

Hoffman shows touring stress

Tales of Hoffman
Canadian Opera Company
Arden Theatre - St. Albert
Friday, November 18

review by Tom Wharton

The Canadian Opera Company presented Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman* at the Arden Theatre in St. Albert Friday and Saturday night. The cast for this production, on tour in Western Canada, is composed of members of the COC Ensemble, the company's resident "farm team" of apprentice singers and recent graduates. In other words, there were no seasoned pros on hand and, at times, this lack of experience showed. Still, translated into English, this light opera is fairly painless for the non opera-fan.

Hoffman (Dennis Giesbrecht) is in love with the opera singer Stella (Kathleen Brett). His rival, the evil councillor Lindorf (Christopher Coyea) is determined that Hoffman shall not win Stella's love. While the rivals wait in a tavern for Stella to return from a performance, Hoffman entertains the other patrons with three stories of his past love affairs.

These stories form the main part of the operetta; each shows how Hoffman's passion for a woman ended tragically. He tells of his love for the mechanical doll Olympia, the doomed singer Antonia and the heartless courtesan Giuletta. These women represent aspects of Hoffman's present love, Stella, and are therefore all played by Brett. In the same way, the villain in each story is an avatar of the satanic Lindorf, and all are played by Coyea.

Through a misunderstanding caused by Lindorf, Stella rejects Hoffman in the end. His Muse (Tania Parrish), who has helped him all along in the guise of his friend Nicklausse, finally reveals herself and con-

soles him with the knowledge that she is his one true love.

The orchestral accompaniment was provided by the Victoria Symphony, conducted by Maestro Derek Bate. The interplay between voices and instruments flawlessly sustained both comic and dramatic excitement, especially in the crowd-pleasing "song of the dwarf Kleinzach."

The operetta form is unlike a full-scale opera, however, in that the arias and duets are interspersed with a lot of spoken dialogue. It is here that the production faltered. Several of the performers were unable to project their voices above the sound of the orchestra. As well, some cast members gave no more than perfunctory utterance to their spoken lines, evoking at times the rushed inadequacy of a bad school play. A poorly-staged swordfight fell completely flat. Lack of care was also shown by the noisy removal of props from the darkened stage, robbing Hoffman's last soliloquy of any tragic dignity.

Some outstanding performances helped gloss over these faults. The audience perked up noticeably when Peter Blanchet appeared as the inventor Spalanzani and then as the senile butler Frantz. He is the kind of actor whose stage presence and comic exuberance can save a faltering scene. Giesbrecht and Brett can also be commended for their sustained effort during the evening.

One can sympathize with the problems faced by cast and crew, having to set up on a different stage almost every night. Director Hans Nieuwenhuis cannot be faulted for the fact that Offenbach died before completing the staging directions. Perhaps he wisely advised the cast to save their energy for the singing alone, hoping this would carry the evening. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to leave one fully satisfied.

Music trivia: Grant and Lloyd and the rest of the band

by G. Winton and L. Robertson

Why is it impossible for a band keep the same personnel for more than two weeks at a time? Black Sabbath has gone through more lead vocalists than Lloyd has pairs of underwear. And none of the existing members of Pink Floyd have been with the band continually from the start. And then you get the upstarts who go solo, fail, and come crawling back to the group (such as Jermaine Jackson, blech!) Let us not forget studio projects such as Alan Parsons and Steely Dan which hire a different band for each record, and sometimes for each song. Add to this big-headed producers who listen to a group, send them out for coffee, and record the album with session men.

Does it sound like we're raving? Well, we are. This is all very complicated and makes it hard for any poor trivia buff to keep up. But, we've kept up, and now we're going to test your knowledge on band members and various musicians. A hint: Andrew Ridgely is not a musician in our opinion, and is not the answer to any question.

Everyone knows a lot about the Beatles, it seems (and for that We Loves You, Yeah Yeah Yeah). But **Sandy Muldrew** knows more than most.

Unusually, Sandy is our clear winner, with no draws or coin tosses needed. This wonderful trivia expert can pick up his prize, a gift certificate from SU Records, which for the moment is still a great record store, from our hapless editor, Mike Spindloe, at *The Gateway* office. (You can't miss Mike, he's the funny looking one with the moustache.)

Last Week's answers:

1. Gandhi was taken off the *Sgt. Peppers* cover.
2. Cynthia tried to be like Brigitte Bardot.
3. Pete Best — drums, Stu Sutcliffe — bass, plus George, Paul and John.
4. George Martin wrote the *Yellow Submarine* music.
5. Steve Martin played Dr. Maxwell.
6. "Twist and Shout" reached number 23 after the movies *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and *Back to School*.
7. George Harrison's "Something" reached number one. ("Twist and Shout" only reached number two.)
8. Paul met John, and Grant and Lloyd weren't even born.
9. Rose and Valerie (we also accepted Roseanne Vallory, and Frozen Valerie

as correct). The judge did not agree.

10. "Love me do" (and we do!).
TB. Elvis dominated the charts in 1956 with "Don't Be Cruel", "Hound Dog", and "Love Me Tender".

This Week's questions:

1. The newest all-star supergroup to come on the scene is called the Traveling Wilburys. Name the celebrity members of this band. (You know, we never realized what a bad singer Bob Dylan is until we heard this band.)
 2. When the Rolling Stones and the Who needed new members, they looked to this band. Name the band, the members in question, and also the now famous lead vocalist.
 3. Speaking of the Stones, name every member, past and present (if indeed there is a present) of the bad boys of rock and roll.
 4. Required Canadian Content Question: (CRTC Ruling 1054.78.(ii).b) Name the keyboard player of Honeymoon Suite, and the band he previously played for.
 5. Chris DeBurgh's studio drummer and keyboardist are also members of another band, led by a guitarist who is also a member of another band. Name the three people in question, and the band to which they all belong.
 6. On some of Bob Seger's older albums, before he sold out and went commercial, he used two bands, one on each side. Name the two bands.
 7. This bald-headed bassist, probably the top bass sessioneer around, was formerly a member of King Crimson, and has since done work for Peter Gabriel, Gowan, James Taylor, and many others. Name him.
 8. This guitarist reached the top on Phil Collins' coattails. He plays on all Phil's albums and joins Genesis on stage. Name him.
 9. Name every member of the "World's most dangerous band," and a record on which each has worked (a different record for each member).
 10. Name all the members of Dire Straits who were with the group from the start to finish.
- Tie-Breaker:** Draw a family tree for Fleetwood Mac. Enter each member's name, the instrument they played, and who they replaced/who replaced them. Pick your own style — we are most interested in the names.

Bring your entries to *The Gateway* office and put them in the big yellow envelope marked "Music Trivia Entries," before 9 am, Tuesday, November 19th.

Composers' choice: Peaks and valleys

Alberta College Faculty Strings
with Linda Perillo, soprano
McDougall United Church
Saturday, November 19

review by Darren Salyn

The Composers' Choice Concert Saturday night at McDougall United Church consisted of an unusual but welcome combination of Baroque and 20th century compositions. The concert was organized and performed by the Alberta College Faculty Strings, a high calibre group, and featured a guest appearance by soprano Linda Perillo.

The first set of pieces were selections from Bach's "The Musical Offering" for string trio; this was followed by an excellent performance of Schoenberg's "Transfigured Night". The original version for sextet was well executed by the Faculty Strings, clearly defining the bright and dark emotions of the poem on which Schoenberg based this piece.

Linda Perillo then performed three of Handel's arias for soprano, strings and continuo. Perillo's presentation of the three arias was energetic and bright, making for delightful listening. Linda's small frame packed a lot of vocal vitality and spite with no hint of any affectation in her production. Her voice has a natural clarity and flexibility that is most suitable for Baroque music. Perillo's pure enjoyment of singing was very evident in her performance, which made listening to her equally enjoyable.

The concert ended with Malcolm Forsyth's "Rhapsody for 14 Strings". It began as an intensely exciting piece, but at times the ensemble appeared lost and thus it became an anti-climactic ending to the concert rather than the climax it should have been.

Overall, the evening was one of peaks and valleys; the peaks occurring in the Schoenberg and the performance of Perillo, and the valleys occurring in the string piece. Considering the calibre of the players, it could have been all peaks.

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