

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



Laurier presents authentic Hoffmann drama and music

Three German performances with English subtitles to include original Nutcracker

For Immediate Release

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WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University is offering local audiences a rare opportunity to experience the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, the German writer and composer best known for creating *The Nutcracker*. E.T.A. Hoffmann Fest will present the artist’s music and storytelling as he originally intended.

Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffmann was a German writer, composer, caricaturist and painter who lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He is known for his stories of the fantastic and the supernatural, which are imbued with psychological depth. Laurier students studying German and music will perform authentic excerpts from three of his works.

“Hoffmann is one of the few German writers of his era who was widely known and read throughout Europe,” said Alexandra Zimmermann, a professor of German at Laurier who is mounting the production. “We will be presenting authentic renditions of the *Duettini Italiani*, *The Nutcracker* and the *King of Mice*, and Hoffmann’s *Tales*.”

The scores of the *Duettini Italiani*, originally published in 1812, are not available in print. Zimmermann made copies from a microfilm in the Bavarian State Library in Munich and Laurier is performing excerpts with the library’s permission.

Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* ballet was based on a Hoffmann tale called *The Nutcracker* and the *King of Mice*. Natalie Sebastian, who has worked with the festival theatres of Stratford, Charlottetown and Drayton, is helping choreograph a shorter and more authentic version.

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The performance will also feature narrations and dramatizations of other Hoffmann tales. These will be presented with translations from his diaries, which serve to shed light on Hoffmann's love interests. One of these involves Julia Mark, a teenage student of his, for whom he developed a passion. Mark is believed to have been an inspiration for Marie in Hoffmann's *Nutcracker* and for Clara in the better-known ballet.

The three works will be performed in the original German and will include PowerPoint projections of summaries and subtitles in English. While the audience will experience the authentic Hoffmann, the students on stage will benefit from the experience of engaging in German beyond the usual classroom approach.

“The drama pedagogy is a great method for learning languages,” said Zimmermann. “Students get to depict a character and learn about a different culture as that culture existed in a different epoch. It's very challenging and rewarding for them.”

Student performers are tenor Jean-Pierre Ouellet; sopranos Sarah Iles, Beth Bayley, Larissa Mason and Angela Burns; and Amy Lim accompanying on the piano. All costumes are designed by Helen Basson.

E.T.A. Hoffmann Fest involves three performances in the theatre auditorium in Laurier's John Aird Centre. They will begin at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. on Friday, November 25, and at 8 p.m. on Saturday, November 26.

Saturday's performance will be followed by a reception in the foyer of the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall. An exhibition, on loan by the E.T.A. Hoffmann Society in Bamberg, Germany, will be on display.

The event is sponsored by the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Toronto and by Laurier's Special Initiative Fund. Tickets are \$8; \$3 for students and seniors.