

'Tales of Hoffmann' at IU in '48

Opera, from page A1

of interesting an audience made up largely of students — an audience which, incidentally, should have been much larger ..."

That they succeeded was clear from the glowing review given the performance by Corbin Patrick, music critic of *The Indianapolis Star*. The idea of such an ambitious undertaking had lured him down to Bloomington to see for himself what the school could produce.

Patrick was not disappointed. In a column called, "Between the Acts," he began, "Inspired, no doubt, by their recent association with members of the Metropolitan Opera Company who visited their campus, the musical forces of Indiana University gave a surprisingly effective performance of Offenbach's rather dated romantic fantasy, 'Tales of Hoffmann,' in the auditorium at Bloomington Saturday night."

Somewhat grudgingly, Patrick admitted, "It was better in all ways than any reasonable person had a right to expect of college students. The production

was so good, in fact, that it didn't deserve to die after one time on the stage. It should live to be repeated in Indianapolis and other cities as an eye-opener for alumni and others who are not yet aware of the splendid things being done by the IU School of Music these days."

Patrick was particularly impressed with a deliberate choice that had been made regarding the orchestra. Wrote the music reviewer, "Mr. Hoffmann wisely had the orchestra play in the pit, below the stage level, so that voices of the singers had every chance to be heard. It detracted nothing from the effectiveness of the excellent orchestral performance. The idea is warmly recommended to the management of the Met, which frequently permits its singers to be overwhelmed by the power of their instrumental accompaniment."

Perhaps part of the charm of that particular "Tales of Hoffmann" production came from still another decision. And that was to sing it in English so the vast majority of the audience could understand what they were hearing and enjoy the plot to the fullest.

Commented the *Indiana Daily Student*, "A foreign opera has been produced in English at Indiana University and produced successfully. Furthermore, it lost none of its dramatic content and gained something extremely important: the complete understanding of the audience." According to the *Student*, in addition to conducting, Ernst Hoffmann has also been responsible for translating the opera for the IU production.

Bloomingtonians who watched the performance of "Tales of Hoffmann" on that Saturday evening in May 1948 had no idea they were watching the beginning of a tradition that would in time enrich their lives. They had only to reach out and make it a part of their lives, whenever the orchestra was tuning up for another IU School of Music opera production.

Perhaps the ambitious music students who congratulated each other after the performance were also unaware that they had just made a name for themselves in the history of the university. But for them, it was a small taste of the tradition of "Curtain going up!"