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Susannah - A Two Act Opera

Department of Music
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Presents

SUSANNAH – A two-act Opera by Carlisle Floyd

ACT ONE – Our story takes place in New Hope Valley, a small 'holler' in the Smoky Mountains, before the time of modern communication, travel and plumbing. The townsfolk are enjoying a community dance. The Elder's Wives are preparing a meal and gossiping about the young Susannah Polk when the itinerate evangelist, Olin Blitch, arrives unexpectedly. After the dance, the mentally-handicapped Little Bat McLean walks Susannah home to her place. Susannah sings her aria "Ain't it a pretty night" where she dreams of seeing the bigger world, just over the mountains. Her brother Sam, the town outcast and drunk, comes home from hunting, and they share a moment singing "Jaybird" – a song taught to them by their parents. The next morning, Susannah goes to take a bath in the creek on her property. Meanwhile, the church elders come looking for a place to hold the upcoming baptisms. When they find the creek, they also spy Susannah taking her bath and are filled with lust, followed by embarrassment, and then spiritual pride. Missing the opportunity for repentance, they choose judgement, gossip and even lies, eventually turning the whole town against her. That evening at the church potluck, the unsuspecting Susannah is shunned by her community. Afterward, Little Bat comes to her place to tell her what has happened. Sam attempts to comfort Susannah with wise words, having himself experienced rejection. Susannah is devastated.

ACT TWO – The next morning, Susannah and Sam struggle with the isolation. Not handling the pressure well, Sam wants to get away to hunt and drink and encourages her to attend the evangelistic meetings that evening to "show 'em she ain't afraid." Reluctantly, Susannah agrees. At the meeting, Preacher Blitch tries earnestly to bring Susannah to repentance for her sins. When she refuses and leaves, he decides to pay a personal visit and try again in a less public place. While hearing her story, Olin Blitch finds himself connecting with her, ultimately making a flawed choice of expressing his personal loneliness and need for womanly love. Susannah, having been condemned by the town as a loose woman, gives in to the self-fulfilling prophecy. The next morning, Preacher Blitch begs God for forgiveness of his grievous sin. He calls a town meeting and attempts to persuade the people that Susannah is innocent of the charges against her. The townsfolk reject him and go on to the baptism. Sam returns home from hunting, learns of what the preacher did, and sets off to kill him. Susannah doesn't believe he's capable of such a thing until she hears the gunshot. Little Bat runs ahead of the townsfolk to tell Susannah what has happened, the people arrive to run her off, but she stands her ground. The opera ends with a devastated, isolated Susannah.

This modern parable (based loosely on the Apocryphal 'Susanna and the Elders') is so tragic because it demonstrates how lies, gossip and judgement can result in a much broader web of impact. Little Bat is coerced, Susannah is maligned, Preacher Blitch is only at her house because he's trying to save her, and Sam commits murder – all the result of the initial choices of the four Elders. Naturally, each character could have stopped the cycle by personally choosing a different reaction to their circumstance. May this cautionary parable lead each of us to introspection and a choice to live the love of Christ more deeply.

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Emily McAndrew / *Susannah Polk*   David Ortiz / *Sam Polk*   Stephen Zork / *Reverend Olin Blitch*

Zachary Randolph / *Little Bat McLean*   Carl Cunningham / *Elder McLean*   Katharina Burghardt / *Mrs. McLean*

Bradley Krueger / *Elder Gleaton*   Sinegugu Katenga / *Mrs. Gleaton*   James Andrew Hearn / *Elder Hayes*

Melody Morgan / *Mrs. Hayes*   Nathaniel Cogen / *Elder Ott*   Ginger Ebanks / *Mrs. Ott*

McKenna Wear   Alicia Dent   Monika Ansinn

Chelsea Lake

Violin

Richard Clark

Rachel Lynne Brantley

Hadid Cortez

Sarah Dominique

Christina Goosey

Kara Kang

Daniela Perez

Dana Wilson

Ronnie Zanella

Oboe

Willagly Senio

Trumpet

Ricardo Reyna

Viola

Colin Fenwick

Anita Gonzales

Carlos Lozano

Bassoon

Alexandra Castro

Horn

Analiz Lozano

Lisha Torres

Trombone

Kenneth Andrade

Brandon Yenchus

Cello

Alma N. Cortez

Andrew Gagiu

Double Bass

Jacob Willard

Flute

Debra Rusengren

Becky Vajdic

Percussion

Kelly M. Gabriel

Lady Imperio

Charles Reid / *Director & Set*   Meriel S. Lora / *Conductor*   Jamila Sylvester / *Assitant-Director*

Joshua Goines / *Music Director*   Gregory Simpson / *Lighting Director*   Afia Asamoah / *Makeup*

Neighbor to Neighbor / *Costumes*   Sarah Gill Simmons & Chelsea Lake / *Costumes*   Marianne Kordas / *Costumes*

Ivana Ticar / Costume Coordinator   Philip Roberts / *Projection*   Cooper Hodges / *Lighting*

Taylor Clayburn / *Poster*   Becky St. Clair / *Promotion*   Dr. Claudio Gonzalez / *Conducting Mentor*

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