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## E. T. A. Hoffmann, 1776-1822

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Unser Reich ist nicht von dieser  
Welt, sagen die Musiker....

(*Johann Kreislers Lehrbrief*)

Ernst Theodor Amadeus (né Wilhelm) Hoffmann, writer, critic, composer, conductor, theatre manager, artist, designer, lawyer and civil servant, was born 200 years ago this month.

In literature Hoffmann is already dated, not to say outdated. In music his name lives on. He himself might have found this apotheosis both apt and gratifying: music for him symbolized the hereafter and afforded our clearest intimation of immortality.

He began his career as a novelist and storyteller by emulating Jean Paul Richter in the romantic and sentimental exaltation of mankind. But even in his wildest flights, Hoffmann's vision was in one sense the more down-to-earth. His pantheon had niches for fiends and monsters as well as saints and heroes. On the cathedral of modern literature and thought it was Hoffmann who placed the gargoyle. Nevertheless, his style was always highflown, and that may have contributed to his downfall. On these empyrean heights where words aspire to the condition of music they are all too liable to decline into a state of gibberish. And Hoffmann's linguistic coinage, which rang so true and bright in its own day, has now become sadly devalued – mainly because of his incorrigible tendency to inflation.

This has for main aspects in the literary mode, and each has its own special affinity with music and musicians. The first is sheer vivid imagination. Hoffmann writes as if perpetually intoxicated by some djinn that has just escaped from the bottle of his mind. His phrases tittup and hiccup across the page in a blurred vision that flits obscurely past the reader, leering or moping. The Doppelgänger is a typical symptom of Hoffmannic depression, with ominous echoes in Heine and Poe. Schubert and Schumann. But it had a brighter side. The imaginative moment engendered a whole new literature for children. All these contrasting dark and bright facets were especially notable in the Russian tradition, from Pushkin onwards, with musical equivalents in Tchaikovsky (*Nutcracker*).

The second and related mode is that of heightened awareness. All sense impressions are transposed sharply upwards, as if by drink or drugs. Colours, sounds and scents melt and glow together in an orgy of synaesthesia. That too had its lighter side; it is still amusing to recall the "coat in C sharp minor with the E major coloured collar" that was Johannes Kreisler's everyday habit of mind. This fashion too had world-wide success and successors, from America (Poe) to England (Wilde) by way of France (Gautier, Rimbaud, and especially Baudelaire, whose own theory of sensory correspondence was avowedly related to the Paris production of *Tannhäuser*. It is only a step from the Venusberg to Bliss (*A Colour Symphony*) and Schoenberg (*Die glückliche Hand*, where colour has a notated part to play).

Thirdly, there are the social implications of Hoffmann's exaggerated and rhetorical approach to life and art. The idea of a mystery pervading society leads naturally to the concept of a secret society, so that brotherhood and every kind of union take on a mystic or even revolutionary significance. Any in-group tends to create its own outsiders and enemies from among its own kind; hence Hoffmann's declared war against the Philistines – the bourgeoisie raging at its own unacceptable face. These themes can be traced through Heine to his acquaintance Karl Marx, while some freer (and more liberal) variations appear in the lives and works of both Schubert and Schumann.

Lastly we reach the ultimate realms of spiritual beliefs and values. In the (still prevalent) Hoffmann heresy, the composer is elevated to the quasi-divine status of creator. Hoffmann worshipped Bach many years before Mendelssohn's alleged rediscovery; Gluck and above all Beethoven were similarly exalted in his writings. He changed his third name to Amadeus partly in homage to Mozart, but partly also perhaps to assuage his own artistic craving to be loved by the gods, the Ganymede complex. There was to be a mystic communion of gods and demi-gods: Johannes Kreisler the Kapellmeister was no mere mortal musician but the symbolic piper of a new rosy dawn. With hindsight the result looks rather less rosy; but these ideas were immensely influential in their day. Carlyle (who translated Hoffmann) was much impressed with the notion of heroes and hero-worship; so were Nietzsche and Wagner. Such cults did not begin with Hoffmann, but he was among their most active and prolific disseminators, and it was he who first hailed their musical incarnation in Beethoven and his works.

Each of these four sides of Hoffmann represents a different way of linking verbal rhetoric with music. There are sound bases for such an affinity. First, his literary style was essentially transcendent; and music (especially in the Germany of Wackenroder and Schopenhauer) was above all the symbol of transcendence. Secondly, he was himself a composer and a Kapellmeister. In both roles his circumstances – and arguably his talents – were modest, not to say poor. But at least he could speak of music with inside knowledge, so that his verbal equivalents are not just empty words but, when properly construed, full of sonority and significance. His writings on music (like Schumann's) were technical and analytic because he was a practitioner and also descriptive and evocative because he was a writer. Conversely, he was also well equipped to offer musical equivalents for verbal ideals; and his operas *Aurora* and *Undine* have been said to presage the Wagnerian leitmotif.

Thus Hoffmann was the leaven in a still continuing process of intellectual fermentation. Before him, the normal mode of music was human and natural. He transposed it to the superhuman and the supernatural, with the inflationary claim that the musician's kingdom is not of this world. Then where now; whatever next?

#### HOFFMANN IN MUSIC

There are many studies of Hoffmann as a writer on, and of, music, and as an influence on world literature (see e.g. the exemplary bibliography in *E.T.A. Hoffmann in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* by Gabrielle Wittkop-Menardeau, 1966); but there is no systematic correlation between the ideas of Hoffmann and the music of others. The following list offers a starting-point; corrections and additions would be welcomed.

The Hoffmann dates are those of first publication in book form; the music is dated either by composition or first performance.

**1814.** *Fantasiestücke*; likely source of title (?programme) for Schumann's op. 12 (1837; cfr. also his opp. 16, 17, 73, 88, 111, 131); [Mahler, *First Sinfonia* (1883-88), III mov., *Marche Funebre in Callot's manner*, ndt] Malipiero's opera *I Capricci di Callot* (1942)

**1815.** *Kreisleriana*; title (?programme) of Schumann's op. 16 (1838; subtitled *Fantasien*)

**1815.** *Die Gesellschaft im Keller*; a source for Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881)

**1815.** *Der Goldene Topf*; Braunfels's unfinished opera (c1905); Petersen's opera (1941); Kosa's opera *Anselmus diak* (1945)

**1815-16.** *Die Elixiere des Teufels*: Rodwell's opera *The Devil's Elixir* (1829)

**1817.** *Das Majorat*: Weigl's opera *Die eiserne Pforte* (1823)

**1817.** *Nachtstücke*; title (?programme) of Schumann's op. 23 (1839)

**1817.** *Der Sandmann*; Adam's opera *La Poupée de Nuremberg* (1852); Delibes's ballet *Coppella ou la Fille aus yeux d'email* (1870); a source for Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881); Audran's operetta *La Poupée* (1896)

**1819.** *Meister Martin, der Kufner, und seine Gesellen*: Bizet's opera project *Le tonnelier von Nuremberg* (1859); a source for Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1862); Weissheimer's opera *Meister Martin und seine Gesellen* (1879); Blockx's *Maitre Martin* (1892); Lacombe's *Meister Martin und seine Gesellen*

**1819.** *Der Kampf der Sänger*: a source for Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (1843)

**1819.** *Doge und Dogaresa*: Schumann's opera project (1840)

**1819.** *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober*: title of Busoni's op. 12 n. 2 for piano (1878); a source for Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881); Hausegger's opera *Zinnober* (1898)

**1819** *Rath Krespel*: a source for Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (1881); Cadaux's unfinished opera *Le violon de Crémone* (?date)

**1819.** *Nussknacker und Mausenkönig*: title of Reinecke's piano duet op. 46 (1870); Ciaikovski's ballet *The Nutcracker* (1891)

**1819.** *Die Automaten*; a possible source for Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881)

**1819.** *Die Bergwerke zu Falun*; Schumann opera project (1831); source of Wagner (unused) libretto for Dessauer (1842); possible source for *Tannhäuser* (see Gutman, *Wagner*, chap. 5); Holstein's opera *Heideschacht* (1868)

**1820.** *Die Brautwahl*; Busoni's opera (1912)

**1820.** *Das Fräulein von Scudery*; Offenbach's pastiche *Der Goldschmied von Toledo* (1919); Hindemith's *Cardillac* (1926, rev. 1952)

**1820.** *Signor Formica*; Rastrelli's opera (1832); Schütt's opera (1892)

**1821.** *Die Königsbraut*: Offenbach's operetta *Le roi Carotte* (1872)

**1821.** *Prinzessin Brambilla*: Braunfels's opera (1909, rev. 1931)

**1822.** *Meister Floh*; a possible source for Wagner's *Siegfried*, Act I (see Gutman, *Wagner*, chap. 7)

See also Rangström's string quartet *Un notturno nella maniera di E.T.A. Hoffmann* (1909); Sekles's orchestral work *Kleine Suite dem Andenken E.T.A. Hoffmann's* (1910); Laccetti's biographical opera *Hoffmann* (1912)