



MANITOBA OPERA



2019/20 SEASON

STUDY GUIDE

Due to the mature nature of some themes and situations in the opera, it is recommended for students in grades 9 and up.

Production Sponsors



GAIL ASPER
FAMILY FOUNDATION

**Manitoba Opera gratefully acknowledges our
Susannah partners:**

Season Sponsor



**Education, Outreach, and Community Engagement
Sponsors**

Student Night at the Opera Sponsor



1060 – 555 Main Street
Lower Level, Centennial Concert Hall
Winnipeg, MB, R3B 1C3
204-942-7470
www.mbopera.ca

Join our e-newsletter for exclusive behind-the-scenes content:
Go to www.mbopera.ca and click “Join Our Mailing List”

Contents

SUSANNAH

The Production

Fast Facts	4
Production Information	5
65 Years of <i>Susannah</i>	6
Synopsis	7
The Principal Characters	11
The Principal Artists	12
The Composer	17
Musical Highlights	19

Cultural Connections

Finding Rural America in <i>Susannah</i>	20
Appalachian Dialect	22
Other “Susannas”	23

Historical Connections

“Ain’t It a Pretty Night?”	24
McCarthyism and the Cold War	25
Revival Meetings	26

Social Connections

The Arts can be Trauma Informed	27
---------------------------------	----

Student and Teacher Resources

Student Activities	29
Winnipeg Public Library Resources	37



Susannah, 2006, Virginia Opera.

Fast Facts

- Carlisle Floyd wrote *Susannah* while he was a professor at Florida State University.
- *Susannah* is based on the apocryphal tale of 'Susanna and the Elders.'
- *Susannah* received its premiere performance at Florida State University's Ruby Diamond Auditorium February 24, 1955.
- *Susannah* is the second most-performed American opera, after George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.
- Famous Susannahs include Phyllis Curtin, Renée Fleming, and Patricia Racette.
- *Susannah* was staged at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.
- The most well known songs from *Susannah* are Susannah's arias "Ain't it a Pretty Night" and "The Trees on the Mountain."
- The setting for *Susannah*, the fictitious town of New Hope Valley in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee, is representative of many religious rural communities in the American South.
- The music of *Susannah* features recognizable elements of Appalachian folk song and Protestant hymns.
- *Susannah* was one of the first operas in the 20th century to explore feminist themes.
- The "revival" scene in Act 2 was influenced by memories and experiences from the childhood of the composer, whose father was a rural preacher.
- In 1997, Floyd rescored *Susannah* for a smaller orchestra for a production by the Kammeroper in Vienna. This production set the opera in a puritanical Lutheran community, to be more familiar for the Austrian audience.



Eric Johnston (Little Bat) and Lillian Sengpiehl (Susannah Polk), *Susannah*, 2006, Virginia Opera.

Production Information



November 23, 26, 29, 2019

Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: November 21, 2019

Centennial Concert Hall

Music and Libretto by Carlisle Floyd

Approximately 2 hours in two acts, including one 20-minute intermission

Premiered at Florida State University, February 24, 1955

Sung in English with projected English translations

PRINCIPAL CAST

Susannah Polk	Soprano	LARA CIEKIEWICZ
Sam Polk	Baritone	MICHAEL ROBERT HENDRICK
Reverend Olin Blich	Bass-Baritone	KRISTOPHER IRMITER
Little Bat McLean	Tenor	JAMES MCLENNAN

Elders

Elder Gleaton	PETER JOHN BUCHAN
Elder Hayes	TERENCE MIREAU
Elder McLean	DAVID WATSON
Elder Ott	TOM GOERZ

Elders' Wives

Mrs. Gleaton	DAWN BRUCH-WIENS
Mrs. Hayes	NAOMI FORMAN
Mrs. McLean	DONNALYNN GRILLS
Mrs. Ott	SHANNON UNGER

MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS WINNIPEG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Conductor	TYRONE PATERSON
Director	KELLY ROBINSON
Set design	ERHARD ROM
Set provided by	VIRGINIA OPERA
Costumes provided by	OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL
Lighting design	MARK MCCULLOUGH
Stage manager	ROBERT PEL
Assistant stage managers	KATHRYN BALL, HEATHER LEE BRERETON
Projected titles	SHELDON JOHNSON

65 Years of *Susannah*



Phyllis Curtin (*Susannah*) and Norman Treigle (Olin Blitch), *Susannah*, New York City Opera (1956). Photo by Leo Friedman.



Susannah sets from Metropolitan Opera (1999) adapted from paintings by American artist Thomas Hart Benton.



St. Petersburg Opera (2017); first commercially available DVD recording of *Susannah*.



Semcentennial anniversary production of *Susannah* at Florida State University's Ruby Diamond Auditorium (2005).

Synopsis

The plot of *Susannah* in two minutes:

At a square dance held at the church in New Hope Valley, Tennessee, the wives of the church elders gossip about the young and beautiful Susannah Polk. They are jealous and distrusting of her, and scornful of her brother Sam. The elders discuss the need to find a creek for a baptism ceremony before the arrival of the new preacher, the Reverend Olin Blitch. Blitch arrives at the dance, meets the elders, and dances with Susannah. After the dance, Susannah and her friend Little Bat talk and laugh about the dance, and Susannah imagines what life would be like outside the valley. Little Bat leaves when Sam returns home from hunting.

The next morning, Susannah is bathing in the creek, espied by the elders who come across her while searching for the creek. Her nakedness fires their lust, which turns to shame, then quickly to haughty indignation. When Susannah arrives for the church dinner later that day, she is turned away by the elders and their wives. Hurt and confused, Susannah returns home, where Little Bat approaches her and timidly explains that she has been shunned because she was seen bathing naked; a wickedness in the eyes of the elders. Further, he confesses that he has been coerced into falsely claiming that she seduced him.

Later that week, Sam tells Susannah that the others expect her to confess and publicly repent; Susannah angrily refuses, knowing she has done nothing wrong. At a revival meeting, Blitch calls for members of the church to step forward in public displays of contrition. Singled out from the congregation, Susannah flees the church, returning home, where she collapses, exhausted. Blitch has followed her to hear her confession and lead her to repent. She again refuses, denying that she has any reason to do so. Blitch, recognizing his own weakness in Susannah's vulnerability, forces himself upon her.

A repentant and conflicted Blitch, having realized that Susannah was an innocent, uselessly tells the elders that they are wrong about her. That evening, as the congregation gathers for the baptism ceremony, Sam finds out that Blitch sexually assaulted Susannah, and sets off to the creek to shoot the preacher. A shot rings out; a mob approaches Susannah's house blaming her for pushing Sam to kill Blitch, and threatening to force her to leave. Susannah stands her ground, holding off the crowd with her rifle. Her accusers disperse, leaving Susannah alone, ostracized from the community, her life shattered.



Susannah, 2006, Virginia Opera.

Synopsis

Susannah Full Synopsis

Act I

Scene 1

One Monday night in mid-July, the folk of the mountain community of New Hope Valley, Tennessee, gather in the church yard for a square dance. Most of the village is present, including the elders of the church and their wives. This celebration kicks off a special week long event for the church: a revival, to be led by a visiting preacher. While the men and women all take turns dancing with different partners, it is clear that the men are drawn to the square of one particular woman: the young and beautiful Susannah Polk, who stands out from the crowd in her brightly colored dress. The elders' wives cast disapproving glances at Susannah and gossip among themselves. When Elder McLean goes to dance with Susannah, his wife jealously harps on the young girl's beauty and manner of dress, sourly remarking "That pretty a face must hide some evil." A moment later, a stranger joins the dance. He is the Reverend Olin Blitch, arrived at New Hope Valley a day early to think, fast, and pray, in preparation for the revival. He is introduced to the elders and their wives, who are thrilled to receive him. His eyes are drawn to Susannah; Elders Gleaton and McLean tell him she is a poor girl, raised by her older brother, Sam, who they say is always drunk. Blitch responds sympathetically, saying he will pray for their souls; Mrs. McLean sharply mutters "She'll come to no good, mark my words." After a short time, the reverend goes off to join the dancers, and eventually finds his way to Susannah, and dances with her. As the scene closes, Mrs. McLean repeats her ill portent: "She'll come to no good, mark my words."

Scene 2

After the dance, Susannah is accompanied home by her friend Little Bat, the son of Elder McLean and Mrs. McLean. It is obvious that Little Bat admires Susannah, although he is nervous to be around her house because his parents have instilled in him a distrust for Sam. They talk and laugh about the dance; Little Bat marvels at how pretty Susannah looks, pointing out that he saw all the men at the dance (including the preacher) courting her. Susannah naïvely dismisses his observation, joking about Blitch's poor dancing. Looking up at the sky reflectively, she sings of the stars and the cities beyond the mountains, wondering what life is like outside of the valley ("Ain't it a pretty night?"). Soon Sam returns from hunting; Susannah is excited to see her brother return, but Little Bat jumps up and scampers off. Sam asks Susannah about the dance, and she tells him what a good time she had. Before they retire for the evening, Susannah convinces Sam to sing "Jaybird" for her; a silly song from her childhood that always makes her feel happy.



Eric Johnston (Little Bat), and Lillian Sengpiehl (Susannah Polk)
Susannah, 2006, Virginia Opera.

Synopsis

Scene 3

The next morning, Susannah goes to the creek near her house to bathe. The elders arrive on the Polk's property, searching for a part of the creek that would be suitable for a baptism ceremony. They soon find the creek, and they also see Susannah. At first they are surprised, but their surprise transforms to lust as they continue to watch her. As they realize what they are feeling, the elders become ashamed, and horrified. Indignantly they make a show of being outraged, proclaiming that Susannah is a wicked girl for exposing herself for all to see, that she needs to be brought to repentance, and that everyone in the valley must be told of her transgression. As the elders retreat into the forest, Susannah is heard innocently singing "Jaybird" to herself, unaware that she has been seen.

Scene 4 and 5

That evening, Susannah arrives late for a dinner at the church, only to be turned away by the elders. Confused, she returns home, where Little Bat finds her. He is visibly troubled, as he tells Susannah that the elders saw her bathing in the creek; that they have been spreading rumours about her, and that they coerced him in to claiming that she seduced him. Furious, she screams at Little Bat to leave and never return. Sam, who had been sleeping inside the house, comes outside. Unable to comfort Susannah, he patiently observes that "people want to believe what's bad." Realizing that nothing can be done, Susannah sobs quietly and begs Sam to sing "Jaybird" for her again.



Eric Johnston (Little Bat), and Lillian Sengpiehl (Susannah Polk) *Susannah*, 2006, Virginia Opera.

Act II

Scene 1

Later that week, Susannah has grown fed up with the rude and inappropriate way the men in town have been treating her since the church dinner. Sam reminds her that the congregation expects her to make a public confession, and suggests that she go to the revival meeting that evening, since he will be away hunting and doesn't want her to be alone. Susannah is reluctant to go, refusing to make any kind of confession when she knows she has done nothing wrong, but eventually acquiesces, saying that if things get bad she will simply leave.

Scene 2

That evening at the church, the pews are filled with people attending the revival meeting. Blitch preaches about sin and repentance; he calls for members of the congregation to step forward to publicly confess their sins and receive forgiveness. As the choir sings, Blitch singles out Susannah. Swept up in the collective intensity of the revival, she stands and moves towards the preacher as though in a trance. A hush falls over the congregation, and Susannah snaps suddenly into awareness. Rejecting the call of the reverend, she runs from the church, fleeing into the night.

Synopsis

Scene 3

At home once again, Susannah sings to herself a song that her mother taught her when she was little ("The trees on the mountains"). After she has finished singing, Blitch approaches the house. He followed her home from the church, to talk with her and to pray with her for the forgiveness of her sins. Once again, Susannah denies that she has done anything wrong, and that the elders lied when they claimed that she seduced Little Bat. The preacher refuses to believe her; he ignores her insistence, convinced that she is guilty of all the rumours he has heard. It is clear that Blitch, having failed to bring Susannah to confess, feels the weight of his role as a spiritual leader. Giving in to his baser desires, and armed with the knowledge that she is alone, he draws close to Susannah. No longer interested in talking or praying, he suggests to her "let's go inside." Too exhausted to refuse him, Susannah leads him into the house.

Scene 4

The following morning at the church, Blitch kneels alone before the altar. Feeling a deep sense of shame for having sexually assaulted Susannah, he calls out to God and confesses his weakness, pleading for the forgiveness of his sin. He now knows that Susannah was a virgin and innocent of the accusations that the elders had made against her. When the congregation gathers at the church (including Susannah, who sits by herself apart from the others), he tells the elders that God spoke to him of Susannah's innocence, and they should ask Susannah to forgive them for how they have treated her. Shaking their heads in disbelief and disappointment, the elders and their wives take their leave of the preacher. He hesitantly approaches Susannah, and pitifully starts to explain that he will make it up to her, asking her to forgive him. Susannah responds: "Fergive? I've forgot what that word means."

Scene 5

Hours later, Sam returns home from his hunting trip to find Susannah distant and distraught. When he learns that Blitch assaulted her, he takes his gun and heads for the creek, where the preacher is performing baptisms. A shot rings out, and moments later Little Bat rushes out of the woods, calling for Susannah. He tells her that Sam shot the preacher, and that the townsfolk are saying that she put him up to it. He warns her that they are coming to drive her away from her home and out of the valley. The church Elders, now an angry mob, surge towards the porch where Susannah stubbornly stands. She whirls inside the house, and reappears with a rifle, brandishing it at the mob. Cowed by her sudden defiance, the villagers disperse back into the woods, exiling Susannah alone with her rage.



Susannah, 2006. Virginia Opera.

Principal Characters

Name	Description
Susannah Polk	A young woman, beautiful and naïve. Lives with her older brother.
Sam Polk	Susannah's older brother, a hunter.
Reverend Olin Bitch	A preacher, recently arrived at New Hope Valley.
Little Bat McLean	Susannah's friend, the son of Elder McLean.
Elders	McLean, Ott, Hayes, and Gleaton are the leaders of the church.
Elders' wives	Influential women of the church, led by Mrs. McLean.



Susannah, 2006, Virginia Opera.

The Principal Artists



Lara Ciekiewicz
Susannah Polk

Whether being hailed as “mesmerizing” (*Classical Voice of North Carolina*), “thrilling” (*The New Classical 96.3 FM*), or “a clear standout” (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), versatile soprano Lara Ciekiewicz makes her mark as a compelling, intelligent, and accomplished singer and actress. As an indication of her increasing stature in the arts world, Ms. Ciekiewicz recently received the Winnipeg Arts Council’s RBC On the Rise Award.

An alumna of l’Atelier lyrique de l’Opéra de Montréal, she has distinguished herself at San Francisco’s Merola Opera Program, the Janiec Opera Company at the Brevard Music Center, Opera NUOVA and the Banff Centre. Ms. Ciekiewicz’s most recent performances with Manitoba Opera include the roles of the Countess (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 2015), Liù (*Turandot*, 2015) and Musetta (*La Bohème*, 2014).



Michael Robert Hendrick
Sam Polk

Tenor Michael Robert Hendrick has appeared on opera stages and concert halls worldwide for over 20 years. He has performed operas in English, Russian, German, Italian, French, and Croatian. His career also includes many concert appearances as a tenor soloist with orchestras worldwide.

Mr. Hendrick was honored at the Kennedy Center as Washington National Opera’s Artist of the Year in 2001 for his portrayal of Lennie Small in *Of Mice and Men* by Carlisle Floyd, a role he portrayed at Manitoba Opera in 2016.

The Principal Artists



Kristopher Irmiter
Reverend Olin Blitch

A Grammy-nominated artist who has performed throughout Canada and in every state of the US, bass-baritone Kristopher Irmiter is one of the most sought-after low voices in North America. He has appeared with San Francisco Opera, l'Opéra de Montréal, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Baltimore Opera, Atlanta Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Utah Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Arizona Opera, and Florida Grand Opera among many others.

With more than 110 performed roles in his repertoire, Mr. Irmiter has earned broad critical acclaim for his vast range, both vocally and dramatically; *Opera News* - “a large and personable presence, his bass-baritone alternately stentorian and tender.” Having particular success as Olin Blitch in *Susannah*, Mr. Irmiter made his Canadian Opera debut with Opera Ontario in this role. *Susannah* was also the vehicle of his debut with Houston Grand Opera. Mr. Irmiter last appeared with Manitoba Opera as Don Pizarro in *Fidelio* (2014).



James McLennan
Little Bat McLean

James McLennan has been celebrated for his “emotional intensity” (*Opera News*), “considerable charm,” and “strong yet pure tenor,” (*Toronto Star*) in a wide range of roles on opera and concert stages across Canada.

Recent season’s credits included Goro in *Madama Butterfly* with Manitoba Opera (2017), Luther Billis in *South Pacific* for Calgary Opera, and Jean Bilodeau in the critically acclaimed production of *Les Feluettes* for Edmonton Opera, a role James originated at the world premiere with Montreal Opera in 2016. Mr. McLennan’s 2018/19 season also included a tour the Canadian prairies with *A Prairie Boy’s Life*, a new chamber work by John Greer commissioned by the University of Manitoba’s Desautels Faculty of Music.

The Principal Artists



Peter John Buchan, tenor
Elder Gleaton

Last appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Ballad Singer, *Of Mice and Men* (2016)

Mr. Buchan is the Department Head for the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba. Internationally, he has performed as guest soloist at the 2005 Reykjavik Winter Festival, and at the Taipei International Choral Festival and World Choral Symposium in Kyoto, July 2005.



Dawn Bruch-Wiens, soprano
Mrs. Gleaton

Last appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Giovanna, *Rigoletto* (2012)

Ms. Bruch-Wiens is the executive director and a cofounder of Flipside Opera, and is a voice instructor for both Canadian Mennonite University and the Community School for Music and the Arts.

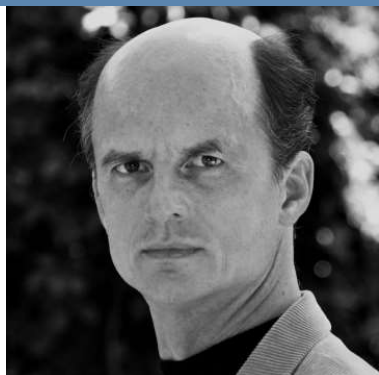


Naomi Forman, soprano
Mrs. Hayes

Last Appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Second Lady, *The Magic Flute* (2011)

As a sessional voice instructor at Brandon University Professor, Ms. Forman is applauded for her innovative and inspirational teaching savvy, and is a sought-after voice and speech arts adjudicator at festivals across western Canada. She is a member of the Brandon Chamber Players Artistic Committee, a Brandon liaison to the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and president of the Brandon Dance Ensemble.

The Principal Artists



Tom Goerz, bass
Elder Ott

Susannah is Mr. Goerz' Manitoba Opera debut.

Mr. Goerz is an outstanding singing-actor who excels in both opera and musical theatre. With clarity of voice and character, he has shone in such roles as Dr. Bartolo in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Vancouver Opera and Pacific Opera Victoria; Owen Hart in *Dead Man Walking* in Montreal, Calgary, and Vancouver; and Titurel in *Parsifal* at Quebec's Festival Lanaudière conducted by Yannick Nezet-Sequin.



Donnalynn Grills, mezzo-soprano
Mrs. McLean

Last appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Marcellina, *The Marriage of Figaro* (2015)

Ms. Grills is a member of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, and also performs with Little Opera Company, Winnipeg Singers, Dry Cold Productions, and many other vocal arts groups in Winnipeg.



Terence Mierau
Elder Hayes

Last Appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Schmidt, *Werther* (2017)

Mr. Mierau led a career as an opera performer in Europe, prior to relocating to southern Manitoba to start a small-scale farming operation in Neubergthal. This farm, which he operates together with his wife, former opera singer Monique Scholte, was featured in the 2017 documentary *From Seed to Seed*.

The Principal Artists



Shannon Unger, mezzo-soprano
Mrs. Ott

Last Appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Annina, La Traviata (2018)

Dr. Shannon Melody Unger has sung leading roles with LOOK Music Theater in Tulsa, Lyric Opera Cleveland, Austin Lyric Opera, and apprenticed at the prestigious Santa Fe Opera Young Artist Program. She has appeared as a soloist with the Memphis Symphony, Tulsa Oratorio and Symphony, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, and the Orchestra of Northern New York. Dr. Unger has been a finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Competition District and Regional Finals, was recipient of numerous fellowships and awards including the Klose Seibold at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, the Irma Cooper at Dayton Opera, and the Aspen, Banff, and Tanglewood Summer Music Festivals.



David Watson, baritone
Elder McLean

Last Appearance with Manitoba Opera:
Fiorello/A Notary, The Barber of Seville (2019)

David Watson's operatic career began here in Winnipeg when he appeared in Manitoba Opera's 1979 production of *La Traviata*. He has since performed on concert and operatic stages throughout Canada, including numerous times for Manitoba Opera.

**Learn more about opera singers and their voices by reading our opera guide:
"What Is Opera?" available online at
<http://mbopera.ca/school-programs/study-guides/>**

The Composer

Carlisle Floyd (born June 11, 1926)

Carlisle Floyd is one of the foremost composers and librettists of opera in the United States today. Born in 1926, Floyd earned B.M. and M.M. degrees in piano and composition at Syracuse University. He began his teaching career in 1947 at Florida State University, remaining there until 1976, when he accepted the prestigious M. D. Anderson Professorship at the University of Houston. In addition, he is co-founder with David Gockley of the Houston Opera Studio, jointly created by the University of Houston and Houston Grand Opera.

Considered the “Father of American Opera,” Floyd’s operas are regularly performed in the US and Europe. He first achieved national prominence with the New York premiere of his opera *Susannah* (1953–54) by the New York City Opera in 1956. In 1957 it won the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award and subsequently was chosen to be America’s official operatic entry at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair.

His second opera, *Wuthering Heights*, premiered at Santa Fe Opera in 1958, and continues to have life decades later—a critically acclaimed recording, released by The Florentine Opera in June 2016 on Reference Recordings, was listed in *Opera News*’ 10 Best Opera Recordings of 2016.

Based on the Steinbeck novella, *Of Mice and Men* (1969) is another of Floyd’s most performed works throughout the world. It was commissioned by the Ford Foundation and was given its premiere by the Seattle Opera in 1970.

Bilby’s Doll (1976) and *Willie Stark* (1981), were both commissioned and produced by the Houston Grand Opera, the latter in association with the Kennedy Center. A televised version of the world premiere production of *Willie Stark* opened WNET’s *Great Performances* series on the PBS network in September of 1981.

Cold Sassy Tree (2000), received its premiere at Houston Grand Opera in April 2000. Subsequently, it has been performed by Austin Lyric Opera, Central City Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Opera Carolina, Opera Omaha, San Diego Opera, Utah Opera, and Atlanta Opera.

Prince of Players, premiered in March 2016 at the Houston Grand Opera and [had] three subsequent productions, plus a professional recording produced within the first two years of its premiere.

Floyd’s non-operatic works include the orchestral song cycle *Citizen of Paradise* (1984), which received its New York premiere with world-renowned mezzo-soprano Suzanne Mentzer. *A Time to Dance* (1993), his large-scale work for chorus, bass-baritone soloist, and orchestra, was commissioned by the American Choral Directors Association.

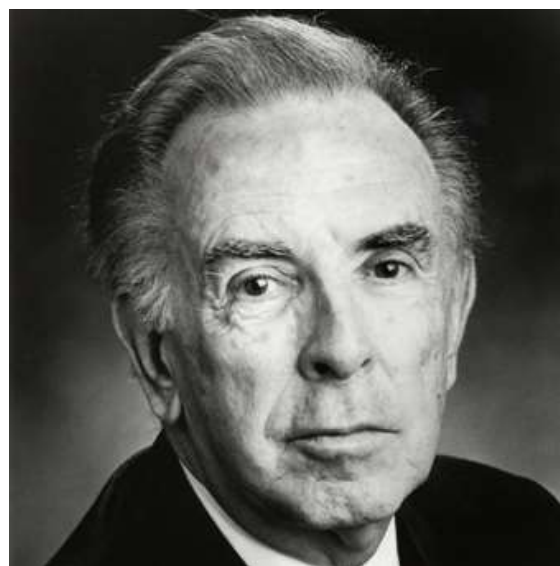


Photo by Jim Caldwell

The Composer

Among the numerous awards and honors Floyd has received include a Guggenheim Fellowship (1956); Citation of Merit from the National Association of American Conductors and Composers (1957); National Opera Institute's Award for Service to American Opera (1983); and the National Medal of Arts in a ceremony at the White House (2004). In 2008, Floyd was one of four honorees—and the only composer—to be included in the inaugural National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors. Additionally, he served on the Music Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts from 1974–80 and was the first chairman of the Opera/Musical Theater Panel.

In 2001, Floyd was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He also was inducted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame (2011) and the Florida Artist Hall of Fame (2015). He holds six honorary doctorates.

During the 2015–16 season, Floyd partnered with Opera America to produce “Masters at Work,” a live, interactive webcast exploring the making of an opera.

Reprinted by kind permission of Boosey & Hawkes.

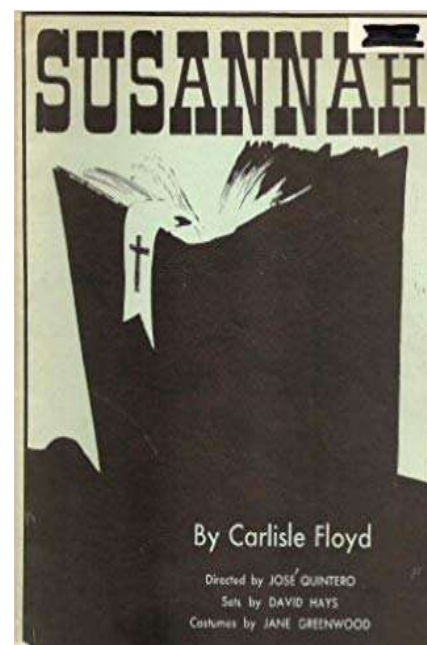
“With a commitment that rivals Smetana’s in Bohemia or Britten’s in Britain, [Floyd] has striven to create a national repertory ... He has learned the international language of successful opera in order to speak it in his own accents and to enrich it with the musical and vernacular idioms of his own country.”

— Andrew Porter, *The New Yorker*

What is a Libretto?

Libretto means “little book” in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being “by” the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers - notably Wagner - wrote their own texts.



Musical Highlights

Listen to some of the most memorable music from *Susannah*

“Ain’t it a Pretty Night?”

Renée Fleming, *Susannah*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl_Hs4PNT-c



Renée Fleming (*Susannah*), *Susannah*,
Lyric Opera of Chicago, 1993.



Patricia Racette (*Susannah*), *Susannah*,
San Francisco Opera, 2014.
Photo by Cory Weaver

“The Trees on the Mountains”

Patricia Racette, *Susannah*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAJ-hrsDYNo>



Norman Treigle (Olin Blitch), *Susannah*,
New York City Opera, 1971.
Photo copyright Beth Bergman

Act II “Revival Meeting”

Norman Treigle, Olin Blitch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWoSClBdh2Y>

“Folk elements appear all the way through the piece, including the hymns in the revival meeting, although they’re all original, both words and music. I use them to suggest immediately the flavor of a place and also what’s going on.”

-Carlisle Floyd, 1991

Finding Rural America in *Susannah*

The characters in *Susannah* demonstrate values that are important to communities in the American South. Their actions, for better or worse, are generally motivated by strong ties to their family or community, or from a deep-seated sense of the burdens and rewards of faith. These attitudes provide a glimpse of what life was like in the rural South in the first half of the 20th century.

Susannah Polk

Susannah is carefree and innocent. She dreams of life beyond the valley; she has a fondness for nature (stars, fireflies, sound of crickets, smell of pine straw, rabbits, flowers, etc.). Even when she imagines what life is like outside of the valley, Susannah reflects upon the things she would miss about her home. Susannah is also stubborn and independent. She refuses to back down from what she knows is true, and what she knows is right.

Susannah is hurt when the elders' false accusations drive her apart from the community. Little Bat's involvement in perpetuating those lies cuts deeper; he was her friend, and she learned that she cannot count on him. She relies on her older brother Sam for support and stability; his absence the night she is sexually abused by Blitch is nothing short of a complete betrayal of her trust.

Susannah's refusal to confess and seek the community's approval must be seen in light of the importance of faith, community, and belonging that is entrenched in the mindset of the American South. To willingly choose isolation over acceptance represents a break from everything familiar and comfortable.

Sam Polk

Sam is the quintessential frontiersman. As an accomplished hunter and trapper, he relies on his own skills and wits, and lives by his own code. He wishes to avoid becoming involved in other people's trouble. As fiercely independent as he is, he is equally loyal. Sam centers his entire identity around caring for and protecting his little sister Susannah. When he realizes that he has failed her, he seeks atonement through vengeance, knowing that it will sever his already strained ties to the community of New Hope Valley.

Reverend Olin Blitch

Olin Blitch is the iconic Southern spiritual leader. He is charismatic and confident; he quotes scripture in conversation, and captivates the congregation with his evangelical showmanship. Although an outsider to New Hope Valley, Blitch belongs to the community through his position of authority. As much as he is pained and conflicted over recognizing his abuse of Susannah, his shame is compounded as he must continue to fulfill his obligations to the community as their religious leader, knowing that he himself can claim no moral high ground.

Finding Rural America in *Susannah*

Little Bat McLean

Although it is not explicitly stated to the audience, we know that Little Bat is a young man with an intellectual disability (Floyd's libretto describes the character as "a shifty-eyed youth, not too strong mentally"). He is motivated by curiosity, and sometimes by fear. Little Bat values his friendship with Susannah— he doesn't keep secrets from her, even though it is painful for him to tell her the truth about his complicity in her ostracism. That complicity arises from his strong family bonds – he is unwilling to speak out or act contrary to his parents' wishes. The fact that he comes to warn Susannah as the townsfolk converge on her home to capture and execute Sam again underscores the importance of his friendship with Susannah, even though it is by that point broken.

Elders & Elders' Wives

The congregation of New Hope Valley is comprised of people who are religiously conservative, and suspicious of people whose lifestyles or circumstances differ from theirs. They look to their religious leader (Blitch) for action and instruction- insofar as it affirms and aligns with their very specific and firmly held convictions. They are preoccupied with ensuring that the reality of their community (and everyone in it) conforms to those beliefs and attitudes, and are intolerant of any perceived (whether real or imagined) deviation from that conformity. When Blitch tells them they were wrong about Susannah, they turn away from him. When the elders recognize their own lustful thoughts towards Susannah, they blame her rather than confront their own shame.

Their actions are cruel and selfish, but it is clear that the elders and their wives are motivated by the absolute imperative of belonging to and being accepted by the community. In their collective worldview, there can be no self apart from the community, and the community cannot tolerate non-conformity. After falsely accusing Susannah of indecent behavior, they insist that she confess publicly, to be reconciled to the community. They earnestly believe that they are acting in the best interest of the community, and do not once consider that Susannah might opt instead to remain isolated.



Susannah, Florida State University, 2005.

Appalachian Dialect in *Susannah*

While all of the text in *Susannah* is in English, it may sound different than the English you speak. *Susannah* is written in a *verismo* style, meaning that the characters, language, and plot are rooted in reality as much as possible – everything in the opera must be believable. Operas in this style often employ colloquial language, and *Susannah* is no exception. To create a believable opera set in America’s Deep South, Carlisle Floyd chose words and a dialect that are uniquely Appalachian. Some of the more noticeable characteristics of this dialect include:

Vowels are formed towards the back of the mouth rather than the front: “can’t” sounds like “cain’t”; “get” sounds like “git”; “forgive” sounds like “fergive.”

The “s” sound that ends some words may be replaced with an “n” sound: one might say “her’n” instead of “hers.”

Participles and gerunds ending “-ing” are pronounced as though they ended “-in,” as in huntin’ or preachin’.

The letter “a” is often added as a prefix to verbs; such as a-bathin’, aspyin’, or a-prayin’.

As with any dialect, some words have a colloquial usage. Examples in *Susannah* include:

Afore – before	Mite – small amount
Allers – always	Plum – completely, absolutely
Brickbat – a piece of brick; also an insult	Reckon – to suppose
Chitlins – fried pig intestines	Seed – saw
Crick – creek	Spell – length of time
Jaybird – a blue jay; also someone who talks too much	Sum’mers – somewhere
Jest – just	They’s – there is or they are
Out’n – out of	Twarn’t – it wasn’t
Mighty – very	Varmint - vermin

Floyd’s mastery of this dialect is playfully displayed in the silly “Jaybird” song in Act 1 of the opera, into which he sneaks some clever wordplay:

“Oh, jaybird sittin’ on a hick’ry limb,
He winked at me an’ I winked at him.
I picked up a brickbat
An’ hit him on the chin.
‘Looka here, little boy, don’t you do that agin!’”

Taken literally, it could describe an easily imagined and somewhat comic scene; a blue jay sitting on a branch catches a youth’s attention, and the youth throws a rock at it. Startled, the bird squawks angrily at the boy. Read a bit differently, knowing that in the Appalachian dialect a “jaybird” is someone who talks too much, and a “brickbat” is an insult, it describes an interaction between a youth and a person who is heckling him.

Other “*Susannas*”



Susanna and the Elders, by Artemisia Gentileschi (1652)

Floyd’s *Susannah* is loosely based on the Apocryphal story of *Susanna and the Elders*, which dates back to the second century BC. In that tale, a young Hebrew woman named Susanna is spied bathing naked in her garden by two elders. The lecherous elders approach Susanna, saying that unless she has sex with them, they will say that they saw her fornicating with a young man in the garden, a transgression for which she would be put to death. She denies them, and the men publicly accuse her of adultery. At Susanna’s trial, the elders are examined regarding their accusation. Their testimonies disagree on key details and their falsehood is revealed. Susanna is declared innocent, and the elders are executed for their deception.

Also told in the *One Thousand and One Nights* as *The Devout Woman and the Two Wicked Elders*, this story has been portrayed by artists in a variety of media throughout the centuries.

The Lothair Crystal (9th century): A depiction of the story (12 scenes with Latin text) is engraved in quartz set in gilt copper.

Famous painters have also depicted the story; it was a popular subject among Baroque masters including Rembrandt, Rubens, and Artemisia Gentileschi.



Susanna and the Elders,
by Robert Colescott (1980)

The 20th century saw more stylized depictions of Susanna by Picasso in his cubist style, by American regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton, and by African-American surrealist Robert Colescott.

Other composers have set the story, as well, including a cantata in French by Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1708), the oratorio *Susanna* by Georg Friderick Handel (1749) and one act of Jerome Moross’s Broadway triptych *Ballet Ballads* (1948).

Ain't It a Pretty Night

"Ain't in a pretty night.

Just think, those stars can all peep down

An' see way beyond where we can

They can see way beyond them mountains

To Nashville and Asheville an' Knoxville

I wonder what it's like out there,

Out there beyond them mountains

Where the folks talk nice, and the folks dress nice

Like y'see in the mail order catalogs."

Susannah is set in the 1920's, when Sears was the most widely circulated mail-order catalog in the United States. While retail stores became more and more common in cities, they were less accessible to rural communities. Many items that were not locally available could be purchased through the mail, including all the latest fashions in clothing, luggage, tools, furniture, appliances, toys, and gifts.



Sears Catalogue, 1930 (Fall), page 44



The cities that *Susannah* names in her song can be found on this map. Nashville and Knoxville are major cities in Tennessee; Asheville is to the east (in North Carolina), beyond the Appalachian Mountain range.

McCarthyism

Though he did not make conscious efforts to reference McCarthyism in the creation of his opera, Floyd believes that it did touch his work. When asked if he specifically intended the opera to serve as a political statement, Floyd said: “I’m too practical a man of the theater; it just struck me as right. But I did write the work during the McCarthy years, and I lived through the terrors. At Florida State an accusation was tantamount to guilt. We faculty had to sign a pledge of loyalty or lose our jobs. It affected me and informed me emotionally. And there it is in the opera. But I can’t say I put it there.”

What is McCarthyism?

“Shortly after WWII a phenomenon known as McCarthyism began to emerge in American politics. McCarthyism was the practice of investigating and accusing persons in positions of power or influence of disloyalty, subversion (working secretly to undermine or overthrow the government), or treason. Reckless accusations that the government was full of communists were pursued by Republican-led committees with subpoena power and without proper regard for evidence. The two Republicans most closely associated with McCarthyism were the phenomenon’s namesake, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and Senator Richard Nixon, who served as Vice President from 1953-1961, and then President from 1969-1974. Both men were driven by personal insecurities as much as by political gain. Government employees, the entertainment industry, educators, and union activists were the primary targets of McCarthyism. Their communist (or leftist) associations were often greatly exaggerated, and they were often dismissed from government jobs or imprisoned with inconclusive, questionable, and sometimes outright fabricated evidence. Most verdicts were later overturned, most dismissals later declared illegal, and some laws used to convict later declared unconstitutional.”

- Michael Barnes, *The Cold War Home Front: McCarthyism*



A hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee

Among the influential American artists who were investigated by Senator McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee during this unstable period were notable composers, authors, and filmmakers including Aaron Copland (*Appalachian Spring*), Arthur Miller (*The Crucible*), and Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*).

Revival Meetings

Act 2, scene 2 of *Susannah* depicts a revival meeting at the church in New Hope Valley.

What is a revival meeting?

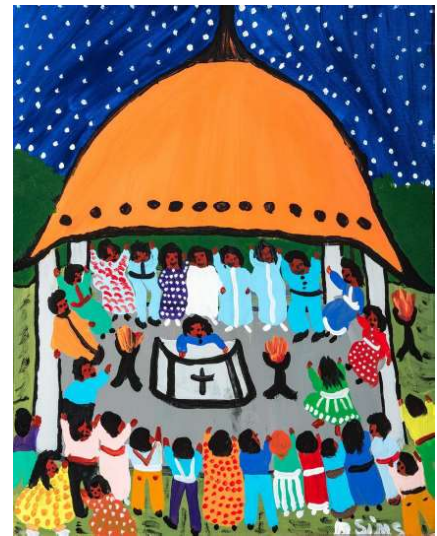
Revival meetings are associated with fundamentalist Christian denominations, primarily in Baptist, Methodist, and Mennonite churches. A revival meeting is a series of religious services held to inspire active members of a church and to convert new members. They are held over a period ranging from several days to several weeks, although some have lasted for months. In Mennonite communities, the purpose of the revival meeting is primarily to promote the spiritual activity of church members, rather than to convert nonbelievers to the faith. Typically a visiting preacher is brought in from outside the church to engage the congregation with impassioned sermons.

Why was it important to the community?

“Commonly held in the late summer just before cotton picking began, the open-air or tent meetings would attract farm families from miles around . . . Revival meetings served both spiritual and social functions. Families would share food and eat together after church. These occasions offered farmers the opportunity to visit with neighbors and friends and exchange personal news.”



Tent revival in Winnipeg, 1957.



Tent Revival. Bernice Sims (1926-2014)

- Steven L. Piott, *Daily Life in the Progressive Era*

As an important part of rural life, particularly in the American South, revival meetings have been depicted in literature, art, and media that were inspired by rural experiences.

Literature: Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*

Music: Charles Ives, *Orchestral Set No. 2: The Rockstrewn Hills Join in the People's Outdoor Meeting*

Film: *Elmer Gantry* (1960)

The Arts can be Trauma Informed

Prepared by Klinik Community Health

It is estimated that within the general population one in four Canadians has experienced a traumatic event, and one in 10 experiences post traumatic stress.

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a part of the human experience. Trauma is unavoidable and is something we all have in common. A traumatic event can occur at any life stage and may continue to impact us in different ways at different times throughout our lives.

How we experience trauma differs from person to person. Many people affected by trauma may not yet realize all that has happened to them and how they have been affected. Others may want help, but may not feel quite ready to ask for it. What is important to know is that there are resources and supports available to us to help find ways to cope with those experiences.



A Trauma-Informed Approach to the Arts

Watching an opera such as *Susannah* elicits a range of responses. Many of us are swept away by the performance, the music, the pageantry. It is an enjoyable experience on

so many levels. Sometimes, however, the themes or subject matter of a performance may impact us in a different way. This can be especially true if the themes or subject matter are something we have experienced on a personal level. Some of us may experience the performance as distressing. It can trigger or bring up a range of other (sometimes unsettling) feelings.

Klinik is very pleased to be partnering with the Manitoba Opera in promoting understanding and awareness of how great works of art can continue to be appreciated and also viewed through a different lens – a trauma-informed lens. Integrating a trauma-informed perspective recognizes that we as audience members may view, interpret, or experience performances in a multitude of ways based on our own life experiences. Knowing this can in turn help us to prepare, normalize our feelings, and identify some coping strategies.

What you can do if feeling triggered by a performance?

It's important is to pay attention and listen to your body, thoughts, and feelings. During times of stress we may experience what is known as the fight, flight or freeze response. Our nervous system is activated and the body becomes primed for action.

You may notice:

- Rapid heartbeat or breathing
- The body becoming tense which can result in shaking or trembling
- Pale or flushed skin

The Arts can be Trauma Informed

In order to regain a sense of calm, it is important to engage the parasympathetic nervous system. Some mindfulness activities to help you do this include:

- Grounding exercises such as putting your feet flat on the ground and squeezing your toes
- Stretching
- Deep breathing
- Chewing gum
- Going for a walk.

Perhaps the most important tool is to understand that you are not in current danger. Self-talk can help us reframe our experience and shorten the length of the fight/flight/freeze stress response.

As a patron you may also wish to find out the subject matter of a performance beforehand and make an informed decision about seeing the performance. This can feel empowering and can reduce your exposure to content that unexpected.

Klinik Community Health

Klinik Community Health offers a range of primary health care, mental health care, and community health services to enhance individual and community capacity. We offer trauma-informed counselling through our crisis and support line services and in-person through our Drop-in Counselling Program. For more information visit www.klinik.mb.ca



Resources

Klinik Crisis & Support Line Services

Crisis Line (24/7)

Phone: 204-786-8686

Toll free: 1-800-322-3019

Sexual Assault Crisis Line (24/7)

Phone: 204-786-8631

Toll Free: 1-888-292-7565

Manitoba Suicide Prevention & Support Line (24/7)

Toll Free: 1-877-435-7170

www.reasonstolive.ca

Manitoba, Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services (M – F, 10am – 9pm)

Phone: 204-571-4180

Toll free: 1-866-367-3276

www.supportline.ca



Student Activities

Curriculum Connections to the Manitoba curriculum Frameworks for Grade 9 - 12 are provided below each activity. For a more in-depth look at the connections, view our Manitoba Curriculum Connections documents at <http://mbopera.ca/school-programs/study-guides/>.

Activity #1: Using the Five C's, Have your Students Analyze the Opera as Drama

CHARACTERS: Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

CONFLICT: What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

CLIMAX: To what climax does the conflict lead?

CONCLUSION: How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

CONTEXT: What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.2.1; 2.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-C1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-M2; M-C2; M-R1

Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Media Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *Susannah* including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *Susannah*.
- Have the students write a media release about *Susannah* including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 4.1.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2; DR-C3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-C3

Activity #3: A Review

Step 1 – Think-Group-Share

Individually, students will write, in point-form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
3. If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

Step 2 – Class Discussion

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

Step 3 – Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, and revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

Step 4 - Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Step 5 - Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 3.1.3; 3.3.1; 4.1.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.4.1; 4.2.2; 5.2.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1; DR-R2; DR-R3; DR-R4

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3; M-R4

Activity #4: Have Your Students Act Out the Story

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

SUSANNAH / SAM / LITTLE BAT / REVEREND OLIN BLITCH / ELDER MCLEAN / MRS. MCLEAN

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

Pretend you are that character and answer the following questions:

1. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is your character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If your character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 2.1.2; 3.3.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-M2; DR-M3

Activity #5: Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another. Explore how they would be feeling about the events of the day.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

Activity #6: Cast *Susannah*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *Susannah*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.1; 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 4.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-C3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-R4

Activity #7: Research and Report

Have the students study the history and politics of America at the time that Carlisle Floyd was writing *Susannah* (1953-1954). What authors were popular? What scientific discoveries were being made? What was the social and political life like in Canada at the time?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2

Activity #8: *Susannah* Mood Board

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *Susannah*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 2.2.3; 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.4.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #9: Musical Interpretation of Literature

Step 1 - Prepare a Musical Outline

Working in small groups, have your students choose a play, novel, or story that they've read and consider how they'd go about adapting it into an opera. Have them write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of the opera. Which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which types of music? Would they have a large chorus to back up the principal singers or would the opera be more intimate? Which singing voices (soprano, baritone, tenor, etc.) would best suit each character?

Step 2 - Compose and Perform an Overture

How could the elements of music (ie., rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) be used to communicate the mood of the piece within the overture? Which instruments would be used? Allow students some time to work on composing their overture based on their answers to these questions. Students can then perform their overture for the class either as a composed and rehearsed piece or improvised. Alternatively, they may choose to present their overture by describing the characteristics of the elements of the music within their piece.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 2.3.5; 2.2.1; 3.1.2; 3.1.3; 4.1.2; 4.4.3; 4.4.2; 4.2.5; 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.1.4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-CR2; DR-M1; DR-M2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-CR2; M-CR3; M-M3

Activity #10: Active Listening

Play the first few minutes of the *Susannah* CD. Ask your students to listen closely to the music and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and first impressions. Then have your students share their reactions with the classroom. Ask them to listen again and pay close attention to the elements of music (rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) then explore questions such as the following:

- What instruments are used to make the music?
- How does this music make me feel?
- What is the mood of the piece?
- What type of emotions do the singers bring forth?
- Does the music have a steady beat or pulse?
- What is the size of the ensemble?
- What do the singing voices tell us about those characters?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.12; 1.2.2; 2.3.1; 2.2.3; 4.4.3; 5.2.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #14: Opera Comprehension Tests

The Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ Considered the first opera.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning “little book.”
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ The person who is in charge of all the action on the stage.

Susannah

1. Who is the composer? _____
2. Who wrote the libretto? _____
3. In what year did the premiere performance take place? _____
4. In what language is the opera performed? _____
5. Where was the opera premiered? _____
6. Where is the opera set? _____
7. The role of Susannah is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
8. The role of Reverend Blitch is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
9. The role of Little Bat is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
10. Who spies Susannah bathing in the creek? _____
11. Which character do the church elders accuse of being a drunk? _____
12. What does Susannah bring to the church dinner? _____

Answer Key

General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or “the pit”
5. *Daphne*
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

Susannah

1. Carlisle Floyd
2. Carlisle Floyd
3. 1955
4. English
5. Florida State University
6. New Hope Valley, Tennessee
7. Soprano
8. Bass-baritone
9. Tenor
10. The elders
11. Sam Polk
12. Peas

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Scott Miller
Education and Outreach Coordinator
Manitoba Opera, 1060 - 555 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3
or
education@mbopera.ca

Additional Resources

WINNIPEG PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Sound Recordings

The World So Wide
Upshaw, Dawn.
[Place of publication not identified] Nonesuch ,
1998.
Call Number: CD OPERA UPSHAW WOR
(includes recording of "Ain't it a Pretty Night"
from *Susannah*)

Electronic Resources

The American Inquisition: The Age of
McCarthyism
Author: Schrecker, Ellen.
Recorded Books, Inc.
Digital Format: Windows Media Player, MP3
ISBN: 9781461814689

Renée Fleming: I Want Magic! - American Opera
Arias
Author: Levine, James.
[United States] Universal Classics & Jazz. Made
available through Hoopla, 1998.
Electronic access
Call number: STREAMING
(includes recording of "The Trees on the
Mountains" from *Susannah*)

Songs of the Hills: Appalachian Classics
[United States] Shanachie. Made
available through Hoopla, 2005.
Electronic access
Call number: STREAMING

MANITOBA OPERA

Books

Falling Up: The Days and Nights of Carlisle Floyd
Author: Thomas Holliday

DVD Recordings

Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*
Austria: Naxos Rights US, Inc. [2017]
St. Petersburg Opera Orchestra & Chorus

CD Recordings

Carlisle Floyd *Susannah*
USA: Vlrigin Classics (1994)
Orchestra de L'Opera de Lyon

If you need recommendations for additional resources,
please contact:

Scott Miller
Education & Outreach Coordinator
smiller@mbopera.ca



Susannah, Virginia Opera, 2006.

About Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and performs with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.

Staff

Tadeusz Biernacki
Chorus Master & Assistant Music Director

Michael Blais
Director of Administration

Bethany Bunko
Patron Services & Communications Coordinator

Larry Desrochers
General Director & CEO

Sheldon Johnson
Director of Production

Elizabeth Miller
Annual Giving Manager

Scott Miller, DMA
Education & Outreach Coordinator

Tyrone Paterson
Music Advisor & Principal Conductor

Darlene Ronald
Director of Marketing

Dale Sulymka
Chief Financial Officer

2019/20 Board of Trustees

Elba Haid, Chair

Paul Bruch-Wiens

Judith Chambers

Dr. David Folk

Peter George

Abbie Grieder

Leona Herzog

Daniela Ignat

Charlene Ilas

Luisa Matheson

Maria Mitousis

Dr. Bill Pope

Alex Robinson

Dustin Schneider

Keith Sinclair

Dr. Jeffrey Sisler

Grant Suderman

Lori Yorke

Works Consulted (General)

This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed since 2000:

BehindTheNames.com
Bellevue University
The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera
britannica.com
The Canadian Opera Company
ClassicalMusic.about.com
Dmitry Murashev's's Opera Site libretti & information
Encyclopedia of Manitoba
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen
Fort Worth Opera Study Guide
La Scena
Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Manitoba Archives
Metropolitan Opera
New York City Opera
The New York Times
Opera America Learning Centre
Operabase
Opera Columbus Study Guide
Opera News
Operas Every Child Should Know
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide
Opera Today
Orchestra London Study Guide
Pacific Opera
San Diego Opera Study Guide
San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide
A Season of Opera
Skeletons from the Opera Closet
TheBiography.us
TheGuardian.com
timelines.com
Tulsa Opera Study Guide
University of Chicago Press
University of Manitoba
University of Texas
University of Waterloo
Rimrock Study Guide
Virginia Opera Study Guide
Wikipedia
The World's Great Operas

STUDENT NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Sponsored by



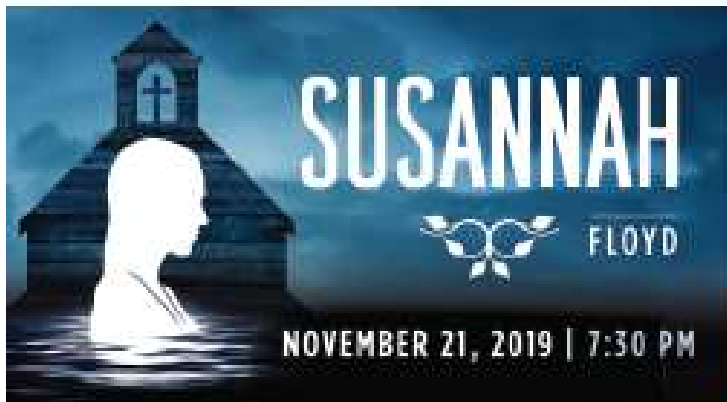
Students can experience the energy and excitement of the fully staged final rehearsal at the Centennial Concert Hall

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO ATTEND:

K-12 schools, home schools, and youth groups
Tickets must be ordered by the educational institutions.

Full-time post-secondary students
Tickets ordered by students (must provide valid student ID).

ONLINE STUDY GUIDES AVAILABLE TO ENRICH YOUR STUDENTS' OPERA EXPERIENCE

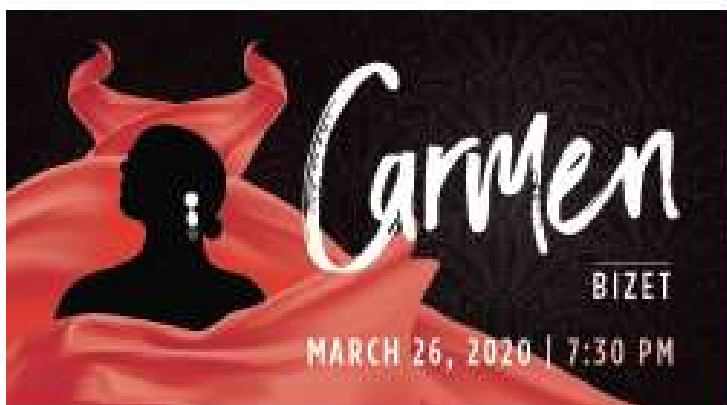


A POWERFUL DRAMA

Carlisle Floyd's masterpiece tells the story of a young Tennessee woman unjustly accused of indecency and bullied by her community. A traveling preacher tries to convince Susannah to repent, but he has designs on more than just her soul.

Please Note: Contains themes and situations that may be intense or triggering.

GRADES 9+



AN IRRESISTIBLE THEATRICAL EVENT

Confident, strong, beautiful - Carmen steals the heart of almost every man she meets, but what she values most is the freedom to live life on her own terms. Alas, the smitten young soldier Don José lets his desire for Carmen spiral into obsession. Their destinies are intertwined in Georges Bizet's timeless tragedy, renowned as one of the greatest stories that opera has ever told.

GRADES 8+

