a beautiful woman. When Hoffmann recognizes Lindorf as his rival, the two men trade insults. Hoffmann's Muse, who has assumed the guise of his friend Nicklausse, interrupts, but the encounter leaves the poet with a sense of impending disaster. He begins to tell the stories of his three past loves...

**Act I** The eccentric inventor Spalanzani has created a mechanical doll named Olympia. Hoffmann, who thinks she is Spalanzani's daughter, has fallen in love with her. Spalanzani's former partner Coppélius sells Hoffmann a pair of magic glasses through which he alone perceives Olympia as human (Trio: "Je me nomme Coppélius"). When Coppélius demands his share in the profits the two inventors expect to make from the doll, Spalanzani gives him a worthless check. Guests arrive and Olympia captivates the crowd with the performance of a dazzling aria ("Les oiseaux dans la charmille"), which is interrupted several times in order for the doll's mechanism to be recharged. Oblivious to this while watching her through his glasses, Hoffmann is enchanted. He declares his love and the two dance. Olympia whirls faster and faster as her mechanism spins out of control, until Hoffmann falls and breaks his glasses. Coppélius, having discovered that the check was worthless, returns in a fury. He grabs Olympia and tears her apart as the guests mock Hoffmann for falling in love with a machine.

**Act II** Antonia sings a plaintive love song filled with memories of her dead mother, a famous singer ("Elle a fui, la tourterelle"). Her father, Crespel, has taken her away in the hopes of ending her affair with Hoffmann and begs her to give up singing: she has inherited her mother's weak heart, and the effort will endanger her life. Hoffmann arrives and Antonia joins him in singing until she nearly faints (Duet: "C'est une chanson d'amour"). Crespel returns, alarmed by the arrival of the charlatan Dr. Miracle, who had treated Crespel's wife the day she died. The doctor claims he can cure Antonia but Crespel accuses him of killing his wife and forces him out. Hoffmann, overhearing their conversation, asks Antonia to give up singing and she reluctantly agrees. The moment he has left Dr. Miracle reappears, urging Antonia to sing. He conjures up the voice of her mother and claims she wants her daughter to relive the glory of her own fame. Antonia can't resist. Her singing, accompanied by Dr. Miracle frantically playing the violin, becomes more and more feverish until she collapses. Dr. Miracle coldly pronounces her dead.



Costume sketches by Catherine Zuber for Antonia (above) and Hoffmann (below)



**Act III** The Venetian courtesan Giulietta joins Nicklausse in a barcarole (“Belle nuit, ô nuit d’amour”). A party is in progress, and Hoffmann mockingly praises the pleasures of the flesh (“Amis, l’amour tendre et rêveur”). When Giulietta introduces him to her current lover, Schlémil, Nicklausse warns the poet against the courtesan’s charms. Hoffmann denies any interest in her. Having overheard them, the sinister Dapertutto produces a large diamond with which he will bribe Giulietta to steal Hoffmann’s reflection for him—just as she already has stolen Schlémil’s shadow (“Scintille, diamant”). As Hoffmann is about to depart, Giulietta seduces him into confessing his love for her (Duet: “O Dieu! de quelle ivresse”). Schlémil returns and accuses Giulietta of having left him for Hoffmann, who realizes with horror that he has lost his reflection (Ensemble: “Hélas! mon cœur s’égaré encore!”). Schlémil challenges Hoffmann to a duel and is killed. Hoffmann takes the key to Giulietta’s boudoir from his dead rival but finds the room empty. Returning, he sees her leaving the palace in the arms of the dwarf Pitichinaccio.

**Epilogue** Having finished his tales, all Hoffmann wants is to forget. Nicklausse declares that each story describes a different aspect of one woman: Stella. Arriving in the tavern after her performance, the singer finds Hoffmann drunk and leaves with Lindorf. Nicklausse resumes her appearance as the Muse and encourages the poet to find consolation in his creative genius.

**A technical rehearsal for Act II**

PHOTO: ALISON CHERRY/METROPOLITAN OPERA  
TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT



## Deconstructing Irony: A Close Look at Irony in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*

Irony is a common rhetorical device. It's found on television and in movies, in newspaper editorials, political speeches, and chatter in the school cafeteria. But it can be hard to define and even harder for students to recognize, in part because it requires attention to several layers of meaning at once, as well as to the forms of expression (for instance, words or music). *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, it has been argued, brings a new level of sophistication to the art form of opera and makes new demands on its audiences. In this activity, students will examine the use of irony in *Hoffmann*, refining their abilities to recognize and define irony in everyday cultural experience. They will:

- Analyze examples of verbal irony
- Consider how the characteristics of irony can be expressed in music
- Listen for evidence of irony in selections from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*
- Explore the use of irony in contemporary culture

### STEPS

Young people often put considerable stock in “getting” a joke, and it is, in fact, an achievement. Appreciation of humor depends on a listener’s prior knowledge and on a considerable amount of information processing. Irony, for instance, involves appreciation of certain characteristics of rhetoric as well as knowledge of explicit and unstated references. Close attention to the use of irony in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* will help students appreciate irony encountered elsewhere in and outside the classroom, while “getting” the jokes in the opera will enhance their appreciation of this *Live in HD* presentation.

**Step 1:** Write the following quote on the chalkboard:

“You have to understand that irony was not a part of the world in the writing of music before Offenbach. Now we’re so drenched in irony. The innovation is the addition of irony.”

The words are Bartlett Sher’s, director of the Met’s new production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. Probe to see whether students understand the point he’s making. What does it mean to add irony to an opera? What does it mean to say we’re “drenched in irony”? What is irony anyway?

Irony is a rhetorical style that’s hard to define, but it generally includes certain overlapping characteristics:

- A difference between a statement’s literal meaning and its underlying meaning
- A relationship between those two meanings: they’re discordant, even opposite
- An assumption that the listener possesses enough unstated information to figure out the implicit underlying meaning

When people use irony, they expect others to understand that they don’t mean what they’re literally saying. It’s a style of speech teenagers recognize, though they

### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, each student will need the reproducible resources found at the back of this guide.

You will also need the audio selections from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, available online or on the accompanying CD.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts and Media Studies

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To acquaint students with the artistic device of irony
- To introduce the possibilities of irony in music and language
- To support an analytic approach to cultural experiences in students’ daily lives
- To spur interest in *The Met: Live in HD* production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*

**FUN FACT:** Jules Barbier and Michel Carré based their version of the tales of Hoffmann on three stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann, all available online in English translation. The Olympia scene is based on “The Sandman” ([tinyurl.com/act1olympia](http://tinyurl.com/act1olympia)); the Antonia scene on “Councillor Krespel” ([tinyurl.com/act2antonio](http://tinyurl.com/act2antonio)). The Giulietta scene is based on a story within a story: the tale of “The Lost Reflection,” which is part of “A New Year’s Eve Adventure.” (It can be downloaded as a pdf at [tinyurl.com/act3giulietta](http://tinyurl.com/act3giulietta).) Hoffmann’s best-known story, “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” forms the basis of Tchaikovsky’s ballet *The Nutcracker*.

may not realize they’re using a classic rhetorical device—for instance, if someone says, “It’s clear as mud,” when they actually mean it doesn’t make sense or is not clear at all. An example of situational irony is a fire station burning down. Can your students think of other examples?

An excellent example of irony appears in Act I of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* (**Track 1**). It isn’t central to the plot. It’s a side conversation between Nicklausse, Hoffmann’s friend, and the “scientist” Spalanzani. They’re about to go to dinner, and Nicklausse has noticed that Olympia, who Spalanzani calls his daughter, is staying behind.

NICKLAUSSE: Elle ne soupe pas?	She’s not having dinner?
SPALANZANI: Non, non, non!	No, no, no!
NICKLAUSSE: Âme poétique! Plaît-il?	A poetic soul! Does that please you?
SPALANZANI: Rien! la physique! ah monsieur! la physique!	Never! Physics, sir! Physics!

To the discerning ear, there are several examples of irony in this short exchange:

(1) Nicklausse asks whether Olympia is having supper, even though he knows full well that “she” is a mechanical doll and that Spalanzani is not about to admit the fact. The irony, meant to go above Spalanzani’s head, assumes that the audience also knows that Olympia is not human and that Nicklausse couldn’t possibly be asking sincerely.

(2) After Spalanzani replies “No,” Nicklausse maintains the pretense that Olympia is human, and swiftly offers three separate ironic wisecracks:

He uses the word “soul” to refer to Olympia’s personality—playing off the spiritual notion that only living beings have souls (not machines like Olympia).

The word “poetic” contains an irony requiring knowledge from outside the frame of the opera. The joke is about poets, not about Olympia. It expects listeners know that poets proverbially live in poverty—so they sometimes don’t have supper.

Nicklausse is being ironic in asking Spalanzani whether it pleases him that Olympia has a “poetic soul.” As the audience knows, earlier in the opera Spalanzani praised Hoffmann for giving up poetry and turning to science (referred to here as “physics”). Nicklausse is teasing Spalanzani; he and the audience know that Spalanzani detests poetry.

(3) Nicklausse is aware of the irony of his remarks, as is the audience. Spalanzani, on the other hand, doesn’t realize it. As he praises physics, the audience hears an additional ironic reference to the “secret” that Olympia is nothing but a doll, a product of physics.





Michael Yeargan's model of the Act II set design  
 PHOTO: ALISON CHERRY/METROPOLITAN OPERA TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT

In all these cases, listeners are meant to take a meaning that's different from the explicit meaning of the words. In other situations, irony derives from words that mean precisely what they say. The ironic effect comes instead from placing their meaning in a larger context.

Offenbach, Barbier, and Carré provide an example early in the prologue. Hoffmann's Muse appears, jealous of his love for the opera singer Stella and surrounded by the "spirits of beer and wine." The Muse believes that Hoffmann's fascination with Stella will make him stop writing. She goes on to sing, "You flasks and barrels, back me up! Your drunkenness will make him forget" (**Track 2**).

In fact, in the epilogue, it's precisely for the reason that he's drunk that Hoffmann loses Stella once and for all and returns to his art. There is a double irony: drinking excessively, generally considered a character flaw, is the cause of Hoffmann's brilliance. At the same time, by losing the love of his life, the thing he wants most, he is able to create works that will live on. The joke is subtle, and it's on Hoffmann.

Once students have a general sense of the meaning of irony, they can try themselves to identify its telltale signs. They may come up with questions like:

- Would anyone really say this?
- Does the character realize what he/she is saying?
- Does one character get it, but not another?
- Does the audience get it, but not the characters?
- Does the audience only get it if they know something in advance?
- Does an action or a situation have an effect opposite to which would normally be expected?

**Step 2:** Step 1 looked at examples of irony in language and in situations. Working in the medium of opera, Offenbach had another means at his disposal: music. At several points in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, juxtaposition of musical styles add layers of ironic meaning. The worksheets titled "Deconstructing Irony" contain a set of questions students can use to identify and describe the ways Offenbach built musical irony into the opera. One worksheet is provided for each of the four examples discussed below. Students can listen to the selections, discuss and analyze them, and complete the worksheets individually, in small groups, or with the entire class.





Example 1 (**Tracks 3 and 4**) comes from the episode of the mechanical doll, Olympia, in which she sings a dazzling aria to the assembled guests. Students will hear the jerkily “mechanical” music Offenbach incorporated into the piece, in particular the section at the end of Track 3, where Olympia’s mechanism literally winds down and then stops, as indicated by a descending scale. Track 4, which follows immediately afterward, begins with the sound of the servant Cochenille winding the doll back up, whereupon she continues her song. The musical joke is straightforward: this beautiful “girl” is revealing herself to be a robot.

SAMPLE ANSWERS:

<b>What’s going on in the scene?</b>	Olympia is singing her song.
<b>Describe the music.</b>	Choppy, mechanical, tricky, then runs out of steam
<b>What’s happening on the surface?</b>	A young girl is performing for a group of guests.
<b>What’s the message beneath the surface?</b>	She’s mechanical.
<b>What’s the point?</b>	Anyone who thinks she’s real (like Hoffmann) is a fool.
<b>What do you need to know to get the point?</b>	You need to recognize the clockwork sound of Offenbach’s music.

Example 2 (**Track 5**) comes from later in the same scene. Cochenille, Spalanzani’s servant, announces supper, and the guests respond with a compliment. The irony is in the overblown, formal music that Offenbach provides for this banal exchange. It’s written in the style of an 18th-century dance Haydn or Mozart might have composed for the court of a nobleman.

This is a musical joke some students might not get. Unless they are familiar with this style of music and what it implies, it’s difficult to grasp the contrast between the sound and the situation. It is characteristic of irony that not everyone will always get the joke.







#### SAMPLE ANSWERS:

<b>What's going on in the scene?</b>	Guests are heading to dinner.
<b>Describe the music.</b>	Grand 18th-century-style formal music
<b>What's happening on the surface?</b>	Guests are praising their host.
<b>What's the message beneath the surface?</b>	This is a grand, impressive ceremony.
<b>What's the point?</b>	These people are pretentious fools.
<b>What do you need to know to get the point?</b>	The sound and history of the minuet

Example 3 (**Track 6**) comes from the Antonia scene, the second act of *Hoffmann*. At that point, it has already been established that Antonia's father has asked her not to sing, afraid that the effort might endanger her life. Here, the servant Frantz finds himself alone near the piano, and he can't resist beginning a song. He starts out complaining about his employer but soon he's talking about his singing itself.

There's a simple kind of humor here: Frantz doesn't sing well. His singing may be funny to listen to, but it's not ironic, since he knows about the fact as well as the audience does. But there is irony in this song that Frantz himself doesn't understand. This humorous song about the act of singing is performed in the context of a story in which singing is a deadly serious matter. In that sense, the joke is on Frantz. He has no idea what matters of life and death are happening around him.

A second level of ironic humor is to be found in the lyrical punch line, "It's the technique." This is an in-joke aimed at opera fans who know that professional singers spend years working on vocal technique. When Frantz attributes his bad singing to his bad technique, Offenbach and his librettists are commenting on the very medium they're working in: live vocal music. They're making fun of opera.

#### SAMPLE ANSWERS:

<b>What's going on in the scene?</b>	Frantz is singing at the piano.
<b>Describe the music.</b>	Mincing, delicate, self-conscious, formal—almost like he's practicing
<b>What's happening on the surface?</b>	A servant is assessing his own musical talent.
<b>What's the message beneath the surface?</b>	Technique doesn't mean much if you have no voice.
<b>What's the point?</b>	Frantz is making an excuse for himself (perhaps one that some would-be professionals make).
<b>What do you need to know to get the point?</b>	The emphasis placed on technique in vocal training

Example 4 (**Track 7**), from later in the Antonia scene, in a sense extends the irony of Frantz's song, but it's much darker. Here, under the influence of Dr. Miracle (a highly ironic name for a magician with evil intentions), Antonia is breaking her promise to her father: she's singing. From a painting on the wall, the voice of Antonia's late mother is heard. Dr. Miracle plays his violin, then joins in the singing as well. The trio rises to fever pitch until Antonia faints. In a moment, she will be dead.

After having made mild fun of opera with Frantz's song, Offenbach takes a different tack here. Whether or not students find Antonia's death funny, it is ironic that, in the middle of an opera, singing kills. The irony is compounded by Antonia's words: they contain a typically corny romantic metaphor about her soul winging its way to the heavens. It proves literally, tragically, true.

#### SAMPLE ANSWERS:

<b>What's going on in the scene?</b>	Dr. Miracle is tricking Antonia into singing.
<b>Describe the music.</b>	A trio with constantly rising tension
<b>What's happening on the surface?</b>	A girl is singing ecstatically as she reclaims her voice.
<b>What's the message beneath the surface?</b>	Father knows best.
<b>What's the point?</b>	Dr. Miracle is a bad person.
<b>What do you need to know to get the point?</b>	Not much more than the set-up of the scene



At the beginning of Act II, Antonia sings a plaintive love song about a turtle dove that has flown away ("Elle a fui, la tourterelle").

Example 5 (**Tracks 8 and 9**): The irony with which Offenbach opens the *Giulietta* act is at once more straightforward and more subtle than some of the other examples. It's straightforward because it directly contrasts, both in music and lyrics, two consecutive songs. It's subtle because the irony involves three characters, everything audiences know about them, and their peculiar assignment to the two different songs.

The first number is one of Offenbach's most famous. It's a barcarolle, a rhythm meant to capture the languid pace of a gondolier as he slowly plies his craft through the canals of Venice. It is a similar version of the sort of song parodied in the Olympia scene, yet the singers are Giulietta, a courtesan, and Nicklausse, whom the audience already knows as someone who is determined to not let Hoffmann fall in love. As they finish the song, along comes Hoffmann, shown in the preceding acts to be a romantic dreamer. Now he sings a song of lust. Its words even include images of some of the things that killed Antonia, including fire, intoxication and the flight of the soul to heaven on wings of song.

It's up to listeners (including your students) to decide where the composer's sympathies lie. Does the juxtaposition reflect an overall, dismissive cynicism in matters of love? The barcarolle sounds lovely and sincere, yet look who's singing. Hoffmann's drinking song seems to undermine the romance, but does he really mean what he says? As the act continues, the tables turn: Hoffmann falls in love with Giulietta, who unromantically dumps him for Pitichinaccio, a dwarf. (Later, in the epilogue, Hoffmann will again depict his rival as a dwarf; see Musical Highlight: Not Such a Little Thing). By creating a form of irony that eludes simple interpretation, Offenbach enriches the message of the tale. (Or does he just muddy it?)

#### SAMPLE ANSWERS:

<b>What's going on in the scene?</b>	Three characters sing two different love songs.
<b>Describe the music.</b>	A dreamy boating song, then a lusty cheer
<b>What's happening on the surface?</b>	Two different views of love are being expressed.
<b>What's the message beneath the surface?</b>	Love is not as simple as it seems.
<b>What's the point?</b>	Are these people all hypocrites? Do any of them really know what he/she thinks?
<b>What do you need to know to get the point?</b>	Most of the information is contained in the songs themselves and in the characters who sing them.



**Step 3:** Listening closely can help audiences understand the meanings implicit in *Hoffmann's* irony. In a broader sense, awareness of irony can affect students' perspectives on the culture we live in.

Now that they're familiar with the concept, students can compile a list of sources of irony they encounter every day. These might include TV shows like *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Late Show with David Letterman*, as well as popular websites like [theonion.com](http://theonion.com) and [politicalirony.com](http://politicalirony.com).

The concept of irony has, of course, been around much longer than Stephen Colbert—or Jacques Offenbach. At [tinyurl.com/swiftproposal](http://tinyurl.com/swiftproposal), your students can find Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, written 280 years ago. Questions similar to those given on the "Deconstructing Irony" worksheets can help them interpret Swift's essay (which endorses cannibalism as a solution to the problem of hunger):

- What's the message on the surface?
- What did Swift really mean?
- What does a reader need to know to understand his point?
- Could anyone misunderstand Swift's argument? How?

**FOLLOW-UP:** One way to follow up is for students to identify examples of irony in magazines, on TV, or online and bring them to class together with analyses of their ironic structure. More ambitious students might enjoy writing a Swiftian essay, either on a topic of current public interest, or on a humorous topic like "Why opera is bad for teenagers."

### The Meaning of a Muse: A Close Look at Creative Choices in Producing *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*

Offenbach died four months before the premiere of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. He left the score unfinished, and many different versions of the opera have been performed over the past 125 years. Sometimes the order of the Antonia and Giulietta acts has been reversed, and occasionally the Giulietta story has been left out entirely. Even the beginning of the opera has varied from production to production. While some begin with Lindorf entering Luther's tavern, others, including the Met's new production, open with the Muse. She expresses her jealousy of the opera singer Stella, with whom Hoffmann is infatuated, and vows to win him back (**Track 10**).

In the epilogue, following the tumultuous events of the opera, Stella enters the tavern, finds Hoffmann drunk, and slips out with his nemesis, Lindorf. Many productions of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* have ended here, with Hoffmann, after recounting his failures with Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta, losing the real woman upon whom all three might have been based.

The Met production incorporates an alternative ending, written and orchestrated by Offenbach (but left out of some published scores). After Stella leaves, Hoffmann's Muse returns. Introduced—perhaps ironically—with the romantic strains of Act III's barcarolle, she sings comfortingly about the struggle of making art (**Track 11**), then the choir is heard with a prayer-like couplet that seems to serve as a moral of the opera: "Love may make one great, but tears make one even greater" (**Track 12**).

Play these tracks, either one at a time or in sequence, and invite your students to discuss their meaning. The Muse tells Hoffmann that his genius will be "warmed by the ashes of his heart." She challenges him to smile at his troubles and promises to "sweeten" his suffering. What can all this mean? Do your students agree that suffering enables people to create art? What about the statement of the choir? Is suffering worth it, if it increases one's ability to be creative?

From another perspective, students may enjoy thinking about the consistency of these sentiments with the rest of the opera—and about the decisions a director has to make when staging it. Are the "morals" supported by Hoffmann's experience? Do they make a difference in the audience's understanding of the opera? Why might some productions choose to leave these sentiments out of Hoffmann's story? With no definitive answers available, such questions illustrate how a director's choices can be as important to an audience's experience of an opera as the libretto or even the composer's score.

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS ARE  
BRIEF OPPORTUNITIES TO:

- Help students understand opera
- Whet their interest in upcoming transmissions of *The Met: Live in HD*

Each focuses on audio selections from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, available online at [www.metopera.org/education](http://www.metopera.org/education) or on the accompanying CD. All five activities use reproducibles found at the back of this guide.

These "mini-lessons" will in practice take up no more than a few minutes of class time. They're designed to help you bring opera into your classroom while minimizing interruption of your ongoing curricular sequence. Feel free to use as many as you like.

### Who's Really Who? A Close Look at Hoffmann's Hoffmann

**FUN FACT:** E.T.A. Hoffmann, born in Germany in 1776, was a writer of fantasy stories, a lawyer, a music critic, and a composer. His name was Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann, but he added the initial "A" for Amadeus in honor of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Unlike the character in Offenbach's opera, he was a successful artist, but his drinking contributed to an early death at age 46.

*Les Contes d'Hoffmann* is packed with multiples. There are multiple villains, usually played by a single performer (see Musical Highlight: Anonymous Four). There are multiple leading ladies—one in each of the three tales-within-a-tale, plus Stella, who appears briefly in the epilogue. Perhaps less obviously, there are two Hoffmanns: there's Offenbach's character, the dreamer, drinker, and storyteller of Luther's tavern, and there's Hoffmann's character—the fictional man who courts Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta.

Offenbach's Hoffmann is a troubled soul (see Musical Highlight: Not Such a Little Thing). The character he creates is romantic, unrealistic, and fickle. As soon as Hoffmann begins telling stories of himself, he makes himself out to be a fool. At the beginning of Act I (following the prologue), he introduces his fictional self. Students may be interested in assessing this character.

In the scene heard in **Track 13**, the "made-up" Hoffmann shows up at the home of Spalanzani, the inventor, and immediately vows to abandon his career as a writer. Spalanzani takes him on as a student. "No more poetry, no more music, and you'll be a professor in the science department," the inventor promises. Does this Hoffmann character really plan to stop writing? Why? The answer comes as soon as Spalanzani disappears (**Track 14**). Hoffmann's Hoffmann is ready to remake himself, to "become a pit full of science," to "turn with the wind"—for one reason: love. "To merit the one I love," he says, "I'll find the makings of a scientist inside myself." He's so smitten that, as heard in **Track 15**, Offenbach gives him the first melodic moment of the act. When Spalanzani steps away, Hoffmann glimpses Olympia and exclaims, "She's asleep! She's so beautiful!"

He's a fool for love. He's not joking. But what about the "real" Hoffmann—the one who's telling the stories, who invented the sardonic Nicklausse, the unachievable Antonia and the heart-crushing Giulietta? He's setting his fictional self up to fall for a mechanical doll. What does *that* say about love? Why would a writer present himself that way? What does Hoffmann's Hoffmann have to tell audiences about the "real" Hoffmann?

Students may be familiar with other fake-self characters, such as the "Jerry Seinfeld" on *Seinfeld* or the "Larry David" on *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. They provide an intriguing example of the many choices writers make every time they sit down to create a story. What advantage might there be in creating fictional versions of themselves, rather than giving characters different names? If your students were making up versions of themselves for a story or a play, how would they depict themselves? Would they be braver, smarter, more heroic—or as silly as Hoffmann's Hoffmann?



### Not Such a Little Thing: A Close Look at the Song of Kleinzach

There are four tales in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*—three involving the loves of Hoffmann and a fourth, the legend of Kleinzach the dwarf. In the prologue, Hoffmann sings about this strange character, the hump on his back, his strange headwear, and the noises he makes when he walks (**Track 16**). It's at once a rousing aria, a pretty good drinking song, and a funny story.

But just when it seems like Hoffmann is getting to the heart of the tale, he changes his tune (**Track 17**) and dreamily sings of a beautiful woman. Only when one of the students in the tavern questions him does he catch himself and return to the tale of Kleinzach (**Track 18**).

The song of Kleinzach seems to be nothing but a random element, irrelevant to the rest of the story. By having Hoffmann interrupt himself, Offenbach informs the audience that he's in love to the point of distraction. But what do your students think Hoffmann means when he sings (beginning of **Track 19**), "Kleinzach, as deformed as he is, is worth more"? More than what—or whom? What tone does the strange song of Kleinzach set as an introduction to Hoffmann's tales?

There may be an answer in the very last scene of the epilogue. After telling his three tales, and immediately after his rival Lindorf has escorted Stella out of the tavern, Hoffmann returns to the saga of Kleinzach (**Track 20**). He sings, "For the heart of Phryné which had to be filled with both love and money, he made a mess of everything, and to lead her away, he spent a lot of money."

Students may enjoy decoding this complicated image. A bit of online research will reveal that Phryné was a famously beautiful courtesan of ancient Greece—a woman whose heart was set on money as well as love. If Kleinzach ruined everything, and if he used his wealth to lead Phryné away, then perhaps Phryné represents Stella, and Kleinzach, Lindorf—the man who's ruined everything for Hoffmann.

So the tale of Kleinzach turns out to be a writer's revenge. Hoffmann may have lost Stella, but he has the last word on Lindorf. He has made up a story about a man who uses his wealth to steal a beautiful woman's heart—as Lindorf has done. But the man in the story is ridiculous and physically deformed. Hoffmann's tale of Kleinzach is actually a sharp commentary about his rival for the love of Stella, the treacherous, victorious Lindorf.



The tavern scene of the prologue,  
1913 Metropolitan Opera production  
PHOTO: WHITE STUDIO

### Anonymous Four: A Close Look at the Four Villains

It was Offenbach's intention that the roles of the Counselor Lindorf, the tricky lens-maker Coppélius, the hypnotic Dr. Miracle, and the diabolic Dapertutto should be played by the same performer. Though their identity is never revealed, the score leaves no doubt that the four are one. The seed for this is planted right as the opera begins. Just before Lindorf enters Luther's tavern, a foreboding downward scale announces his arrival. Then Lindorf introduces himself twice in two sentences—and the theme repeats (**Track 21**).

At the beginning of the first act Spalanzani, musing on his situation, mentions Coppélius, and the orchestra plays the same melody (**Track 22**). A few minutes later, just as with Lindorf, it precedes Coppélius's actual entrance (**Track 23**). Like Lindorf, the magic-lens maker promptly introduces himself—as if to tell the audience that he's no longer literally Hoffmann's rival, but a new character.

In the tale of Antonia, Offenbach slightly varies the villain's entrance. Frantz tells his master the doctor has arrived and Crespel expresses worry: "He will kill my daughter after my wife." Then a downward scale interrupts him—but it's not the villain theme heard earlier. Crespel continues, "I hear the clinking of his bottles," and the scale descends again. "Will someone chase you far from me!" moans Crespel, and Dr. Miracle appears, laughing eerily. He introduces himself, different from Lindorf and Coppélius, with a simple, "Here I am! It's me!" (**Track 24**)

But Offenbach hasn't abandoned the motif associated with his villains. He has simply postponed it. Dr. Miracle lurks around performing strange tricks for several minutes before Antonia finally appears before him—at which point the composer lowers the boom (**Track 25**). Having already been introduced, Dr. Miracle starts right away, nudging Antonia to her doom: "You'll never sing again? Do you know what a sacrifice that imposes on your youth? Have you considered this?" As it turns out, by urging her to sing, he is convincing Antonia to kill herself.

Hoffmann seems to find his nemesis everywhere. In Act III, the fact is even reflected in the man's name: Dapertutto, from the Italian "dappertutto," meaning "everywhere." Unlike Lindorf, Coppélius, and Dr. Miracle, Dapertutto operates behind the scenes. When he first appears on stage he is alone, so there's no need for an introduction, but his arrival is not unheralded: the villain theme is back (**Track 26**). After stating his intention that Hoffman fall in love with Giulietta, he lays out his plan in an aria (see Musical Highlight: No Accident).

Offenbach leaves no doubt that Hoffmann, writer of the three stories within the story of the opera, sees Lindorf, Coppélius, Dr. Miracle, and Dapertutto as one. Interestingly, the last appearance of his nemesis, when Lindorf takes Stella out of Hoffmann's life once and for all in the epilogue, is not accompanied by music at all (**Track 27**). Lindorf doesn't even sing his final words, but briskly speaks—"If you'll permit me, madame"—and whisks Stella away. Hoffmann, left alone, can only go



Léon Rothier as Dr. Miracle and  
Lucrezia Bori as Antonia, 1913

PHOTO: WHITE STUDIO



Costume sketches by  
Catherine Zuber for two  
of the villains



back to storytelling and finishes the tale of Kleinzach (see Musical Highlight: Not Such a Little Thing).

With this evidence in hand, students may enjoy probing a larger mystery: Offenbach has undoubtedly connected his “Four Villains”—but why? The answer is in the mind of each listener. Students can consider what the villains have in common and how they differ. Why would Hoffmann choose to depict his real-life nemesis, Lindorf, as a trickster like Coppélius? A devilish seducer like Miracle? A magician who uses women to steal men’s shadows and reflections, like Dapertutto? What do these different aspects suggest about how Hoffmann might describe Lindorf himself? By presenting four villains in one, Offenbach and his librettists provide ample room to debate the meaning of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*.

### No Accident: A Close Look at “Scintille, diamant”

One of the joys of opera is comparing multiple interpretations of a piece or aria by different artists. The composer himself often provides specific instructions on how to perform his music—not only which notes to sing and how long to hold each note, but the dynamics (e.g., loud or quiet), the tempo (e.g., slowly or rushing along), and sometimes even when the singer should stop to breathe.

*Les Contes d'Hoffmann* provides a fine, easy-to-follow example in Act III's “Scintille, diamant” (**Track 28**). Hoffmann and Nicklausse have arrived in Venice. They've just met the courtesan Giulietta. But unknown to them, she is under the spell of a sinister magician, Dapertutto. In this enchanting aria, Dapertutto discusses the mechanics of his magic—in particular, a diamond ring he uses to steal people's shadows, reflections, perhaps even their souls.

Structurally, “Scintille, diamant” is in the A-B-A form. Students will hear one section of music, a second section, then a reprise of the first section, as discussed below. This simple structure makes it easy to listen for differences in the “A” section when it's repeated at the end.

On the reproducible, students will find the words of “Scintille, diamant” interspersed with notations from the score, either italicized or bold. Notations in brackets are intended for the orchestra. All other notations are instructions for the singer. The notations are in Italian; their meanings are discussed below.

At the very beginning of the piece, Offenbach lays down the ground rules for tempo and dynamics. The aria begins *Andante poco mosso*—at the pace of a lively walk. The letter *p* appears over the singer's first note in the score. This stands for *piano*, or soft. That's the default mode for this piece, and with that in mind, students can follow along as the composer's instructions are translated into sound.



Costume designs for the Met's 1913 production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*

The central image of “Scintille, diamant” is that of the diamond in the ring. Dapertutto personifies the stone, commanding it both to sparkle and to attract. In particular, he sings, the diamond has the ability to attract both larks and women.

When the character first mentions the diamond’s prey, Offenbach instructs his orchestra to play more quietly than before: *pp* (pianissimo). This works to double effect. It creates the sense of Dapertutto’s expressing a hidden thought. By contrast, his voice becomes a stronger element of the overall sound.

But what is the hidden thought? Not only are the lark and the woman attracted by the diamond, but they’re also endangered. The lark can be killed, the woman can lose her soul. To convey how exciting this thought is to Dapertutto, Offenbach tells the performer to sing *poco animato*—with an extra little bit of energy. The orchestra, meanwhile, is to begin a crescendo, their playing becoming louder, but *poco a poco*, little by little, the sound growing slowly, *ed appassionato*, and with an impassioned sound. It’s almost as if the orchestra were expressing feelings boiling up inside Dapertutto, feelings he might not want to reveal.

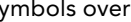

As he begins to repeat the thought that the little bird can be killed and the woman lose her soul, the singer is told to perform *allargando*. This indicates a full sound and a slightly slower, broadening tempo. Then, a moment into the thought, Offenbach directs him straight out: *ff*. The letter *f* stands for *forte*, or strong—in musical terms, loud. Two *fs* tell the singer to sing very loud—just at the point where he’s mentioning the lark’s life.

So far, most of the notations have directed the dynamics of the piece. But two measures later, as Dapertutto starts to sing of the woman losing her soul, Offenbach includes a tempo notation: *lento* (very slow). Dapertutto, perhaps savoring his thought, shifts from a lively walking pace to a slow, more ominous tempo. Then Offenbach writes a large comma, which tells the singer to take a breath. This is not just for the benefit of the performer. The composer knows that the tiny break in the music at this critical point will have a subtle effect on listeners as Dapertutto reiterates how powerful the diamond—and by extension he himself—can be.

Dapertutto has revealed himself. Now, as he returns to the opening section of the aria, he must regain control. Offenbach uses another tempo notation to tell the singer how: *a tempo*. This means, “go back to the pace at which you started”—no longer very slow, but back to that lively walking tempo. The composer also provides a dynamic notation—*pp*. Where the first time through *pp* was a direction for the orchestra, the orchestra is now to play *ppp*, more softly still. Offenbach creates dramatic contrast by adjusting the musical dynamics.



As he repeats “attire-la”—Dapertutto’s command to the diamond—the singer gets a new direction: *rallentando*. This tells him to start gradually slowing down without a change in volume. Offenbach is about to be very specific in terms of



volume. When the singer reaches another “attire-la,” seconds later, he finds two symbols over the four notes that make up the word “attire”: , then . The first stands for a *crescendo*: as he begins the word, he’s to sing louder and louder. The second stands for a *diminuendo*: as he finishes the very same word, he’s to sing softer and softer. The result places strong emphasis on one word, one thought—that of the diamond’s power. Dapertutto is relishing the power he’s about to unleash.

The remaining notations in the score are addressed to the orchestra. They direct it to slow down (*rallentando*), by contrast strengthening Dapertutto’s last word; to get a bit louder (going from *pp* to *p*), as he finishes, then to fade swiftly away, from *p* to *pp* and at last to *ppp*.

In this aria, Offenbach manipulates the sound, pacing, and dynamics to help the singer communicate not only the meaning of Dapertutto’s words, but the subtle and swift changes in his feelings. Consciously or not, audiences register these shifts. They feel the character’s emotional mettle.

TEMPO MARKINGS	poco animato	a little more animated/energetic
	poco a poco	little by little
	allargando	getting slower and broader, without losing fullness in tone
	lento	slow
	a tempo	resume original speed
	rallentando	slowing down gradually
DYNAMIC MARKINGS	ff	fortissimo; very loud
	f	forte; loud
	p	piano; soft, quiet
	pp	pianissimo; very soft
	ppp	pianississimo; softest possible
		crescendo; gradually getting louder
		decrecendo or diminuendo; getting gradually softer



### Supporting Students during the *Live in HD* Transmission

Thanks to print and audio recording, much about opera can be enjoyed long before a performance. But performance itself remains an incomparable embarrassment of riches—sound and images, pageantry and technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance Activities are designed to help students look at different aspects of the experience, consider creative choices that have been made, and sharpen their own critical faculties.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible activity sheet. You should go over the sheets with students before the transmission, so they'll know what to look for during the opera. Students should bring the activity sheets to the transmission for filling out during intermission or after the final curtain, based on what they've seen and heard.

The basic activity sheet is called My Highs & Lows. It includes a ratings matrix with which students can express their critiques, a time-tested prompt for careful thinking. It is intended not only to help students articulate and express their opinions, but to support comparison and contrast, enriching understanding of the art form as a whole.

For *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, the other activity sheet (All in His Head?) directs students' attention toward the unusual visual conception of the Met's new production.

The Performance Activities can be found on pages 35–37. Either activity can provide the basis for class discussion after the transmission. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the transmission.

### Who's It About, Really? A Close Look at Art and Autobiography

#### IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at *The Met: Live in HD* transmission of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*.

#### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To discuss and reflect on students' experience watching the Live in HD presentation of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*
- To probe the concept of a relationship between artists and their creations as depicted in this opera
- To consider the broader issue of a relationship between art and autobiography in world literature

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? This discussion will offer students an opportunity to review the notes on their My Highs & Lows sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual conception of this Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* experts.

A prominent characteristic of this opera and, in particular, the Met's production, is the relationship between Hoffmann—the writer in the prologue and epilogue—and the various versions of himself we encounter in each of his three tales. The facts of this relationship have been discussed in the Musical Highlight: Who's Really Who?. But with *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Offenbach and his librettists provided an early example of a theme that would be central to literature in the 20th and 21st centuries: the relationship of fiction to autobiography.

The real E.T.A. Hoffmann didn't include himself as a character in the stories adapted for the opera. That idea was introduced by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré in the stage play on which Offenbach based his opera. In it, Hoffmann pretty much admits he's writing about himself when he says that all three women in his tales are versions of Stella. Which raises the question: were Offenbach, Barbier, and Carré correct? Was the real E.T.A. Hoffmann secretly—or unconsciously—writing about himself? Are every author's stories really about him or herself?

Students may be interested to learn that this is a major topic of controversy in literary circles. They may enjoy learning about writers who have been charged with “just” telling their own life stories. Some, like James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, have been as straightforward as Offenbach's Hoffmann about the connection. Others, like novelist Philip Roth, have fought it tooth and nail. Roth's Zuckerman trilogy (*The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, and *The Anatomy Lesson*) is all about the artist's insistence that he is not his characters. On the other hand, some recently published books described by their authors as autobiographical, like James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, have been revealed as largely fictional. If *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* had premiered in this century, might the heirs of the real E.T.A. Hoffmann have objected to the opera's autobiographical implications?

What do your students think?

- Is it possible to make things up entirely, or is all fiction based on genuine experience?
- Why wouldn't a writer simply tell true stories, rather than create such elaborate tales?
- How much do you have to change a life experience before it's considered fiction?
- Was it fair to the real E.T.A. Hoffmann for Offenbach and his librettists to put their Hoffmann into his stories?

As a class exercise, students may enjoy analyzing the three central episodes of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* from the perspective of Hoffmann's actual experience.

- What are the central characteristics of each woman, and what might they say about Hoffmann's view of Stella? For example, think about their behavior, their emotions, their temperament, and their relationships with others.
- What are the central characteristics of each embodiment of Lindorf, or "the villain," and what do they tell about Hoffmann's view of his nemesis?
- How does each of these six characters (the three women and the three fictional antagonists) treat the Hoffmann in their story? Is Hoffmann being honest about himself? Is he hiding anything?
- Do the tales that the opera's Hoffmann tells seem to reflect his own experiences? Are they really "autobiographical"?

For follow-up, students can imagine that they are Hoffmann. They have just received a letter from a publishing house, turning down the stories, objecting to the fact that Hoffmann uses himself as the main character. In the role of Hoffmann, they can write back to the publishing house, asking the editors to reconsider while explaining their (Hoffmann's) creative choices and the true relationship between Hoffmann's life and his stories.



**FUN FACT:** *Les Contes*

*d'Hoffmann* has not only been recorded as a stage production, but was also turned into a major motion picture. In 1951, the British filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger wrote, directed, and produced a full-scale production, in English, taking full advantage of the special effects available to cinematographers. Now available on DVD, it is like a feature-length Technicolor music video.

Here you'll find reproducibles of the texts and worksheets for each *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* activity. Feel free to make hard copies of these and distribute them to your students.

My Highs & Lows and All in His Head? are activity sheets to be used during the *Live in HD* transmission. The latter is designed to focus student attention during the transmission and to support your post-screening classroom work.

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Deconstructing Irony

## Olympia

### TRACKS 3 AND 4

OLYMPIA: Tout ce qui chante résonne  
Et soupire tour à tour,  
Emeut son cœur qui frissonne  
D'amour, ah!! ah! frissonne d'amour!

Voilà la chanson gentille,  
la chanson d'Olympia.

Everything that sings, sometimes loudly,  
Sometimes sighing,  
Expresses a heart that trembles  
With love, ah! ah! trembles with love.

That's the lovely song,  
the song of Olympia.

What's going on in the scene?	
Describe the music.	
What's happening on the surface?	
What's the message beneath the surface?	
What's the point?	
What do you need to know to get the point?	

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Deconstructing Irony

## Spalanzani's Guests

### TRACK 5

COCHENILLE: Le souper vous attend!

CHŒUR: Le souper nous attend, nous attend!

Non, aucun hôte vraiment, non, mais vraiment

Ne reçoit plus richement.

Supper awaits you!

Supper awaits us!

No host, really, no, but really,

No one entertains more richly.

What's going on in the scene?	
Describe the music.	
What's happening on the surface?	
What's the message beneath the surface?	
What's the point?	
What do you need to know to get the point?	



ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Deconstructing Irony

Franz

TRACK 6

FRANZ: Jour et nuit je me mets en quatre,  
au moindre signe je me tais,  
c'est tout comme si je chantais,  
encore non, si je chantais,  
de ses mépris il lui faudrait rabattre.  
Je chante seul quelque fois;  
mais chanter n'est pas commode!  
Tra la la! la la!  
Ce n'est pourtant pas la voix, la la la,  
qui me fait défaut, je crois.  
La la, la la!...  
Non! c'est la méthode!

Day and night, I'm work like a dog.  
I shut my mouth at the slightest sign.  
It's as if I were singing—but no,  
If I were singing,  
He'd have to cut back his contempt.  
I sometimes sing alone,  
but it's not easy to sing.  
Tra la la!  
It's not my voice, however,  
that's my problem, I believe.  
La, la, la!  
It's my technique.

What's going on in the scene?	
Describe the music.	
What's happening on the surface?	
What's the message beneath the surface?	
What's the point?	
What do you need to know to get the point?	

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Deconstructing Irony

Antonia

TRACK 7

**ANTONIA:** Je cède au transport qui m'enivre!  
Quelle flamme éblouit mes yeux? Ah!  
Un seul moment encore vivre,  
et que mon âme vole aux cieux!

**LE FANTÔME:** Ma voix t'appelle, comme autrefois.  
Chante toujours, ma fille! chante.

**MIRACLE:** Chante, chante, chante, encore! Sa voix t'appelle.

I give in, I'm carried away by an intoxicating feeling!  
What is this flame that dazzles my eyes?  
A single moment more to live,  
then my soul may fly to Heaven!  
My voice is calling you, as of old.  
Sing always, my daughter! Sing!  
Sing, sing, sing, again! Her voice is calling you!

What's going on in the scene?	
Describe the music.	
What's happening on the surface?	
What's the message beneath the surface?	
What's the point?	
What do you need to know to get the point?	

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY  
Deconstructing Irony

## Giulietta

### TRACK 8

NICKLAUSSE: Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour,  
Souris à nos ivresses,  
Nuit plus douce que le jour,  
Ô belle nuit d'amour!

GIULIETTA AND NICKLAUSSE: Le temps fuit et sans retour  
emporte nos tendresses!  
Loin de cet heureux séjour,  
Le temps fuit sans retour.  
Zéphyrs embrasés, versez-nous vos caresses;  
Zéphyrs embrasés, donnez-nous vos baisers, ah!  
Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour,  
Souris à nos ivresses,  
Nuit plus douce que le jour,  
Ô belle nuit d'amour!

Beautiful night, oh night of love,  
Smile down on our intoxication,  
Night sweeter than day,  
Oh beautiful night of love!

Time flies and without returning  
Carries away our moments of tenderness!  
Far from this happy moment,  
Time flies without returning.  
Breezes that can inflame, pour your caresses upon us;  
Breezes that can inflame, give us your kisses, ah!  
Beautiful night, oh night of love,  
Smile down on our intoxication,  
Night sweeter than day,  
Oh beautiful night of love!

### TRACK 9

HOFFMANN: Que d'un brûlant désir  
votre cœur s'enflamme!  
Aux fièvres du plaisir consommez votre âme!  
Transports d'amour, durez un jour!  
Ah! Au diable celui qui pleure,  
pour deux beaux yeux;  
à nous l'ivresse meilleure  
des chants joyeux!  
Vivons une heure dans les cieux! Ah!

May a burning desire  
inflame your heart!  
Let your soul burn up in the fevers of pleasure!  
Love that carries us away, last for a day!  
Ah! to the devil with anyone who cries  
for two beautiful eyes.  
We prefer the intoxication  
of joyous song.  
Let's live an hour in Heaven! Ah!

What's going on in the scene?	
Describe the music.	
What's happening on the surface?	
What's the message beneath the surface?	
What's the point?	
What do you need to know to get the point?	

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

The Meaning of a Muse

**TRACK 10**

**THE MUSE:** La vérité, dit-on,  
Sortait d'un puits;  
La Muse, si vous le permettez,  
Sortira d'un tonneau.  
C'est là qu'il passe ses nuits,  
Mon grand ami Hoffmann  
Qui est poète et musicien  
Et qui ne boit pas d'eau.  
Vous savez que je l'ai  
Toujours bien protégé  
Comme le fait toute bonne fée.  
Quelle Muse!  
Une folle qui déserte les cieux  
Pour disputer aux yeux  
D'une beauté frivole l'amour d'un fou.  
Disparais, ô sirène,  
Fantôme, fantôme de ses nuits!  
En vain, en vain tu le poursuis  
Parce que je briserais ta chaîne  
Qu'il porte au cou.

Truth, they say,  
Comes out of a well;  
The Muse, if you'll permit me,  
Will come out of a barrel.  
It's there that he spends his nights,  
My great friend Hoffmann,  
Who is a poet and a musician  
And never drinks water.  
You know that I have  
Always protected him well,  
like a good fairy.  
What a Muse!  
A crazy woman who leaves the heavens behind  
to compete against the eyes  
of a frivolous beauty for the love of a crazy man.  
Disappear, o siren,  
Phantom of his nights.  
You pursue him in vain,  
Because I will break your chain,  
Which he wears around his neck.

**TRACK 11**

**THE MUSE:** Des cendres de ton cœur  
Réchauffe ton génie,  
Dans la sérénité souris à tes douleurs,  
La Muse adoucira ta souffrance bénie.

The ashes of your heart will  
Reheat your genius,  
Smile at your troubles in serenity,  
The Muse will sweeten your blessed suffering.

**TRACK 12**

**CHŒUR:** On est grand par l'amour  
Et plus grand par les pleurs!

**CHORUS:** Love makes one great  
And tears make one greater.

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Who's Really Who?

**TRACK 13**

**SPALANZANI:** Ah! bonjour... enchanté!...

**HOFFMANN:** Je viens trop tôt, peut-être?

**SPALANZANI:** Comment donc, un élève...

**HOFFMANN:** Indigne de son maître.

**SPALANZANI:** Trop modeste, en vérité!

Plus de vers, plus de musique,

Et vous serez en physique

Professeur de faculté.

Vous connaîtrez ma fille,

Un sourire angélique,

La physique est tout, mon cher!

Olympia vaut très cher!...

**HOFFMANN:** Quel rapport la physique a-t-elle avec sa fille?

**SPALANZANI:** Holà! hé!... Cochenille! Fais allumer partout...

**COCHENILLE:** Et... le champagne?

**SPALANZANI:** Attends! Suis-moi.

Pardon, mon cher, je reviens dans l'instant.

Ah, good day, nice to meet you!

Perhaps I've come too soon?

What? Oh, you're a student!

Unworthy of his teacher.

Too modest, truthfully!

No more poetry, no more music,

And you'll be a professor in the  
science department.

You must meet my daughter,  
the smile of an angel!

Science is everything, my dear!

Olympia is most valuable!

What does science have to do with his daughter?

Ho! Hey! Cochenille—let's get some light around here.

And... champagne?

Wait! Follow me!

Excuse me, my dear, I'll be back in an instant.

**TRACK 14**

**HOFFMANN:** Allons! Courage et confiance.

Je deviens un puits de science.

Il faut tourner selon le vent.

Pour mériter celle que j'aime,

Je saurai trouver en moi-même

L'étoffe d'un savant...

Elle est là... Si j'osais!

All right—courage and confidence.

I'll become a pit full of science.

You have to turn with the wind.

To be worthy of the one I love,

I'll find the makings of

A scientist inside myself.

She's over there... if I dare!

**TRACK 15**

C'est elle! Elle sommeille!... Qu'elle est belle!

It's her! She's asleep! She's beautiful!

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Not Such a Little Thing

**TRACK 16**

HOFFMANN: Il était une fois à la cour d'Eisenach...

ÉTUDIANTS: A la cour d'Eisenach!

HOFFMANN: Un petit avorton qui se nommait Kleinzach!

ÉTUDIANTS: Qui se nommait Kleinzach!

HOFFMANN: Il était coiffé d'un colbac,

et ses jambes faisaient clic clac!

Clic clac! Clic clac!

Voilà, voilà Kleinzach.

HOFFMANN: Il avait une bosse en guise d'estomac!

Ses pieds ramifiés semblaient sortir d'un sac!

Son nez était noir de tabac,

Et sa tête faisait cric crac!

Once upon a time at the court of Eisenach...

At the court of Eisenach!

There was a little dwarf who was called Kleinzach!

Who was called Kleinzach!

He wore a tall, fur military hat

and his legs went "click clack."

Click, clack, click, clack

That, that was Kleinzach.

He had a hump for a stomach.

His huge feet seemed to come out of a bag.

His nose was black from tobacco,

And his head went "crick crack."

**TRACK 17**

HOFFMANN: Quant aux traits de sa figure...

ÉTUDIANTS: Quant aux traits de sa figure...

HOFFMANN: Quant aux traits de sa figure...

Ah! sa figure était charmante!

Je la vois, belle comme le jour

Où, courant après elle,

Je quittai comme un four

La maison paternelle

Et m'enfuis à travers les valons et les bois!

Ses cheveux en torsades sombres

Sur son col élégant jetaient leurs chaudes ombres.

Ses yeux, enveloppés d'azur,

Promenaient autour d'elle un regard frais et pur

Et comme notre char emportait sans secousse

Nos cœurs et nos amours,

Sa voix vibrante et douce aux cieux qui l'écoutaient

Jetait ce chant vainqueur dont l'éternel écho

Résonne dans mon cœur!

As for the features of his face...

As for the features of his face...

As for the features of his face...

Ah! her face was charming!

I see it, beautiful as the day,

When, running after it,

I left my father's home as if

It were a hot oven and took off

Through the valleys and forests.

Hair falling in long dark curls

Upon an elegant neck cast warm shadows.

Her blue-rimmed eyes

Cast a cool, pure spell,

And as our carriage, a smooth ride,

Carried our hearts and our loves away,

That voice, vibrant and sweet,

Sang to listening heavens the conquering song

Whose eternal echo resounds in my heart!



### TRACK 18

NATHANAËL: O bizarre cervelle! Qui diable peints tu là!  
Kleinzach?

HOFFMANN: Kleinzach? Je parle d'elle!

NATHANAËL: Qui?

HOFFMANN: Non! personne! rien! mon esprit se troublait!  
Mon esprit se troublait! rien!

What a bizarre thought! What kind of devil are you describing?  
Kleinzach?

Kleinzach? I'm speaking of her!

Who?

No! No one! Nothing! I'm a bit flustered!  
I'm a bit flustered! It's nothing!

### TRACK 19

HOFFMANN: Et Kleinzach vaut mieux, tout difforme qu'il est!  
Quand il avait trop bu de genièvre ou de rack,  
Il fallait voir flotter les deux pans de son frac,  
Comme des herbes dans un lac,  
Et le monstre, le monstre faisait flic flac!  
Flic flac! Flic flac!  
Voilà, voilà Kleinzach!

And Kleinzach, deformed though he is, is worth more.  
When he'd drunk too much gin or arak,  
You had to see his coattails flapping  
Like weeds in a lake  
And the monster went "flick flack!"  
Flick flack, flick flack,  
That, that was Kleinzach!

### TRACK 20

Pour le cœur de Phryné  
que doublait un bissac  
d'amour et de ducats,  
il faissait un micmac  
Et pour en être le cornac,  
de sa bourse il faissait fric-frac!  
Voilà, voilà Kleinzach!

For the heart of Phryné  
Which had to be filled  
With both love and money,  
He made a mess of everything;  
And to lead her away,  
He spent a lot of money!  
That, that was Kleinzach!

THE MET: LIVE IN HD  
LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN

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RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT  
Anonymous Four

**TRACK 21**

LINDORF: Le conseiller Lindorf, morbleu!  
Tu ne connais pas le conseiller Lindorf?

Counselor Lindorf for heaven's sake!  
You don't recognize Counselor Lindorf?

**TRACK 22**

COPPÉLIUS: C'est-moi, Coppélius...  
doucement! prenons garde!

It's me, Coppélius...  
Quietly...stay alert!

**TRACK 24**

CRESPÉL: Qui me tuerait ma fille après ma femme.  
J'entends le cliquetis de ses flacons dans l'air.  
Loin de moi qu'on te chasse.

MIRACLE: Ha! ha! ha! ha!

CRESPÉL: Enfer!

MIRACLE: Eh bien! me voilà! c'est moi-même.  
Ce bon monsieur Crespel, je l'aime!

He'll kill my daughter after my wife.  
I hear the clinking of his bottles.  
Will someone chase you far from me!

Ha! ha! ha! ha!

Hell!

Well, here I am! It's me!  
I love this good Mr. Crespel!

**TRACK 25**

MIRACLE: Tu ne chanteras plus?

Sais-tu quel sacrifice s'impose ta jeunesse,  
Et l'as-tu mesuré?

You'll never sing again?

Do you know what a sacrifice that imposes on your youth?  
Have you considered this?

**TRACK 26**

DAPERTUTTO: Allez!... pour te livrer combat  
Les yeux de Giulietta sont une arme certaine.  
Il a fallu que Schlémil succombât...  
Foi de diable et de capitaine!  
Tu feras comme lui.  
Je veux que Giulietta t'ensorcelle,  
T'ensorcelle aujourd'hui.

Go on—Giulietta's eyes are an army certain  
to deliver you in combat.  
Schlémil had to succumb...  
I vow as a devil and a captain,  
you'll do the same.  
I want Giulietta to bewitch you,  
to bewitch you today.

**TRACK 27**

LINDORF: Vous permettez, Madame.

HOFFMANN: Pour le cœur de Phryné  
que doublait un bissac...

With your permission, Madame.

For the heart of Phryné  
which had to be filled...

THE MET: LIVE IN HD  
 LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT  
 No Accident

TRACK 28

DAPERTUTTO: *Andante poco mosso p*

Scintille, diamant, miroir où se prend

*[pp]*

l'alouette, scintille, diamant, fascine, attire-la!  
 L'alouette ou la femme à cet appât vainqueur  
 vont de l'aile ou du cœur.

*poco animato*

L'une y

*[crescendo poco a poco ed appassionato]*

laisse la vie et l'autre y perd son âme.

*allargando*

L'une y laisse

*ff*

la vie et

*Lento* ,

l'autre y perd son

*a Tempo*

âme.

Ah!

*pp [ppp]*

Scintille, diamant, miroir où se prend l'alouette,  
 scintille, diamant, attire-la,

*rallentando*

attire-la, attire-la!

Beau diamant,

⚡ ⚡

atti re-la!

Beau diamant, scintille,

*[rallentando]*

attire-

*[p] [pp] [ppp]*

la!

Sparkle, diamond, mirror that captures the

lark. Shine, diamond, fascinate, attract her!  
 The lark or the woman fall for this conquering bait,  
 whether flying or following the heart.

One

loses its life, the other her soul.

One loses

its life,

the other her

soul.

Ah!

Sparkle, diamond, mirror that captures the lark.  
 Shine, diamond, fascinate,

attract her, attract her!

Beautiful diamond...

attract her!

Beautiful diamond, sparkle,

attract

her!

Notations in brackets are intended for the orchestra; all other notations are instructions for the singer.

## *Performance Activity: All in His Head?*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Hoffmann, the central character of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, is both a writer and a serious drinker. Traditionally, the set design for this opera stresses the latter, beginning and ending in Luther's Tavern. But the design of the new Metropolitan Opera production stresses the former—Hoffmann's creative identity. See if you can identify aspects of the set that tell the audience we're watching a creative artist at work: What does the set look like? What props are used? How do the characters move on stage? Also notice the costumes and lighting.

### IN THE PROLOGUE:

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### IN ACT I (OLYMPIA):

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### IN ACT II (ANTONIA):

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### IN ACT III (GIULIETTA):

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### IN THE EPILOGUE:

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# *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*: My Highs & Lows

DECEMBER 19, 2009

CONDUCTED BY JAMES LEVINE

REVIEWED BY \_\_\_\_\_

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
KATHLEEN KIM AS OLYMPIA	*****	
ANNA NETREBKO AS ANTONIA	*****	
EKATERINA GUBANOVA AS GIULIETTA	*****	
KATE LINDSEY AS NICKLAUSSE/THE MUSE	*****	
JOSEPH CALLEJA AS HOFFMANN	*****	
ALAN HELD AS THE FOUR VILLAINS	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
OPENING: THE SPIRITS OF BEER AND WINE—AND THE MUSE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
LINDORF BUYS THE LETTER FROM ANDRÈS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
HOFFMANN ENTERS THE TAVERN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE BALLAD OF KLEINZACH MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE STORY OF OLYMPIA BEGINS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
NICKLAUSSE MAKES FUN OF OLYMPIA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
COPPÉLIUS TRIES TO SELL HIS EYES MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE SONG OF OLYMPIA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
OLYMPIA'S DANCE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE STORY OF ANTONIA BEGINS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
HOFFMANN AND ANTONIA SING MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
MIRACLE AND THE INVISIBLE ANTONIA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
MIRACLE TRICKS ANTONIA INTO SINGING MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE STORY OF GIULIETTA BEGINS; THE BARCAROLLE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
DAPERTUTTO LAYS OUT HIS PLAN WITH GIULIETTA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

HOFFMANN FALLS FOR GIULIETTA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
HOFFMANN DISCOVERS HE HAS NO REFLECTION MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
HOFFMANN FIGHTS SCHLÉMIL MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
GIULIETTA SLIPS AWAY MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
STELLA COMES TO THE TAVERN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
HOFFMANN MEETS HIS MUSE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5