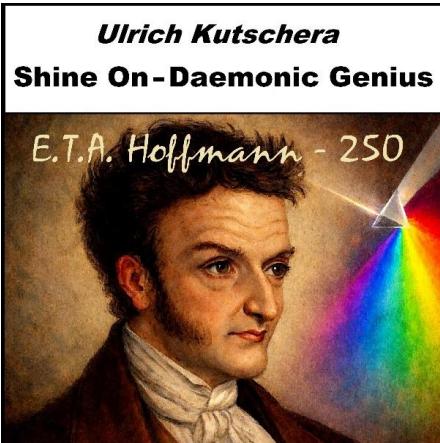


Shine on, you daemonic genius: Celebrating 250 years of E.T.A. Hoffmann

Ulrich Kutschera

On January 24, 1776, a universal genius was born in Königsberg whose influence would ripple through the centuries. Today marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Ernst Theodor Amadeus (E.T.A.) Hoffmann. A prolific writer of over 50 short stories, a composer of 85 musical works, a caricaturist, and a defiant jurist, Hoffmann remains the quintessential figure of "daemonic" Romanticism.



A Childhood Shaped by Father Absence

Hoffmann's life was defined early on by instability. Born to a chaotic father and a mentally fragile mother, he was raised in a conservative household by a widowed grandmother and an unmarried uncle, who gave him a solid musical education (piano lessons etc.). Hoffmann later described his childhood as a "wasteland," specifically his mother's inability to care for him.

Despite this emotional void, he followed family tradition into jurisprudence, but his soul belonged to the arts. In a lifelong tribute to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, he changed his name from E.T. Wilhelm to E.T. Amadeus. For years, he led a double life: publishing his chilling "Doppelgänger" horror stories under pseudonyms while reserving his real name for his musical scores.

The Rise and Fall of Undine

Hoffmann's later career was a nomadic struggle against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars. From Warsaw to Dresden, he navigated hunger, unemployment, and even injury on the battlefield. His creative peak arrived in 1816 with the premiere of his magic opera, *Undine*, at Berlin's Schauspielhaus. For a brief, shining year, he was recognized as a premier composer, with his melodies sung in the streets of Berlin.

However, the "horror" that often filled his books eventually bled into reality. In 1817, the theatre housing his masterpiece burned down, and *Undine* was quickly forgotten. By his 46th birthday, the genius was struck by progressive body paralysis. In a gruesome final medical attempt to save him, doctors used glowing irons to burn holes into his back. Ever the satirist, the dying, paralyzed Hoffmann joked with friends about the "aroma of roasting" before passing away in July 1822.

From 1776 to Pink Floyd: A Legacy Ignited

The connection between Hoffmann's "daemonic genius" and modern culture is perhaps best symbolized by Pink Floyd. Exactly 150 years after the peak of Hoffmann's musical fame, the band began their career in London. The cover of their 1975 album *Wish You Were Here*—featuring a "Man on Fire" shaking hands with his own Alter Ego—strikingly mirrors Hoffmann's obsession with the Doppelgänger and his own literal torture by fire.

To honor this 250th milestone, Ulrich Kutschera has released the single "[Shine On – Daemonic Genius](#)." This release features the world-premiere recording of Hoffmann's 1799 piece, *The Mask-Melody*, alongside a dedicated [Spotify playlist](#) of his neglected works. Two and a half centuries later, we finally look past the jurist to see the "Hoff-man" as he truly was: a tormented but brilliant visionary.

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