SUSANNAH

by Carlisle Floyd
Presented by UNI Opera

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22 &
SATURDAY, JANUARY 23
7:30 PM
GREAT HALL, GALLAGHER BLUEDORN
Welcome to tonight’s performance of Carlisle Floyd’s all-American opera, Susannah. Long-time opera connoisseurs and those experiencing opera for the first time all join us in celebrating the 60th anniversary of the first performance of Floyd’s opera. This masterpiece is one of the most-performed American operas in the repertoire today. With its thought-provoking libretto, Susannah will challenge your sensibilities and emotions in a way that is only able to be experienced through this wonderful medium of operatic performance. The fact that this opera was written by a 24-year-old during the McCarthy era is another fact of historical interest along with Floyd’s inspiring and moving music.

Tonight’s performance is under the direction of Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour, who is currently in her second year at UNI. Dr. Sadeghpour has brought years of professional directing experience to UNI and has added vibrancy and brilliance to the opera program through successful productions mounted over the last year and a half. Recently, some of her students were selected and toured Costa Rica as “Promising Young Artists of the 21st Century” and performed with the San Jose Symphony Orchestra. The School of Music is pleased to partner with the UNI Theatre department with set design in this production created and realized by Ron Koinzan.

The UNI Opera Program continues to grow in stature with graduates receiving prestigious initiations to participate in national opera programs, attend major graduate schools, perform globally with professional opera companies, and teach in Iowa’s schools. Before Brian Dickie, General Director of Chicago Opera Theatre, retired from his position in 2012 he stated that UNI students “...were terrific. There were some remarkable voices who are clearly in the hand of an outstanding singing teacher. The university is in Cedar Falls, Iowa and is clearly the place to be...” Gianna Rolandi joined me in this (audition) session and we were both mightily impressed by the potential of these young people. I thought that next year I would put Northern Iowa on my itinerary in the fall in addition to Julliard, Curtis, Yale and all those other places on the east coast!”

I can proudly pronounce that the quality of our student singers continues in 2016 because of dedicated voice professors, including Dr. Jean McDonald, Jeffrey Brich, Dr. Katherine Osborne, Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour, Elisabeth Bieber and Dr. John Hines (also appearing in tonight’s production). Our outstanding vocal coach, Dr. Korey Barrett, prepared students in an exemplary way and he continues to assist them in their overall development for professional careers as singers and educators.

The Northern Iowa Symphony Orchestra is under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, who continues to bring prominence to the program and our students through international tours and national leadership, twice serving as President of the College Orchestra Directors Association (2008-10 and 2015). The applied faculties also added their talents and exceptional teaching of students.

Enjoy this American classic and most importantly the energy and music-making of these talented UNI students. Thank you for attending and supporting UNI Opera.

John Vallentine, Ph.D.
Director & Professor
UNI School of Music

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

SUSANNAH

A Musical Drama in Two Acts
Libretto and Music by Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926)

There will be one fifteen-minute intermission.

The story of Susannah

Time: The recent past

The musical drama has as its basis the Apocryphal book of the same name, and retells the story of Susannah and the Elders in the locale of a Tennessee mountain valley in the twentieth century.

Act One

The residents of New Hope Valley, Tennessee are at a square dance in the yard of the New Hope Church. It is a Monday night in mid-July. Susannah, a young girl of uncommon beauty, draws much attention from both the men and women and is unaware of the eyes upon her. The itinerant evangelist, Olin Blitch, arrives a day early for a revival and baptisms and catches the townspeople unawares. After an ecstatic greeting, Blitch surprises the Elders by joining in the dancing. Mrs. McLean notices that Blitch is drawn to Susannah’s square.

At the Folk farm house later that night, Little Bat McLean escorts Susannah home and they enjoy the beautiful evening (“Ain’t it a Pretty Night”) until Sam arrives. Happy to see her brother, Susannah recounts the evening as Little Bat hurriedly leaves because of his fear of Sam’s bad reputation. The next morning, the Elders discover Susannah bathing in the creek which is sought as a baptismal font. The Elders, because of lust and the guilt accompanying this emotion, brand Susannah as evil and “of the devil” and set forth to announce their discovery to the valley’s people and to Blitch. Rumor, elaboration, and lies quickly supplant fact, and that evening at a community picnic at New Hope Church, Susannah is outcast though she does not understand why.

In the final scene in Act One, Little Bat has followed Susannah home from the picnic and little by little, tells Susannah what the community is saying about her, and finally admits his own role in her plight. Susannah protests her innocence and cries for Little Bat to leave, and he does when he is chased away by Sam. Sam, an “uncomprehended poet and recluse” does his best to comfort his sister, the one thing of beauty left in his life (“It’s About the Way People is Made, I Reckon”).

-INTERMISSION-
Act Two

Friday morning of the same week. Listlessly, Susannah asks “how long’s it gonna last, Sam?” to which he has no answer. She tells him how she has been treated by the people of the town since the picnic, and Sam bursts out “I’d kill ’em all, if it’d do any good.” When he hears that Blitch has asked her to attend the meeting that night, he admits that he needs to leave to check the traps on the mountain and he would feel better if he knew she was safe at the church. After much convincing, Susannah reluctantly agrees to go, “but if things gits bad, I’m gonna leave.”

That evening, the townspeople of New Hope Valley have all gathered at the church for the revival meeting. Blitch shouts above the choir, and then begins his sermon to great effect. He then puts out an altar call: “I wanna see all those whose souls wants savin’ an’ what wants to become free of the heavy burden of sin come down and meet the Lord an’ I here at the altar.” Many of the congregation come forward, but when Susannah, who has been sitting in the back listening, does not choose to repent, Blitch calls upon her publicly. When she refuses she is pursued to her home by Blitch, who overhears her singing to herself (“The Trees on the Mountains”). The evangelist is still convinced of her guilt and reputation for lechery. He fails to force a confession and Susannah, exhausted and broken, succumbs to his advances and is seduced by him.

The next morning, Blitch, who now knows of Susannah’s innocence, prays for forgiveness (“Hear Me, O Lord”). He summons the Elders and their wives to the church, and with Susannah present, attempts to convince them of her true story without implicating himself. The Elders are unchanged, and after they leave Blitch throws himself upon Susannah’s mercy.

At sundown, Sam jovially returns to the Polk house and immediately discerns that something terrible has happened. He pries the story from Susannah, and enraged and vengeful he runs to the creek where Blitch can be heard in the distance baptizing. The people of the valley come after Susannah, menacing and warning her to leave the valley, and she wildly and derisively drives them off. Little Bat remains, and Susannah cajoles him into an embrace. She slaps him viciously, thus severing forever her last tie with her community and her world.

CAST

Susannah Polk: Kayla Kjeldseth
Rachel Storlie (cover)
Sam Polk: Adam Brown
Reverend Olin Blitch: John Hines
Little Bat McLean: Blair Remmers
Elder McLean: Aaron DeSantiago
Elder Gleaton: Sean Smith
Elder Hayes: Luke Fosselman
Elder Ott: Andy Cutler
Mrs. McLean: Megan Grey
Mrs. Gleaton: Michelle Monroe
Mrs. Hayes: MaKayla McDonald
Mrs. Ott: Kayla Schmitz

People of New Hope Valley:
Kelly Behling
Laurel Boston
Bradley Boyd (Man One Soloist)
Jonathan Carpenter
Lauren Day
Alissandra Henkle
Genavieve Koinzan
Michaela Koinzan
Natalie Lindaman
Mandy Masmar
Kelly Noltner
Hunter Quint (Man Two Soloist)
Rachel Roche
Alexandra Saulsbury
Lauren Soukup
Haley Steele
Emma Swensen
Carlos Woerner
Violin I
Hannah Howland, concertmaster
Anne Sloter
Elizabeth Anderson
Lydia Pakala
Austin Jacobs
Rachel Pakala

Violin II
Anna Larson, principal
Taryn Kroymann
Anna Marie Black
Marissa Gabriel
Ryan Joss
Gavin McGivney

Viola
Alyssa Adamec, principal
Jotham Polashek
Andrea Sanchez Ruiz
Kathleen Marston
Isaak Sund
Hanna Gibson
Anjah Droe

Cello
Kyle Geesey, principal
Christopher Fenton
Jonathan Haverdink
Alexander Mong
Wesley Montoya
Seth Engen

Bass
Joseph Mnayer, principal
Andrew Braught
Zachary Nichols

Flute/Piccolo
Emily Bicknese
Stephanie Thimmesch

Oboe/English Horn
Emily Cornish

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet
Stacia Fortune
Nicholas Schumacher

Bassoon
Joshua Carlo

Trumpet
Rishi Kolusu
Daniel Meier

Trombone
Craig Goettle
Jason Andriano

Timpani/Percussion
Ryan Greiner
Steven Hoopingarner
Jake Rager

Harp
Gretchen Brumwell, UNI Faculty

Artistic Director and Stage Director
Mitra Sadeghpour

Music Director and Vocal Coach
Korey Barrett

Conductor
Rebecca Burkhardt

Set Design
Ron Koinzan

Lighting Design
Chris Tuzicka

Costume Design
Danielle Mason

Choreographer
Mandy Masmar

Props Design
Gretchen Koinzan

Technical Director
Ron Koinzan

Projections
Shawn Poellet

Music Preparation and Rehearsal Pianists
James Jenkins, Elisabed Imerlishvili,
Korey Barrett

Stage Manager
Gretchen Koinzan

Assistant Stage Manager
Lawrence Guadagnoli

Supertitle Operator
Leia Lensing

Run Crew: Eugene Cheok, Noel Nathan, Kayla Richardson, Hallie Berg, Jordan Brunsm, Niccole Giberson, Kassey Hegland, Madison Knaack, Montana Watkins, Athena Walton, and members of the Ensemble

Paint Crew: Sarah Kramer and members of the Ensemble

Opera Graduate Assistants: Kelly Behling, MaKayla McDonald, Michelle Monroe, Blair Remmers

Director of the UNI Opera Program
Mitra Sadeghpour

Opera Outreach Coordinator
Michelle Monroe

Assistant to the Opera Director
Alexandra Saulsbury

UNI Voice Faculty
Jean McDonald
Jeffery Brich
Katherine Obsborne
John Hines
Elisabeth Bieber

Director of School of Music
John Vallentine

Program
Sarah Pauls and Cecelia Hotzler

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College of Humanities, Arts and Sciences, Eric Lange: Department of Theatre, Mandy
Masmar and the UNI Dance Program, Colby Campbell, Blake Shelton, Dr. Cayla Bellamy,
Jordan Andrews
CAST BIOS

Kelly Behling (Ensemble, soprano) is a first year graduate student pursuing her Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Kelly is originally from the Appleton, Wisconsin area and graduated last spring with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Kelly’s operatic credits include the title role in Puccini’s Suor Angelica, and Une pastourelle in Ravel’s L’enfant et les sortilèges. She has also had the privilege of singing Juliette in Gounod’s Roméo and Juliette, Echo in Strauss’ Ariadne auf Naxos, and Pamina in Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte in opera scene productions at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Giannetta from Donizetti’s L’elisir d’amore in UNI’s fall scenes program. Kelly is currently studying under Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour.

Laurel Boston (Ensemble, mezzo-soprano) is a freshman pursuing a Psychology and Vocal Performance degree at the University of Northern Iowa. Laurel is originally from the Cedar Rapids, Iowa area; in high school, she competed in solo and small ensembles, where she was awarded Best of Center on her 2015 solo. Laurel is a member of the UNI Marching Band, UNI Women’s Chorus, and the UNI Opera Ensemble. Although this isn’t her first time on a stage, this is her first year in an opera production.

Bradley Boyd (Ensemble, Man One), baritone, is a senior undergraduate student pursuing his Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Bradley is originally from Davenport, Iowa in the Quad City area. He had the opportunity to study in Italy this summer of 2015. Bradley participated in the opera program as a member of the chorus in John Gay’s Beggar’s Opera and currently studies voice under Professor Jeffrey Brich.

Adam Brown (Sam Polk), tenor—a native Iowan—is a senior Music Education major from the University of Northern Iowa. With UNI opera, Adam played a partial role as Tony in West Side Story, and was a chorus member in Otto Nicolai’s The Merry Wives of Windsor last year. Additionally, he has worked with distinguished composers Jake Heggie and Alice Parker. Earlier this year, Adam traveled to Costa Rica with four other Promising Young Artists of the 21st Century and performed American musical theater. In 2014, Adam was selected as a finalist in the National Association of Teachers of Singing competition, and toured with UNI Concert Chorale to Estonia. At UNI, Adam participates in UNI Opera ensemble, UNI Concert Chorale, and Cantorei. Adam is currently studying in Dr. Jean McDonald’s voice studio.

Jonathan Carpenter (Ensemble) is originally from Dubuque, Iowa. Jonathan has participated in productions of RENT, with the UNI Theater Department and The Producers at the Grand Opera House in Dubuque. Jonathan is a second year student at the University of Northern Iowa majoring in Electronic Media with an emphasis in Production and Performance and minoring in Interactive Digital Studies with an emphasis in Digital Music. Jonathan is excited to be performing in his second production at the UNI and his first ever opera with the UNI School of Music!

Andy Cutler (Elder Ott), bass, is a sophomore Vocal Music Education major at the University of Northern Iowa. Andy is originally from Waukee, Iowa and graduated from Waukee High School in 2014. This is Andy’s first year in the opera program at UNI, but has been part of multiple ensembles on campus over the past two years, including Concert Chorale, UNI Singers, and the Varsity Men’s Glee Club. Last year, Andy competed in the NATS student auditions and received first place honors in his division. Andy currently studies under the tutelage of Dr. John Hines.

Lauren Day (Ensemble), mezzo-soprano, is a second year undergraduate student pursuing her Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Lauren has appeared in scenes from A Scotch Verdict, and Dead Man Walking with UNI Opera. Lauren is studying under Professor Jeffrey Brich.

Aaron DeSantiago (Elder McLean): Actor, dancer, and lyric baritone. Aaron DeSantiago, was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Aaron is currently a sophomore at the University of Northern Iowa, studying Vocal Performance under the direction of Professor Jeffrey Brich. Aaron has also taken dance classes with instructor Mandy Masmar. At UNI, Aaron is a member of UNI Opera, Concert Chorale, Varsity Men’s Glee Club, and was awarded second place in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Auditions. Aaron was featured as a dance soloist and chorus member in UNI Opera’s production of Otto Nicolai’s The Merry Wives of Windsor, and sang various roles during their opera scenes concert. Most recently, he has toured Costa Rica, and performed songs from My Fair Lady and West Side Story with the Costa Rica National Symphony Orchestra. This spring, he plans on touring Iceland and Norway with the Varsity Men’s Glee Club.

Luke Fosselman (Elder Hayes): Representing Boone, IA, Luke Fosselman, tenor, is pursuing a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. He has previously been in the chorus of The Merry Wives of Windsor with the UNI Opera Ensemble. Luke studies under Professor Jeffrey Brich.
Megan Grey (Mrs. McLean), mezzo-soprano, is currently a senior at the University of Northern Iowa studying Vocal Performance under Dr. Jean McDonald. An active performer, Megan has appeared as the Secretary in scenes from Menotti’s The Consul, the Sorceress and Spirit in Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas, and Mrs. Page in Otto Nicolai’s The Merry Wives of Windsor, all with UNI Opera. This past academic year, Megan received the honor of being named the 2015 Presser Scholar for UNI in addition to winning the annual Schubert Club scholarship competition and the Iowa district of the National Association of Teacher’s of Singing Audition in 2015. Recently Megan was a featured soloist with the Costa Rica National Symphony Orchestra, performing selections from My Fair Lady as well as West Side Story.

Alessandra Henkle (Ensemble) is a junior Performing Arts Management major with a Marketing minor. Ali graduated from Ankeny High School in Ankeny, Iowa in 2013 where she was heavily involved in the choral music, show choir, and theater programs. This is Ali’s second year participating in opera at the University of Northern Iowa. She has performed with the UNI Opera as a member of the ensemble in scenes from Carousel, Dead Man Walking, The Tender Land, and was cast as Ida in Die Fledermaus. She was also a member of the ensemble in UNI Opera’s full production of The Merry Wives of Windsor. She is currently a member of UNI Singers. Ali is currently studying voice with Professor Jeffrey Brich.

John Hines (Olin Blitch), an Associate Professor of Voice at UNI and internationally acclaimed bass, has been heard from the concert and opera stages of Italy, Austria, Russia, and the United States. Past UNI Opera appearances include the role of Sir John Falstaff in Nicolai’s The Merry Wives of Windsor (2015) and Sarastro in Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte (2012). An active recitalist and oratorio soloist, in March 2013 Hines celebrated his New York City, Carnegie Hall debut as the bass soloist in Haydn’s “Lord Nelson” Mass. Since 2007, his many concert performances in the Russian Federation—most notably those comprised of Russian vocal music—have earned him the title “The American Chaliapin” by Russian critics and audiences, and a seat on the international panel of jurors for the Boris T. Shitololov International Vocal Competition in St. Petersburg, Russia since 2008. In Russia, Hines has appeared in performance with artists from the Mariinsky, Bolshoi, and Kiev Theaters, and has had his performances broadcast over Russian Federal Television and Radio. In addition to programs of Russian music, Hines has also performed works by traditional Western composers, most notably Franz Schubert’s song-cycle Winterreise at the St. Petersburg State Academic Capella in 2009— the last artist to perform this work in the Capella since the late Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau 60 years prior. In 2010, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Robert Schumann, Hines returned as the bass soloist in Schumann’s rarely performed Requiem mass with the State Academic Capella Chorus and Orchestra under the direction of Maestro Alexander Chernushenko. In 2012, Hines was a featured solo artist on the Northern Iowa Wind Symphony anniversary tour of Northern Italy performing in Milan, Brescia, Bergamo, Pontevico, and Costa Volpino.

Kayla Kjeldseth (Susannah Polk), soprano, a native of Sioux City, Iowa, is attending the University of Northern Iowa as a second year graduate student in Vocal Performance. Most recently, Kayla was able to travel to Costa Rica with a group of her peers as a Promising Artist of the 21st Century. There she sang the role of Maria in selections from West Side Story with the Costa Rica National Symphony Orchestra. Recently she performed Franz Schubert’s Mass in G with the Metropolitan Chorale of Waterloo for their spring concert, Heaven and Light, under the direction of Amy Kotsonis. Last spring, Kayla performed in an art song recital showcasing the work of Jake Heggie for the Meryl Norton Hearst Visiting Artist Series of 2015. In addition, Kayla was able to perform music of Gustav Charpentier’s, Louise, playing the role of Irma in one scene of UNI Opera’s 2015 Showcase. She also had the privilege of singing the roles of Mistress Ford in Otto Nicolai’s, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Kitty Hart in a scenes performance of Jake Heggie’s Dead Man Walking. During her first year of graduate studies she participated in outreach performances within the community of Cedar Falls, Iowa at both Southdale Elementary School and at the Hearst Center For the Arts. In the fall of 2014, she had the opportunity to sing at the university’s annual Scholarship Benefit Concert in the Great Hall as Julie Jordan in a scenes performance of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s, Carousel. Kayla received her Bachelor’s of Music at the University of Northern Iowa, and she studies with Dr. Jean McDonald.

Genavieve Koinzan (Ensemble) is nine years old and is in the Fourth grade at Cedar Heights Elementary in Cedar Falls, IA. She swims with BLAST swim team, plays cello, loves Harry Potter and loves reading. She co-starred in a UNI student film last spring and enjoyed participating in the Sturgis Youth summer theatre program. She is excited to be a part of the opera and is thankful for her parents for helping her get involved.

Michaela Koinzan (Ensemble) is eight years old and in the Third grade at Cedar Heights Elementary in Cedar Falls, IA. She is on the BLAST swim team, enjoys Harry Potter, reading and relaxing at home. She has taken gymnastics and dance and has a talent for creating theatrical props. She is excited to be a part of the opera and is grateful for the opportunity!
Natalie Lindaman (Ensemble) is a 2nd grader. In December 2014 she played Cecil and Tiny Tim in A Coney Island Christmas with The Potter’s House Players. She has participated in classes and camps at BHCT. This is her first opera performance.

Mandy Masmar (Ensemble) is Dance Faculty at the University of Northern Iowa. She began teaching at UNI in 2014. Her prior training has allowed her to obtain proficiency in many different styles of dance and has been dancing collectively for over 20 years. Her research is mostly in the creative aspect of movement, and she explores this through a choreography based study. Mandy teaches the core dance classes offered at UNI, as well as instructs and directs the university’s two performance-based dance companies (Orchesis Dance Company and IDT Dance Company). Recent projects also include choreographer of TheatreUNI’s production of RENT, along with working closely with UNI Opera as the choreographer of Merry Wives of Windsor and Susannah, and through various collaborations with their showcases and recent Costa Rica trip.

MaKayla M. McDonald (Mrs. Hayes), soprano, is a first year graduate student studying Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. MaKayla recently graduated in May of 2015 with a Bachelor of Music degree in Voice Performance from the University of Northern Iowa. MaKayla studies under Professor Jeffrey Brich. She has most recently sung the role of Gretel in Old Capitol Opera’s production of Englebert Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel and the Narrator in the Stamp Brother’s Production of Marley. Other performance credits include Nettie Fowler in scenes from Caroussel with the UNI Opera Ensemble and a concert soloist with UNI Combined Choirs and the Northern Iowa Wind Symphony for Rolf Rudin’s Requiem.

Michelle Monroe (Mrs. Gleeton), soprano, made her University of Northern Iowa Opera Ensemble debut in October 2013. She completed her B.M.E. at Northern State University in South Dakota and is currently pursuing her M.M. in Vocal Performance at UNI. Her roles include the bar wench, Janet Brown, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, Belinda in Dido and Aeneas, a Novice in Suor Angelica, and an Angel in The Maid of Orleans. Michelle has appeared as soprano soloist with the NSU choir and orchestra in Haydn’s Missa in Tempore Belli, with the Mittelsächsisches Theater Orchestra as Zerlina in the duet “La ci darem la mano,” and with UNI’s Cantorei choir and chamber orchestra in Bach’s “Schweigt stille, plaudert nicht” and “Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke.” She was awarded first place in the senior women’s division at the South Dakota NATS competition in 2012. Michelle currently studies with Professor Jeffrey Brich.

Kelly Noltner (Ensemble), soprano, is currently attending the University of Northern Iowa pursuing a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance. She earned her Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in May of 2015. Kelly’s previous roles include the Countess in The Marriage of Figaro, Mama/Teacup/Dragonfly in The Bewitched Child with the Midwest Institute of Opera, Lady 4 in the world premiere of Sweets by Kate, Terentia in The Beautiful Bridegroom, Rowan in The Little Sweep, and Ida in Die Fledermaus. Kelly was also a featured soloist with the UWEC Symphonic Choir and Symphony Orchestra in Salisbury Vespers. Kelly is currently studying under Dr. Jean McDonald.

Hunter Quint (Ensemble, Man Two) is a Theatre Performance major at UNI. He has been involved in Love and Information and most recently in RENT. He is also involved in the Waterloo and Cedar Falls theatre community. Favorite roles include Beverly Carlton in The Man Who Came to Dinner and Chip in The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. Hunter is very excited to make his opera debut in UNI Opera’s production of Susannah!

Blair Remmers (Little Bat McLean), tenor, is a first year graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa and is pursuing his Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance. Originally from Sioux Center, Iowa, Blair graduated from Morningside College in Sioux City with a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance. During his time at Morningside, Blair studied with Professor Kate Saulsbery. Blair has appeared in such roles as Tobias in Sweeney Todd, Don Curzio in Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro and Nanki-Poo in Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado, as well as in a solo capacity with the Sioux City Youth Symphony and Morningside College’s Symphonic Wind Ensemble. Blair is currently studying under Dr. Jean McDonald.

Rachel Roche (Ensemble), Soprano, is a first year student majoring in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Rachel is originally from Waterloo, Iowa and during the fall semester she studied under professor Jeffrey Brich.
Alexandra Saulsbury (Ensemble and Assistant to the Opera Director) is a soprano Music Studies major at the University of Northern Iowa. She began studying voice privately in her hometown of Sioux City, IA with Shannon Salyards, and now studies under Dr. Jean McDonald. Alexandra has appeared in several roles with the UNI Opera Ensemble, including Betty Doxy in scenes from The Threepenny Opera, Mustardseed in scenes from A Midsummer Night's Dream, Jane Pinke in scenes from A Scotch Verdict, and Louise in scenes from Louise. In addition to performing, Alexandra is interested in the field of opera stage direction. To this end, she has acted as Assistant Director for the Betty Ling Tsang Fine Arts Series’ production of Oklahoma!, and for An American Broadway Spectacular, a touring scenes concert taken to Costa Rica by UNI students as part of the Promising Young Artists of the 21st Century program. Alexandra has held the positions of Wardrobe Supervisor for the Betty Ling Tsang Fine Arts Series’ production of Cats, and Stage Manager for the UNI Opera Ensemble’s An Evening in Italy.

Kayla Schmitz (Mrs. Ott), mezzo-soprano, is a first year graduate student pursuing her Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Kayla hails from Alta, Iowa and graduated from Wartburg College in 2010 with Bachelor degrees in Music Performance and Music Education. She worked for five years as a music educator around Iowa before returning to pursue her Master’s. Kayla has a variety of theatrical credits including Pitti Sing in The Mikado, Sarah Brown in Guys and Dolls, Vivienne Kensington in Legally Blonde, Fred’s Wife in A Christmas Carol, and Florence Pike in Albert Herring. She was also selected as a semi-finalist in the Central Region NATS in 2013. Kayla is currently studying under Dr. Jean MacDonald.

Sean Smith (Elder Gleaton) is a senior baritone from the studio of Dr. John Hines. Sean has been involved in UNI Opera throughout his time at the University of Northern Iowa and has played the role of Mr. Peachment in The Beggar’s Opera, Billy Bigelow in scenes from Carousel, and Guglielmo in scenes from Così fan tutte.

Lauren Soukup (Ensemble), soprano, is a sophomore at UNI majoring in Vocal Music Education, with a minor in Communications. Lauren is from Marion, IA and graduated from Linn-Mar High School in 2014. This is Lauren’s second year in the UNI Opera program. Last year she performed as chorus/dancer in UNI’s production of The Merry Wives of Windsor. She was also seen in multiple roles in UNI Opera’s spring scene concert. Since coming to UNI, Lauren has participated in Concert Choral, UNI Singers, and opera. Last fall Lauren competed in the NATS student auditions at UNI and received third place in her division. Lauren is currently studying under Dr. Jean McDonald.

Haley Steele (Ensemble), soprano, is a first year graduate student pursuing a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Originally from Sedalia, Missouri, Haley has had the opportunity to perform as Mabel in Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Pirates of Penzance, Dorabella in Mozart’s Così fan tutte, Miss Pinkerton in Menotti’s The Old Maid and the Thief, and Nanetta in scenes from Verdi’s Falstaff during her undergraduate work at the University of Central Missouri, where she graduated in 2014. In the year following her graduation, Haley sang as a member of the Kansas City Symphony Chorus with whom she had the privilege of recording Holst’s The Planets to be released in 2016. Haley is a student of Dr. Jean McDonald.

Rachel Storlie (Susannah Polk Cover, Ensemble), soprano, is a first year Master of Music student in Vocal Performance at the University of Northern Iowa. Rachel is originally from Caledonia, MN and now hails from nearby Spring Grove, MN. She completed her undergraduate degree through both Luther College and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Rachel received first place honors from the National Association of Teachers of Singing competition, was the winner of Luther College’s Concerto Competition, and fulfilled a Young Artist contract with La Musica Lirica. Her opera roles include Lauretta in Puccini’s Gianni Schicchi, Abbess in Puccini’s Suor Angelica, Mimi in Puccini’s La bohème (scenes), Rosalinda in Strauss’ Die Fledermaus, and Contessa in Mozart’s Le Nozze di Figaro. Rachel is currently studying with Dr. Jean McDonald.

Emma Swensen (Ensemble) is from Des Moines, Iowa. She is currently a junior at UNI studying Performing Arts Management with minors in Business Communication and Interactive Digital Studies. This is her first time performing in an opera production.

Carlos Woerner (Ensemble), bass, is a second year Music Education major at the University of Northern Iowa. Carlos graduated from Marshalltown Senior High School. Carlos has previously appeared in An Evening in Italy with UNI Opera. Carlos is currently studying under Dr. Jean McDonald.

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If you have questions or would like more information on donating to the UNI Opera Fund, please contact Dan Breitbach, UNI Foundation, 205 Commons, Cedar Falls, IA 50614. Office: 319-273-7727. Email: dan.breitbach@uni.edu.
Thank you so much for joining us tonight for UNI Opera’s production of *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd! Tonight’s performance is the result of a collaboration of a huge team of students, faculty, and staff, many of whom have been working on the production since last summer (ah, remember summer….). I am very proud of their creativity and devotion to the process of teaching, learning, and performing opera. No art form is quite like opera in the way it brings together so many artistic elements in order to tell a story of human experience. Music, drama, dance, and visual arts synthesize in front of our eyes to transform the Great Hall stage into the Appalachian town of New Hope Valley, Tennessee on a Wednesday night in mid-July of 1946…

**Why *Susannah***? This is a question I am often asked, and the answers are numerous. Because of the incredible musical score, both challenging and accessible to our student performers with its unique mix of twentieth-century Romanticism and folk-inspired melodies. Because of the amazing opportunities for a large ensemble cast to develop complex characters who are both beautifully human and flawed. And to expose our students and community to American opera: opera in English, which celebrates our own art music and creativity as a nation and addresses many of our most controversial social issues.

The story of *Susannah* is as old as the Apocrypha and as recent as today’s front page news. Written by Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926) during the height of McCarthyism, *Susannah* (1955) presents probing questions about extremism in any belief system and to what lengths humans will go to cover their own misdeeds. This cast has gone through many very emotional rehearsals and grappled with these questions and the parallels to their individual experiences. Through this process, everyone involved fully realized the power of the arts to address important issues, and it is our hope that not only will you be moved by our performance but that it will inspire thought and conversation after you have left the theatre.

On behalf of UNI Opera, I thank you for being a part of our audience tonight and for supporting our incredible students and opera in the Cedar Valley. Please join us on April 22 and 23, 2016 in Bengtson Auditorium in Russell Hall for our spring Opera Showcase, and you can follow our activities on Facebook and Twitter as well! Information on how to donate to the UNI Opera Fund can be found in the program and on the UNI Foundation website.

Enjoy the opera!

Mitra Sadeghpour, DM

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