



MANITOBA OPERA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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COMPANY PREMIERE OF *SUSANNAH* OPENS 2019/20 SEASON

NOVEMBER 23, 26, 29

A Story of Survival and Standing Up for Your Truth

The moving story of a young woman's stand for truth against the hypocrisy of her secluded community and the preacher who has designs on more than just her soul, opens Manitoba Opera's 2019/20 season. The company premiere of *Susannah*, by the esteemed American composer Carlisle Floyd, will be presented at the Centennial Concert Hall **Saturday, November 23 (7:30 pm), Tuesday, November 26, (7 pm), and Friday, November 29 (7:30 pm). *Susannah* will be sung in English with English projections.**

For tickets call 204-944-8824, go online at mbopera.ca, or in person at the MO Box Office, lower level, Centennial Concert Hall (9:30 am – 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday). Seniors, students, and youth discounts are available.

Susannah is the most-performed American opera after *Porgy and Bess*. This "powerfully emotional piece is among the finest achievements in American opera." (*Nashville Music Scene* 2015).

Floyd, the son of the southern Methodist Minister, reset the Apocryphal Bible story of *Susanna and the Elders* to rural Tennessee during a revival meeting. Floyd's music for *Susannah* is rooted in Appalachian folk melodies, Protestant hymns, and traditional classical music with hints of Copeland and Bernstein. The opera features memorable songs and folksy arias like "Ain't It a Pretty Night" and "The Trees on the Mountains."

"With themes of intolerance, religious hypocrisy, social harassment, and alienation, this gripping drama with unforgettable music continues to be so very poignant over sixty years after its debut," commented Larry Desrochers, Manitoba Opera General Director & CEO. "Floyd's opera is thoroughly American and is a very relatable work."

THE ARTISTS

The principal artists for this company premiere include Winnipegger **Lara Ciekiewicz** who returns to the MO stage to sing the role of Susannah Polk. Ciekiewicz gave a very touching performance as the Countess in the 2015 production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. **Michael Robert Hendrick**, who so memorably sang the role of Lennie in Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* in 2016, makes a return as Susannah's older brother and guardian, Sam. Fellow American **Kristopher Irmiter** also makes a return to sing the role of the itinerant evangelist preacher Reverend Blitch. He last performed with the company in *Fidelio* as Don Pizarro in 2014. **James McLennan**, who makes Winnipeg his home as well, sings the role of Little Bat McLean. McLennan last performed with Manitoba Opera as Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, 2017.

2. MB Opera presents *Susannah*, November 23, 26, 29, 2019

The production is directed by award-winning director, dramaturge, and choreographer **Kelly Robinson**. **Tyrone Paterson**, Manitoba Opera's Music Advisor and Principal Conductor, will conduct. The production also features the **Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra** and the **Manitoba Opera Chorus**.

Sets are provided by Virginia Opera with costumes from Opéra de Montréal and Harlequin. Lighting design is by **Bill Williams**.

THE STORY

Susannah Polk, a wide-eyed, pretty 19-year-old girl, lives simply, but happily with her older brother Sam who raised her in a small Tennessee mountain village. She faces accusations of promiscuity and is shunned by a community caught up in a frenzy of religious zeal, innuendo, and intimidation after a group of church elders discover her bathing in a secluded stream near her home.

Entirely innocent, Susannah is painted as a sinning seductress by the elders who are eager to conceal their own lustful feelings. They force her best friend, Little Bat, to say that he had sex with her, and the entire town turns against her.

At a revival meeting, a visiting preacher, Reverend Olin Blicht, tries to force her into repentance to "save her soul," but she runs from the church. He follows her home to convince her to repent, but he lets her know he's a lonely man and interested in more than her soul. Exhausted and beaten down by the treatment of the townsfolk, she lets him lead her into the house. The next day, alone and praying, he knows now the townsfolk were lying - she was a virgin. He begs her and the Lord for forgiveness, but is shot dead by Sam as revenge for violating his sister. Unable to catch Sam, the town descends on Susannah, but she stands her ground, laughing as she chases them off her property with a shotgun. She has survived their attack and remains standing there, an inviolably strong and inexorably lonely prisoner of a self-imposed exile.

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***SUSANNAH* SPONSORS & FUNDERS**

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