

## ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Historical and Musical Context of the Characters in Carlisle Floyd's "Susannah"

STUDENT: Keisha D. Cook

DEGREE: Doctor of Arts

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: December 2013

PAGES: 132

This dissertation explores the characters in Carlisle Floyd's musical drama *Susannah* within a historical and musical perspective. 1950s culture affected Floyd's musical drama and this dissertation connects the cultural phenomena to musical phenomena. Each character undergoes dynamic changes that are influenced by plot, text, historical context, and musical devices. Floyd motivates his characters through the use of stage directions, lyrics, musical aspects, religion, politics, and his own experiences. The political and religious themes in *Susannah* manifest themselves in the plot, characters, and musical drama. Religious zealotry combines with political themes, and is expressed by way of musical features.

Each of the character's scenes is examined from a cultural and musical perspective. A detailed character description with motivations begins each analysis chapter. Musical elements are studied chronologically through the plot. Carlisle Floyd's characters in *Susannah* are either motivated or negatively affected by fear. The dissertation connects the element of fear to the political era in which the opera was composed, as well as shows the musical portrayal of these elements. For example,

Susannah is subjected to the perils of fear in a social setting and the music portrays this fear by way of musical and textual elements. Although Mrs. McLean and the townspeople crusade against Susannah, Floyd's work exposes that the true villain of the opera is fear and religious zealotry.

This 1950s adaptation of a biblical story contains themes of wrongful persecution, fear, fanaticism, and political upheaval. Social ostracism and religious zealotry are common themes in literature, art, and music. Carlisle Floyd successfully composed a musical drama based on these common themes. He used many compositional devices to convey how false accusations, fear, social hypocrisy, and doubt can destroy a society. This dissertation examines how the characters in *Susannah* behave, interact, and react to the stimuli within the plot and how the music contributes to their characterization and actions.