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**21 August 2023**

## **Opera UCT to stage Offenbach's evergreen 'Tales of Hoffmann'**

French composer Jacques Offenbach's most well-known opera, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, or *The Tales of Hoffmann*, comes to the stage in Cape Town in a new production by Opera UCT.

The production, directed by Steven Stead, will feature a cast of young singers from Opera UCT at the University of Cape Town, conducted by their director, Jeremy Silver. *The Tales of Hoffmann* will be staged at the Pam Golding Theatre at the Baxter Theatre from 8 to 10 September 2023.

Offenbach's opera was first performed in 1881, a year after the composer's death, and has become part of the standard repertoire of opera houses across the world. Last performed in Cape Town in 2012, the opera contains the popular Barcarolle duet, "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour", as well as the coloratura soprano aria "Les oiseaux dans la charmille".

*The Tales of Hoffmann*, with a libretto based on three stories by German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), is about a poet, Hoffmann, who relates the story of three women he loved: a mechanical doll, a young singer, and a courtesan.

"This opera provides an opportunity to showcase the talents of a wide variety of singers, musicians and theatrical artists, while offering a captivating and emotionally charged opera experience for audiences," said Silver, who has conducted many operas in South Africa over two decades.

He added: "Each act has a different female lead character, which demands a range of singing styles, including coloratura, lyric, and dramatic soprano roles. Furthermore, the title character, Hoffmann, also requires a versatile tenor with both lyrical and dramatic abilities."

Silver said the opera serves as an excellent vehicle to highlight the talents of Opera UCT's many accomplished singers.

Stead, well-known in Cape Town as a stage director of musicals and opera, described his concept for this production as fantastical.

“This is a theatrical as well as a musical spectacle for the audience. From the ethereal beauty of Olympia (the mechanical doll) to the eerie ambiance of the Venetian courtesan Giulietta’s palace, *The Tales of Hoffmann* offers a visual feast that enhances the dramatic impact of the story,” said Stead.

For him, the character of Hoffmann is a poet who through telling his bizarre stories of lost love, interrogates his own psychological interior landscape, exploring his sense of loss and longing, and the nature of love.

“Hoffmann makes one wonders whether love is simply lust or a spiritual connection. Is it real? Is it even possible? He filters his life experiences through his art, distilling them, distorting them, until his art ultimately becomes more significant than the messy reality of his life,” Stead explained.

In this production, Hoffmann is presented as a contemporary Fellini-esque filmmaker. After a rowdy party in which Hoffmann is persuaded to tell the story of his three failed love affairs, each of the three fantastical tales take place on a different film set.

The opera will be sung in French with surtitles in English and isiXhosa. There are alternating casts for this production, with the title role of Hoffmann shared by tenors Luvo Maranti and Makudu Senaoana. Silver will conduct the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, with Marvin Kernelle as assistant conductor and chorus master.

- *The Tales of Hoffmann* will be performed in the Pam Golding Theatre at the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, on Friday 8 September at 19:00, Saturday 9 September at 19:00, and Sunday 10 September at 15:00. Tickets are available from [Webtickets](#) for R150–R380 (full price), R100–R300 (pensioners 60-plus), and R100 (students and scholars).

## **EDITOR’S NOTES**

### **Biographies**

Jeremy Silver, director of Opera UCT, studied languages and music at Clare College, Cambridge and conducting at the Royal College of Music. He furthered his operatic studies at the National Opera Studio in London where, 15 years later, he formed part of the artistic leadership team. He has worked extensively in South Africa with all the major symphony orchestras in the country and has conducted productions of Puccini’s *La Bohème* and Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* for Cape Town Opera and Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Gauteng Opera. As principal conductor of Opera Africa (2004–2007), he conducted

productions of Bellini's I Capuleti e i Montecchi, and Verdi's La Traviata and Rigoletto at the State Theatre, Pretoria, as well the South African opera Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu by Mzilikazi Khumalo at Het Muziektheater in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Born in KwaZulu-Natal, Steven Stead graduated from the former Natal University (Durban) with a BA Honours degree in drama. His stage career in South Africa and the UK has been extensive, involving work as a performer and director in more than eighty productions, ranging from classical drama and opera to musical theatre and cabaret. He spent eight years living in London, where he specialised in opera direction, joining the staff of the English National Opera (ENO) in 1998. He has directed several operas and musicals in Cape Town and is currently executive director of KickstArt Theatre Company in Durban.

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***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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