

TALES OF HOFFMAN

By Jacques Offenbach

Virginia Opera

Sept.28 (8:00PM) Sept.30 (2:30PM) Oct.3 and 5(8:00PM) Oct.7 (2:30PM)

For tickets: 757-623-1223 (Southside) 757-877-2550 (Peninsula)

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The elements of horror, the demonic and the grotesque become haunting images not unlike expressionistic paintings in this lavish production. . Thanks to the wizardry of Director Lillian Groag's brilliant stage pictures, given perfect definition by the intense colors and starkness of Mark McCullough's lighting and Erhard Rom's somewhat nightmarish scenery, there is an all prevailing mood of the supernatural and decadence. Martha Hally's demi-monde costumes seem to be from a scrapbook of the twenties as recalled in Bertolt Brecht's Berlin.

This is Offenbach's only serious opera. It has traces of operetta in it, but is mainly a lilting composition brimming with an endless stream of beautiful music and comedy of a bizarre nature. There are many notes of profound sadness that come in and out of the action like the ghostly gondolas in the third act.

In a tavern, powerful tenor Dan Snyder as Hoffman, a drunken poet torn between looking for love and the prodding of his muse, sings of his greatest affairs and their empty endings. His strong, viral arias come from a body ravaged with neurosis and disenchantment. He has been manipulated by a supernatural villain. His face is an etching of an abandoned, world weary libertine in the striking portrait of Hoffman Mr. Snyder presents to us..

The lovely to look at and to listen to as well, Manon Strauss Evrard, performs all four of the women who ultimately spurn his advances. They include a wind-up doll Olympia, Antonia with a self destructive life and a Venetian courtesan Giuletta who vanishes in a gondola after trying to capture Hoffman's soul. Strauss Evrard brings v distinction to each of them with a soprano voice that easily rises above the entire company and orchestra when necessary. While only in her twenties, it's a voice in the process of maturation, but well on its way to becoming an instrument of most exceptional quality.

Burak Bilgili, a charismatic, highly versatile performer, dominates the stage when he is on, in any one of the four villainous roles he undertakes with, complete control and a delightfully scary demeanor. As Hoffman's muse, and in other roles, Sonia Gariaeff, is a standout presence as well and wears her coats of many colors with an air of confidence. Dean Anthony presents very amusing antics in his quartet of zanies.

There is a fine chorus of bohemian young folks in this stellar company. Included in the group are dancers very well choreographed by Jessica Page. With a

couple of exceptions they don't look like "dancers" but like real people being a bit naughty. Her work seems exactly right for Groag's concept.

The director says she feels this is a coming of age story. Hoffman gives up his undisciplined world of excess and assumes responsibility for his life and especially for his art. I quite agree.

Maestro Peter Mark guides the over forty piece orchestra with the lush, rich colors that define Tales of Hoffman. This is an opera that goes from bad, destructive choices to respectable *gemutlichkeit* in a manner that is as intriguing as a ride in one of those ghostly gondolas. It should be seen.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.