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GRADUATE COLLEGE

CARLISLE FLOYD'S

COLD SASSY TREE

A Document

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By

SUSANNE R. SHESTON

Norman, Oklahoma
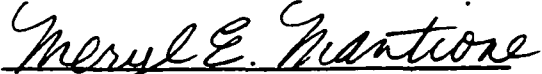
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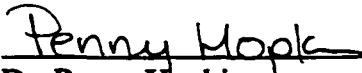
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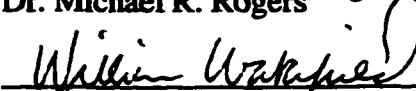
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Dr. Eugene Enrico

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Dr. Penny Hopkins

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Dr. Michael R. Rogers

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Dr. William Wakefield

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the twentieth century, American composers continue to turn to opera as an appealing genre for creative expression. Opera houses, from the largest American companies to smaller, regional houses, are commissioning new scores. At a time when symphony orchestras struggle to attract an audience for contemporary music, new American operas are being produced with some regularity in the United States.

The continued appeal of opera as a form of art and entertainment comes, arguably, from its multi-faceted structure. No other art form offers the musical elements of orchestral playing, solo singing, and choral singing, combined with the visual ingredients of costume design, set design, and lighting design, with the textual presence of literature—all occurring simultaneously. The modern listener has all of these numerous and varied elements to attract and sustain his or her interest. The sheer variety of visual and audio stimuli can appeal to a broad spectrum of audience members. In this day of cinematic and television entertainment, the theatrical possibilities available in opera still remain appealing, some four hundred years after the first operatic experiments.

Opera scores have long held the fascination of critical and scholarly writers as well. Numerous scholarly documents present analyses of twentieth-century operatic

scores alone, each offering critical insight into these large-scale, significant works. Some have sought to compare the various stylistic trends emerging in American opera in the last one-third of the century,[1] while others focus on the contents of a single score.[2] Production guides listing the essential information necessary for performance consideration are available for selected American scores written in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[3] Penelope Ann Speedie has written an exhaustive catalogue of American opera, wherein stylistic trends are traced through scores dating from the earliest American efforts to the most contemporary scores available at the time of her research.[4] Modern operatic scores offer fertile possibilities for analysis and exploration. Considering the current trend of performance of new and recently composed American operas, critical analysis of modern scores offers both scholarly and practical applications.

At this moment in American operatic evolution, it is both compelling and relevant to explore in detail one of the most contemporary scores recently composed and produced. Of particular interest is a thorough examination of a new piece written by a seasoned composer: a study of how a veteran composer, who first saw his

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[1] See Robert L. Larsen, "A Study and Comparison of Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*, Robert Ward's *The Crucible*, and Gunther Schuller's *The Visitation*," (D.M.A. diss., Indiana University, 1971).

[2] See Lisa S. Ramer, "A Critical Analysis of Carlisle Floyd's Opera: *Susannah*" (M.M. thesis, University of Washington, 1993).

[3] See Rebecca Hodell Kornick, *Recent American Opera: A Production Guide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[4] Penelope Ann Speedie, *American Operas on American Themes by American Composers: A Survey of Characteristics and Influences* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1991).

popularity begin nearly fifty years ago, approaches a new work, how he treats his subject musically, and how he integrates or discards the stylistic innovations of the last decades. Carlisle Floyd has written one of the most contemporary scores available at the time of this research. His newest opera, the result of a major commission, is *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000).

Numerous scholars have written about Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926), about his works, and about his stature as an American composer.[5] Floyd is a renowned composer of operas, having written several full length and one-act scores. Some of these stage works have suffered the fate of so many twentieth-century pieces, receiving few subsequent performances. However, his opera *Susannah* (1954) has received enduring acclaim, remains in the modern repertory, and is said to be the "most frequently performed opera written by an American."[6] Floyd's operatic version of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* also appears with frequency in American theaters.

Floyd has been repeatedly successful in garnering commissions from sizeable American opera companies, including Santa Fe Opera (*Wuthering Heights*, 1958), New York City Opera (*The Passion of Jonathan Wade*, 1962), and San Francisco

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[5] See Ramer; Kerry McDevitt, "The Stage Works of Carlisle Floyd: 1949—1972" (D.M.A. diss., Juilliard School, 1975); Jeanine L. Shelley, "An Investigation into Folk Elements: Their Interrelationship with Musical Structure, and Realism in Carlisle Floyd's Opera *Susannah*" (M.M. thesis, Youngstown State University, 2000); Mary Lester Senter, "The Monodrama *Flower and Hawk* by Carlisle Floyd" (D.M.A. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1980); Sue Ellen Zank McMurray, "Motival Structure of *Susannah*, a Music Drama by Carlisle Floyd" (M.A. thesis, Central Washington State College, 1967).

[6] David Mermelstein, "*Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd, at the Houston Grand Opera," *The New Criterion* 18, No. 10 (June, 2000): 57.

Opera (*Of Mice and Men*, 1963).[7] *Cold Sassy Tree* was co-commissioned by Houston

Grand Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Baltimore Opera, Opera Carolina and San Diego

Opera.

Floyd is a composer who, after already achieving operatic success and renown

as a composer, lived through the evolution of the myriad musical styles and avant-

garde techniques of the second half of the twentieth century. Floyd's own

compositional style is generally characterized as conservative. Comparisons between

the composer and other Americans such as Samuel Barber and Douglas Moore, and

with the English composer Benjamin Britten are common. Floyd is acknowledged as

a composer who consistently imbues his scores with folk-like tunes. Penelope

Speedie categorized Floyd, along with Aaron Copland (*The Tender Land*), Douglas

Moore (*The Ballad of Baby Doe*) and Lukas Foss (*The Jumping Frog of Calaveras

County*), among others, as a composer associated with "folk elements in American

opera."[8] Speedie calls Floyd's vocal lines "extremely conversational," and cites the

use of hymnody and polymeters in his scores.[9] She notes:

> In all Floyd's operas, his overall emphasis seems to be on touching the
> emotions of the audience. Almost all of his operas deal with people whose
> lives are changed irrevocably or destroyed. Although he incorporates some
> contemporary harmonies and rhythms, his music for the most part is rooted in
> tonal lyricism and is strongly influenced by Southern folk traditions.[10]

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[7] *Seattle Opera eventually premiered Of Mice and Men* after a period of extensive revision by the composer.

[8] Speedie, 581.

[9] Ibid., 693.

[10] Ibid., 694.

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Andrew Stiller, in his short article on Floyd in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, also characterizes the composer's style as conservative.[11] Various histories of twentieth-century music, however, overlook Floyd's music altogether, or offer only a brief nod of acknowledgment.[12] The implication may be that the conservative nature of his operas offers less possibility for commentary and examination than more cutting-edge or adventuresome works.

As a composer living at the turn of the twenty-first century, the stylistic palette available to Floyd for his newest score was vividly diverse. In spite of his available options, the composer's musical choices in *Cold Sassy Tree* reflect an organic evolution of Floyd's own individual voice, intensified and concentrated by his experiences with the music of the last fifty years. As Floyd's most recent addition to his oeuvre, *Cold Sassy Tree* will be the subject of study in this project.

Cold Sassy Tree is based upon the novel of the same name, published by Olive Ann Burns in 1984. The setting is a small town in Georgia, the namesake of the novel, in the year 1900. Floyd chose a story by an American novelist, set, like *Slow Dusk, Susannah,* and *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* among others, in the American South. As stated in the playbill accompanying the premiere performance,

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[11] Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, eds. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.* 2nd ed. London: MacMillan Publishers, 2001. S.v. "Carlisle Floyd," by Andrew Stiller.

[12] See Roger Parker, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 317.

Cold Sassy Tree is "about American attitudes, character—and the joy of language."[13] In this respect, the opera is like several of the Floyd operas that preceded it.

The world premiere took place on 14 April 2000, at the Houston Grand Opera. The conductor for the production was Patrick Summers, Music Director for the Houston Grand Opera. The stage director was Bruce Bereford, of film direction fame, whose directorial credits include the Academy Award-winning film, *Driving Miss Daisy*. The opera was sung in English, with English surtitles projected above the stage. The score is approximately three hours and ten minutes in length, including two intermissions. Table 1 displays the cast of the premiere performance.

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[13] Daniel Webster, "Song of the South," *Stagebill* (Houston: HGO, Spring 2000), 14.

Table 1. Cast of Characters (In Order of Appearance), Voice Types, and Names of the Original Cast Members[14]

Mayor	Tenor	James C. Holloway
Effie Belle Tate	Mezzo	Judith Christin
Thelma Predmore	Mezzo	Marie Lenormand
Lula	Soprano	Kerri Marcinko
Myrtis	Soprano	Jessica Jones
Sheriff	Baritone	Richard Sutliff
Will Tweedy	Tenor	John McVeigh
Rucker Lattimore	Bass-Baritone	Dean Peterson
Mary Willis Tweedy	Soprano	Diane Alexander
Loma Williams	Mezzo	Beth Clayton
Hosie McClendon	Baritone	Matthew Kreger
Luther/Rufus	Tenor	Scott Sully
Lightfoot McClendon	Soprano	Margaret Lloyd
Camp Williams	Tenor	Joseph Evans
Love Simpson	Soprano	Patricia Racette
Clayton McAllister	Baritone	Christopher Schaldenbrand
Dr. Lomax	Bass	Oren Gradus

People of Cold Sassy Tree

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[14] *Stagebill* (Houston: HGO, Spring 2000), 20; Carlisle Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*, perusal copy, 2000, Boosey & Hawkes, New York.

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES

Scholars who have devoted writings to the study of Floyd and his compositions have occasionally explored, if only fleetingly, the connections between musical elements and dramatic propulsion and content in his scores. I find the relationship between musical and dramatic events to be a most compelling area of interest in *Cold Sassy Tree*. The purpose of this project is to analyze the relationship of musical events to the unfolding drama and characterizations in the score, and to identify the unique features of the opera.

The score will be discussed in six chapters. In the first chapter, Floyd's role as librettist will be discussed. Floyd is a seasoned librettist, having written his own adaptations for all of his previous scores. He has also written several articles on the art of crafting librettos. In *Cold Sassy Tree*, the composer found it necessary to deviate, sometimes radically, from the Burns novel upon which the opera is based. These changes in the story will be examined and discussed. A synopsis of the libretto will be included.

The score is dependent on the frequent appearance of leitmotivs. The second chapter will outline the numerous leitmotivs in the score, with labels applied according to each leitmotiv's dramatic use. The subsequent appearances of these leitmotivs within the score will be addressed and the composer's melodic style will also be examined.

The following three chapters will include discussions of each of the three acts

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of the opera. The method of examination will consist of detailed analysis and discussion of one excerpt selected from each act. The sections that will be discussed are the following: from Act I, all of Scene 4, including Rucker's sermon aria and the finale of the act; from Act II, the two consecutive arias occurring at the end of the act; from Act III, the first half of Scene 1, through the exit of Lula, Myrtis, and Effie Belle. The first area of exploration in these chapters will be the melodic characterization of the score, utilizing musical examples excerpted from the opera and containing references to leitmotivs identified in the previous chapter. The harmonic content of the score will be addressed subsequently, again illustrated by musical examples and charts, where necessary. Formal structures will be explored and discussed. A discussion of orchestration matters as they pertain to significant structural and/or dramatic events of the score will be included. Finally, a discussion of the relationship between the text and musical events will appear.

A final chapter will contain a summary of discoveries in *Cold Sassy Tree*. A comparison between the general characteristics of Floyd's earlier scores and this score will be included, as well as a summation of how *Cold Sassy Tree* is reflective of newer techniques.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE

Although several authors have written about Carlisle Floyd and his various

operas, *Cold Sassy Tree* is such a new work that literary comment on the score is

scarce, and in-depth analysis, particularly of the kind found in the present study, is

non-existent. The existing literature written specifically about *Cold Sassy Tree*

consists of a few critical reviews of the Houston premiere of the work, appearing in

magazines and newspapers. Critical response to Floyd's newest opera has been

predominantly favorable, but mixed. Charles Ward called *Cold Sassy* a hit, in his

Houston Chronicle review (17 April 2000) of the Houston Grand Opera premiere.

Joshua Kosman reviewed the Houston production in the *San Francisco Chronicle*,

declaring, "American Opera has a new classic."[15] His headline touted the opera as a

"dramatic triumph," and he later referred to the work as a "minor masterpiece of

musical storytelling and assured theatrical know-how."[16] Heidi Waleson, writing for

the *Wall Street Journal*, called *Cold Sassy Tree* a "well-made, traditional opera with a

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[15] Joshua Kosman, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*. by Carlisle Floyd (Houston Grand Opera), *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 April 2000, 1(D).

[16] Ibid.

strong story and characters, a powerful tonal core and some good tunes."[17] Like the

other newspaper reviewers whose articles were sampled, Waleson drew comparisons

between *Cold Sassy* and Floyd's enduring masterpiece, *Susannah* (1955). Waleson

called the musical language in the newer score more sophisticated and complex than

that of *Susannah*, noting that its roots clearly lie, however, in the older work.[18] In the

Los Angeles Times, Mark Swed called Floyd's new piece a "folksey" comedy.[19] He

praised the comedic success of the work in the wake of the predominantly tragic

operas written in the last decade. Swed summarized the composer's stylistic

approach in the following way, saying that Floyd believes:

> American opera should sound like American opera—harmonies are simple
> and direct, tunes are tunes, emotions are elemental and explosive, bad guys
> are not ambiguous, vocal lines are easy to sing, production requirements will
> not break the bank. Floyd proudly writes people's opera.[20]

Scott Cantrell, writing for *Opera News*, cited orchestral writing as the score's best

feature, calling it "lush, colorful and deftly mood-specific."[21] Regarding the musical

language of the score, Cantrell assessed the opera as conservative, proposing that it

wouldn't have sounded "modern" even in 1950, and comparing the piece with

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[17] Heidi Waleson, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd (Houston Grand Opera), *Wall Street Journal*, 25 April 2000, A24.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Mark Swed, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd (Houston Grand Opera), in *Los Angeles Times*, 17 April 2000, F1.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Scott Cantrell, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd (Houston Grand Opera), in *Opera News* 65 (August 2000): 71-72.

Barber's *Vanessa* and Robert Ward's *The Crucible*.[22] The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's*

Robert Croan agreed that Floyd has always been a "conservative" composer, saying:

> To be sure, this is not a work that will advance the art of opera. . . . Cold Sassy
> Tree has a distinctly retro sound. . . [but Floyd] knows his craft, he writes
> beautifully and idiomatically for the voice, and he has a good sense of theater
> – something many more "advanced" and highly respected composers of today
> lack when it comes to writing an opera.[23]

David Mermelstein, writing for *The New Criterion*, offered one of the most

enthusiastic responses to the premiere. Mermelstein described, with dismay, the lack

of excitement about the *Cold Sassy* premiere. This lack of anticipatory "buzz" was

starkly opposed to the critically hyped appearances of other recent scores, by such

composers as André Previn (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1998), William Bolcom (*A*

View From the Bridge, 1999), and John Harbison (*The Great Gatsby*, 1999).

Mermelstein noted that *The New York Times* (a publication to which he is a regular

arts contributor) elected to refrain from sending a critic to the premiere at all. He

described the mood of the critics in attendance in the following way, noting:

> . . . several journalists who were present made little effort to hide their
> contempt for Floyd's scores, even using the damning word "accessible" to
> describe his easy-on-the-ears music and straightforward librettos. They
> should have held their tongues, for in the event, Cold Sassy Tree proved as
> effective as it was unassuming, as taut as it was tender, and as sharp as it was
> honest. . . .Cold Sassy Tree does not aspire to great depths or great heights.
> Nor is it a self-conscious work, bashfully standing in the shadows, convinced
> of its own inferiority. Rather, it confidently declares itself and gets on with

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[22] Ibid., 71.

[23] Robert Croan, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd, (Houston Grand Opera), in *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 19 April 2000: E3.

things.[24]

Mermelstein continued his praise of the opera, calling Floyd's new work a "lean folk

opera."[25] He described the work in terms of the piece sounding American, positing

that it "owes little to its European antecedents," and staking a claim that "old-

fashioned Americana lies at the heart of Cold Sassy Tree."[26]

Skeptical commentary about the merit of the new score includes comments by

Carl Cunningham in the *American Record Guide*. Cunningham stated:

> One is left wondering whether this pleasant, innocuous evening in the theater
> sustains enough interest to merit the effort involved in composing and
> producing it. . . . Too often sentimentality emerges as the dominant emotion
> and this gentle, nostalgic piece ends leaving the audience without the cathartic
> thrill one seeks in an operatic experience.[27]

Dissertations and Theses

Several dissertations and theses have been written on Floyd and his operas.

Lisa S. Ramer devoted the attention of her Master's Degree thesis to analysis of

Floyd's *Susannah*. Her paper focuses on character study of the various personalities

in the score, offering particularly an examination of the title character. Ramer also

explores the origins of the Susannah story. The author's musical focus lies in the

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[24] David Mermelstein, "*Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd, at the Houston Grand Opera," *The New Criterion* 18, No. 10 (June, 2000): 57.

[25] Ibid., 57.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Carl Cunningham, review of *Cold Sassy Tree*, by Carlisle Floyd, (Houston Grand Opera), in *American Record Guide* 33 63 (July/ August 2000): 33.

13

identification and labeling of musical "themes" in the opera.[28] The transcript of an

interview between Ramer and Carlisle Floyd is included in the paper. Jeanine L.

Shelley also explored *Susannah*, with particular attention to the folk elements in the

opera.[29] Sue Ellen Zank McMurray examined the "Motival Structure of *Susannah*,"

in her Master of Arts thesis at Central Washington State College.[30] Mary Lester

Senter chose to analyze Floyd's monodrama *Flower and Hawk*, in her Doctor of

Musical Arts document at the University of Texas at Austin.[31]

In his document, *The Stage Works of Carlisle Floyd*, Kerry McDevitt

endeavors to describe major musical events in Floyd's early operas through

theoretical analysis. McDevitt refers to conventional areas of analysis, such as formal

structures, motivic recurrence, modality, and chord quality to describe events in the

scores. The author also alludes to the dramatic impact that some of these musical

events have on the effectiveness of the score, although this facet is explored only

minimally. McDevitt focuses on analyses of *Susannah* and *Slow Dusk*, identifying

recurring features of Floyd's style. These harmonic and rhythmic features include

pedal points, chords with quintal or quartal qualities, parallel fourths and fifths, varied

ostinato patterns, modal keys, and unprepared modulation to distant keys.[32] The

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[28] Ramer, 25.

[29] See Shelley.

[30] See McMurray.

[31] See Senter.

[32] McDevitt, 57-63.

author also cites Floyd's "own style of leitmotiv," and his affinity for folk-like tunes

or hymns.[33] An additional feature cited by McDevitt is the presence of spoken

dialogue, a characteristic also frequently found in *Cold Sassy Tree.*

McDevitt includes a biographical chapter on Carlisle Floyd that chronicles his

life through 1972. The author also describes the events surrounding Floyd's

composition of each of the operas written before 1975.

Also available in the McDevitt paper is a discussion of Floyd's librettos, as

well as the composer's libretto-writing technique. McDevitt's comments about

Floyd's librettos are primarily qualitative, rather than analytical. McDevitt refers to

the sense of dramatic flow, for example, created by the libretto of *Wuthering Heights.*

He observes that Floyd has created, in *Wuthering Heights,* action that "moves swiftly

toward climax and personal destruction with the inclusion of only an occasional scene

of lighter mood to provide temporary relief from the harsh, prevailing mood of the

piece."[34] McDevitt also cites the recurring use of dialect in the Floyd operas, naming

Susannah and *Of Mice and Men* as specific examples. As this study will show, this

feature appears in *Cold Sassy Tree* as well.

Journal Articles

A wealth of journal articles exists on composer Carlisle Floyd, particularly

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[33] Ibid., 60.

[34] Ibid., 50.

pertaining to *Susannah*.[35] Many of these articles were written in the 1950s, around the time of the premiere of *Susannah*. Many others date from the past five years, as the same score has seen a resurgence of popularity.

Floyd himself has written several articles about his own operas. These essays include description of his own libretto-designing strategies, as well as commentary about individual scores.[36] The journal articles available at present that specifically address *Cold Sassy Tree* exist in the form of reviews and have been discussed above.

[35] See William R. Braun, "In the Beginning" *Opera News* 63 (April 1999): 24-25; Thomas Hernandez, "A Dialectical Approach to Event and Emotion in Carlisle Floyd's Susannah" *Opera Journal* 17 (1984): 23-32; Barrymore Laurence Scherer, "Southern Revival" *Opera News* 63 (April 1999): 16-21; Scott Steele, "Nude Angels and 'Creepy' People" *Maclean's* 110 (3 February 1997): 65; Paul Thomason, "Song of the South" *Opera News* 63 (April 1999): 26-29.

[36] Carlisle Floyd, "Apologia for Composers of Opera" *Central Opera Service Bulletin* (New York: Central Opera Service of the Metropolitan Opera Company, 1959); Carlisle Floyd, "The Composer as Librettist" *Opera News* 27 (10 November 1962): 9-12; Carlisle Floyd, "The Making of an Opera: Some Considerations" In *Perspectives, Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theater: A Series of Fifteen Monographs* (Washington D.C.: OPERA America, 1983): 19-25; Carlisle Floyd, "Of Mice and Men" *Opera Journal* 4 (Winter 1971); Carlisle Floyd, "Of Mice and Men," *Opera News* 34 (6 September 1969) 20-21; Carlisle Floyd, "On the Librettist's Art," *American Music Teacher* 16 (April/May 1967): 36-38; Carlisle Floyd, "Playwriting: In the Opera House," *Theatre Arts* 42 (January 1958): 32-33.

CHAPTER 3

FLOYD AS LIBRETTIST

Although many composers have written their own librettos, Floyd is relatively unique among American composers in this capacity. Having studied both music and creative writing simultaneously in college, Floyd found it natural to pen the librettos for his own operas.[37] In his dual role as composer and librettist, Floyd joins such composers as Berg, Berlioz, Boito, Borodin, Delius, Hindemith, Holst, Janacek, Leoncavallo, Lortzing, Menotti, Moussorgsky, Pfitzner, Pizzetti, Prokofiev, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Wagner.[38] Some of these composers wrote original libretti, while others adapted existing plays or other materials. Floyd has often assumed this role of "adaptor," selecting the original works of other writers. Such is the case in *Cold Sassy Tree*.

The composer has authored several articles on the art of libretto writing, revealing some of his approach to the task. Floyd takes care to explain that a successful libretto must reflect the disparity between the length of time required to

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[37] Carlisle Floyd, "The Composer as Librettist," 9.

[38] The Earl of Harewood, ed., *Kobbé's Complete Opera Book*, 3rd ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969) quoted in Kerry McDevitt, "The Stage Works of Carlisle Floyd: 1949-1972" (D.M.A. diss., Juilliard School, 1975), 45.

speak a segment of text versus the length of time required to sing the same text.[39] Floyd outlines the advantages enjoyed by the composer who writes his own librettos in an article in *Opera News*. "Perhaps the greatest advantage enjoyed by a composer-librettist is his tremendously increased awareness of dramatic elements, a general sharpening of his theatrical acuity."[40] Another advantage cited by Floyd for the composer-librettist is his heightened instinctive awareness of what type of drama particularly suits him and his musical style.

Floyd describes his notion of centering a new libretto around a dramatic "spine" in his various journal articles. He promotes the selection of "credible, multi-faceted characters whose behavior must be properly motivated and logically realized."[41] Floyd believed as early as 1962, when he wrote about his opera *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* in *Opera News*, that the audience of the day demanded "much more for its pleasure than mere vocalism or even beautiful music. This audience [is] steeped in a realistic tradition through its exposure to films, the stage and even television."[42] Floyd has referred repeatedly to his attraction to cinematic subject matter. His choice of *Cold Sassy Tree* reflects this affinity for the cinematic; the Burns novel was adapted into a film by the same name in 1989.

Floyd's 1983 article for OPERA America's *Perspectives* offers exceptional

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[39] Carlisle Floyd, "On the Librettist's Art," 36.

[40] Carlisle Floyd, "The Composer as Librettist," 9.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 10.

insight into the composer's choices and his creative process when both choosing a source or subject and writing a libretto, as well as when creating the musical score. In the article, Floyd comments about both musical and textual considerations. He begins his discussion of the libretto-writing process by saying, "Probably nothing is more critical to the ultimate success or failure of an opera than what material is chosen by the composer and librettist to be fashioned into a work for the musical stage."[43] He proceeds to cite two essential components in a potential story: action and passion. He notes that composers are always "on the lookout for vivid, preferably larger-than-life characters who are capable of great feeling and have the capacity to reveal what they feel."[44] Floyd believes that the potential plot must allow the transformation from written narrative to action on the operatic stage. He posits that a story worthy of adaptation should contain "catalytic occasions. . . , the crisis situation against which characters reveal themselves and their true feelings in a heightened emotional state."[45] Floyd describes, in *Perspectives,* his belief that the librettist must consider whether the potential story is viable in "terms of physical requirements and time span," noting that for him personally, a story that includes large leaps in time span "invariably loses dramatic tension."[46]

Floyd cites tasks specific to the librettist as an adaptor of an existing story as

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[43] Carlisle Floyd, "The Making of an Opera: Some Considerations," 20.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 21.

[46] Ibid.

including the "sharpening of the dramatic focus,"[47] as well as finding moments

worthy of possible expansion. Describing his actions to achieve this end, he states:

> everything retained [in the libretto] must contribute to the central story line or
> it is best eliminated; this demands a certain amount of ruthlessness on the part
> of the adapter which is not always easy to summon, especially in the case of a
> scene one is particularly fond of, but it almost always pays off in the long
> run.[48]

Floyd similarly describes this task in *Opera News*, referring specifically to his

experiences adapting the novel *Wuthering Heights* for his 1958 opera:

> In adapting the long and expansive novel *Wuthering Heights* for my recent
> opera, I discovered the necessity of excising superfluous characters, scenes
> and subplots and of learning to combine several scenes related in subject
> matter into one telling episode.[49]

Floyd faced the same task in adapting *Cold Sassy Tree*, which is also an extended,

expansive novel, into a viable libretto.

The *Cold Sassy Tree* Libretto

In a note in the program for the Houston premiere of *Cold Sassy Tree*, Floyd

praises the Burns novel for its vivid characters and broad emotional range. He relates

a particular challenge with which he has grappled in writing his newest libretto,

namely "that of dealing with material in which comic and serious elements coexisted

at close range and where the shift from one to the other was frequently accomplished

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[47] Ibid., 22.

[48] Ibid., 22.

[49] Floyd, "The Composer as Librettist," 12.

without transition."[50] Floyd ultimately concludes that "nothing is more genuinely 'life-like' than unforeseen change, and also that sharp contrast is an essential ingredient of both successful drama and comedy."[51]

Many significant differences exist between the Burns novel and Floyd's libretto. The novel is very long, a sprawling work too lengthy in its entirety for the scope of a single three-hour opera. Critic Scott Cantrell notes in his *Opera News* review of the Houston premiere that Floyd has done a remarkable job of creating a libretto from Burns's "stream-of-consciousness text."[52] Cantrell continues, saying:

> Although billed as a comic opera, *Cold Sassy Tree* is really a heart-warming story of love, loss and the life force, embellished with plenty of laughs along the way; dramatically, it's a balance with which Mozart would have been happy.[53]

The protagonist in Burns's *Cold Sassy Tree* is Rucker Blakeslee, whose name was changed by Floyd for the operatic version to Rucker Lattimore. Lattimore is the owner and keeper of the town general store, and therefore occupies a position of distinction in the community. The slow, reliable pace of the quiet town is disrupted when Lattimore, only three weeks after his wife's death, announces his intentions to remarry. This announcement is the impetus that propels the story. The entire body of the novel is related, first person, by Lattimore's young grandson, Will Tweedy.

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[50] Carlisle Floyd, "From the Composer/Librettist," *Stagebill* (Houston: HGO, Spring 2000):38b.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Cantrell, 71.

[53] Ibid.

Floyd maintains some of the narration within the opera, setting it as timed, spoken text supported by orchestral underscoring.

Musical Example 1. *Parlato* Narration in *Cold Sassy Tree*, Floyd.[54]

Whereas the character of Will is omnipresent during the novel, Floyd eliminates Will's presence on stage when required by the dramatic situation.

Due to the length of the novel, numerous events have been omitted in the libretto. Some of these episodes are major developments in the plot of the novel, while others are merely ancillary. Some situations are omitted due to the practicalities of production demands. The removal of other circumstances and events alters the plot, sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly. A further significant area of change in the libretto is the exclusion of characters important to the novel.

Of the scenes that would pose significant production problems, one major omission is a scene wherein Will Tweedy is caught on a tall railroad bridge. When a train barrels toward him, Will narrowly escapes disaster by slipping between the rails

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[54] Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*. 202.

of the tracks. Another potentially problematic staging issue stems from Rucker Blakeslee having only one hand in the novel. The character lost his other hand during the Civil War. Both the Houston and Austin productions avoided the issue, letting the character appear with both hands intact. Floyd also removed the several scenes in Burns's volume wherein Rucker and Hoyt Tweedy purchase cars, take the cars on trips, and open the first car dealership in Cold Sassy.

Numerous changes in the libretto involve plot alterations. A significant event excluded in Floyd's libretto is the suicide of Loma Williams's husband, Camp. Camp Williams appears, along with Lightfoot McClendon and Rucker, in the general store during the climactic robbery scene in Act III. In this scene of the opera, Camp's general ineptitude, culminating in his inability to call for help when Rucker overwhelms the bandits, leads directly to the fatal gunfire. Conversely, Rucker appears in the store alone in the novel. The other striking choice in Floyd's libretto is the altered identity of Love Simpson's rapist. In both versions of the story, Love relates the story of the sordid event from her childhood to her husband Rucker. The rapist in the original tome was Love's own father. Floyd changes the identity of the rapist to a neighbor across the hall, tempering the shock value of the revelation.

The primary example of exclusion of characters important to the novel is the omission of the character Hoyt Tweedy, Will's father in the original. In Floyd's adaptation, Will explains that his father died when he was very young. Hoyt Tweedy plays a major role in the novel, as the head of the younger generation of Rucker's family. Hoyt is especially important in the final chapters of the Burns novel, stepping

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forward to assume the position of patriarch in the wake of Rucker's death. Floyd also omits the minor character of Mary Toy Tweedy, Will's younger sister.

In his libretto, Floyd changed the personality or function of various characters in the novel. For example, in the novel, the character Hosie McClendon, a mill boy, gains Rucker's confidence and takes a job working in the general store. In the opera, Hosie is one of the two robbers at the end of the story. Hosie and Lightfoot are engaged to be married in the novel, whereas they are brother and sister in the opera. Will battles jealousy in Burns's original, resenting Hosie and his relationship with Lightfoot, while his relationship with Hosie is limited in the stage version to a fist fight between the two in Act I, Scene 2.

Another major alteration effected in the libretto involves Will's career aspirations. In the Floyd adaptation, Will narrates the story as a professional writer, recalling his childhood. Numerous references are made during the opera to Will's deep-rooted dream to become a writer. In Burns's novel, Will longs to be a farmer, though his gift as a storyteller is highlighted repeatedly. For example, after Will invents a series of fantastical tales about his aunt, she gives him a journal and advises that he should become a writer some day. Floyd's decision to turn Will into a writer was natural, considering these allusions in the novel.

Burns has written the text of the novel in a deliberate phonetic representation of the desired colloquial sound. The author peppered the dialogue with Southern slang as well:

> "Where's the chi'ren?" Grandpa boomed out. "Y'all come kiss your new
> granny." He turned to Miss Love and laughed. "Haw, I didn't think till now,

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but I done made you a granmaw!"[55]

Floyd maintains the heavy Southern dialect of the Burns novel, particularly in the *parlato* narration delivered by Will Tweedy. In the Houston and Austin premieres, the singers affected a Southern accent as well, elongating vowels and employing extra diphthongs and triphthongs.[56] However, occasionally Floyd has tempered Burns's lavish use of dialect to improve the lyric possibilities of the text.

Table 2. Comparison of Burns text and Floyd adaptation.

Burns.	[Rucker:] Hit warn't God figgered it out, Love. Hit was me. And now I'm astin' you to be my wife.[57]
Floyd.	[Rucker:] What I want most, in all the world, is for you to be a real wife t' me.[58]

The use of dialect also serves to set Love Simpson's character apart from the rest of the townspeople. Love, who is from Baltimore, has studied elocution and is regarded by the town's residents as a northerner. Her parlance lacks the peculiarities of the thick Georgia drawl that characterizes the speech of the rest of the townspeople. Love is an outsider in every way in Cold Sassy. The contrast between her manner of speaking and that of the rest of the characters amplifies their differences.

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[55] Olive Burns, *Cold Sassy Tree* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984), 95.

[56] Cantrell, 71.

[57] Burns, 305.

[58] Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*, 207.

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Time Constraints in the Opera Versus the Novel

Because of the limited time frame available to establish characters and their relationships during a three-hour opera, sometimes the dramatic impact is less intense in the stage version than in the novel. The libretto offers a less complete portrait of the characters, simply because of this limited duration. The composer cites a critic who described the novel as "the story of an old man growing younger and a young man growing up and the woman who, without intending to, becomes the catalyst for their change."[59] The audience can't understand as completely, in the opera, however, the relationship between Will Tweedy and Love Simpson as Will matures. Neither is Rucker's complex relationship with Love as fully fleshed out, as the two finally acknowledge their feelings for each other and try to reconcile the dark events in both of their pasts. A striking example of necessary truncation in the libretto is the resolution of conflict between Love and Rucker after she reveals the details of her childhood attack. In the novel, several weeks and many situations pass as Rucker tries, within the context of turn-of-the-twentieth-century America, to overcome the shock and implications of his wife's revelation. Floyd understandably resolves the couple's relationship in one single climactic scene at the end of Act II. The necessary catharsis is still achieved in the scene, even though the resolution that follows is hasty.

Since the premiere of *Cold Sassy Tree*, Floyd's libretto has been critically

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[59] Carlisle Floyd, Houston, To Whom it May Concern, March 1999, Houston Grand Opera Archives and Resource Center, Houston.

evaluated. Critics agree that the composer was successful in his attempt to adjust the protracted story for the stage, suggesting that Floyd has surpassed the task of creating a merely functional libretto. Rather, reviewers maintain that the composer has created a skillful, effective adaptation of Burns's original. Having achieved this end, Floyd maintained the integrity of the popular novel and the strength of the story remains a major strength of the opera. A synopsis of the libretto appears in appendix 1 of this study.

CHAPTER 4

MELODY IN THE OPERA:
CATALOGUE OF THEMES AND LEITMOTIVS

Floyd is a gifted melodist, as is apparent in this, his newest opera. The

composer treats many of the themes in *Cold Sassy Tree* as leitmotivs, using them to

create unity within the score and to add dramatic significance by aiding in

establishment of character identity. It is interesting and informative to catalogue

these melodies at the point of their initial appearances, briefly describe them, to add a

descriptive label that elucidates the dramatic function of each, and to indicate the

locations of their subsequent use in the opera.

Floyd has an affinity for long, angular melodies, as shown frequently in *Cold*

Sassy Tree. The composer alternatively works in a disjointed, rhythmically

dependent declamatory style as a foil to this purposefully lyric approach. Also, as

mentioned previously, Floyd frequently employs melodrama, with Will's character

intoning text above orchestral underscoring as he supplies the background fabric of

the plot. These contrasting characteristics create a richly varied melodic palette.

Act I

The opera begins grandiloquently with an immediate statement of a striking

leitmotiv that recurs often throughout the opera. This predominant leitmotiv

frequently appears when the town of Cold Sassy itself is highlighted. The melodic

and harmonic structure of the leitmotiv, as well as its *tutti* orchestration, all serve as essential components of the recurring measures. The leitmotiv is built on a D pedal point with a tritone resolving outward to a perfect fifth above:

Musical Example 2. "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv, Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*, Act I, Scene 1, mm.1-2.[60]
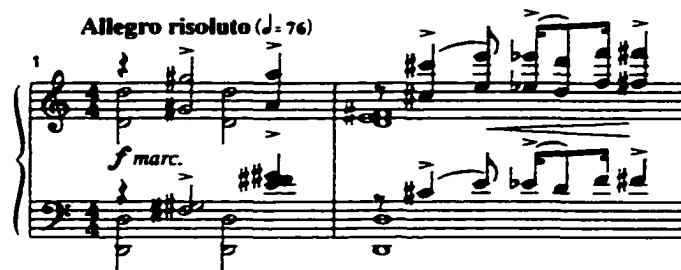
The "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv also opens the fourth scene of the first act, which begins with a *tutti* ensemble of the townspeople. "Cold Sassy" appears again in measures 105 through 108, and again at the conclusion of the first act, in mm. 244 through 248. The second act begins with new material, followed closely by the "Cold Sassy" motive, stated with a new, introspective character. The third act begins with "Cold Sassy" as well, this time in combination with another leitmotiv to be described later. In the epilogue that ends the opera, the leitmotiv is heard prominently in measures 170 and 171, and "Cold Sassy" comprises the final five measures of the piece.

Another motive associated with the town itself first appears early in the score, in measure seventeen. This leitmotiv recurs throughout the opera, and often

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[60] Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*. Score, perusal copy, 2000, Boosey and Hawkes, New York. 1.

accompanies either town gossip or textual commentary about the name of the town itself. This "Gossip" leitmotiv, with its chirping grace note ornamentation, sometimes accompanies the entrances or actions of strong figures in the community, such as Effie Belle.

Musical Example 3. "Gossip" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 1, m. 17.[61]
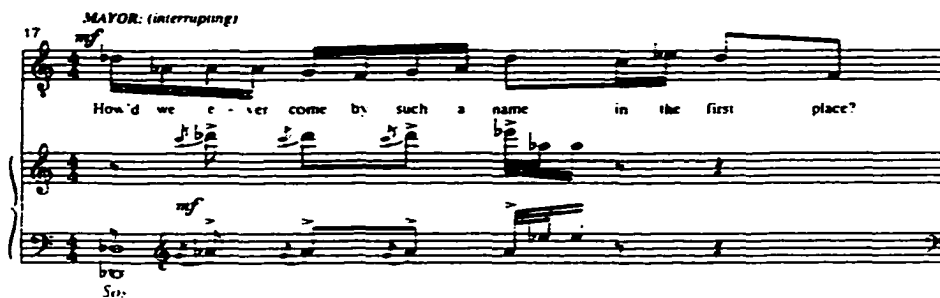
The first time that Will Tweedy is heard, in Act I, Scene 1, his text is set as *parlato* narration. When he first sings, his vocal line is a setting of the next leitmotiv (see musical example 4). The orchestra first presents the tune, in measures 48 through 52. The leitmotiv is characterized by an extremely lyrical melody, and appears in various instruments of the orchestra as well as different voice parts. The text coupled with this melody identifies the character of the leitmotiv as one of youthful wonder, experienced by Will and later by Lightfoot McClendon. The leitmotiv appears again in Act II, Scene 2, as the theme of Lightfoot's aria, "I yearn so to know things." The melody accompanies the climax of Will and Lightfoot's exchange that follows the aria, at the moment of their first kiss, shown in musical example 5. In the first scene of Act III, the leitmotiv returns in the orchestra alone

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[61] Ibid., 3.

(mm. 168-171) when Will sees Lightfoot in his grandfather's store.

Musical Example 4. "Youthful wonder" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 1, mm. 52-56.[62]

Musical Example 5. "Youthful wonder" leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 2, mm. 82-86.[63]

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[62] Ibid., 8.

[63] Ibid., 178.

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Several leitmotivs are associated with Rucker, who is the predominant

character in the opera. With Rucker's initial entrance comes a statement of his first

leitmotiv, shown in musical example 6. The major mode of the statement, its

distinctive. leaping melodic pattern, and also its characteristic rhythmic structure

comprise the essential recurring ingredients of the leitmotiv. "Rucker 1" returns in

the orchestra in measure 112, as Will proffers narrative about his grandfather. and the

leitmotiv permeates the subsequent section, through measure 144. It appears in

measures 196 and 197 in augmentation. as shown in musical example 7. In Act I.

Scene 3. "Rucker 1" appears in measures 24 through 26, with additional allusions in

mm. 38 through 41, mm. 106 through 108. and mm. 129 through 130.

Musical Example 6. "Rucker 1" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 1, mm. 89-92.[64]

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[64] Ibid.. 18.

Mary Willis's and Loma's reaction, upon hearing that their father will remarry, produces a leitmotiv that expresses their horror and guilt. "The Shame" provides the structure for their duet at the end of Act I, Scene 1, shown in musical example 8. A severe, dotted rhythm and descending melodic pattern characterize the leitmotiv. "The Shame" reappears in Act I, Scene 3, when Rucker brings Love home as his new wife and asks his daughters to greet her. The leitmotiv returns in measure 61 of the same scene. In Act II, Scene 1, "The Shame" returns in measure 60, as the two daughters remove their mother's personal belongings from her home—the house that now belongs to Love Simpson.

Musical Example 7. "Rucker 1" leitmotiv in augmentation, Act I, Scene 1, mm. 196-197.[65]

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[65] Ibid., 26-27.

Musical Example 8. "The Shame" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 1, mm. 230-231.[66]

The next important leitmotiv is associated with Love. It is derived from her

Act I, Scene 3 aria, "Rented Rooms." The leitmotiv is identified by both the triplets

on beats one and four, and by its melodic structure. The aria begins in measure 160,

but the leitmotiv is foreshadowed in the orchestra several measures earlier, in

measure 150. It illustrates Floyd's lyricism at its best (see musical example 9).

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[66] Ibid., 31.

Musical Example 9. "Rented Rooms" leitmotiv. Act I, Scene 3, mm. 160-161.[67]

As Love confides in Mary Willis and Loma in the aria, this melancholy leitmotiv illustrates Love's regret and unease about her past. Later, in Act II, Scene 3, "Rented Rooms" returns when Rucker first kisses Love. This reference to "Rented Rooms" in the orchestra, as Love reacts negatively, reveals that her disquiet is connected to dark events from her past. The leitmotiv appears later in the scene, in the aria wherein Love relates the details of her rape, which occurred in her family's rented apartment. At the musical apex of the aria, an agitato statement of "Rented Rooms" is present in the orchestra:

Musical Example 10. "Rented Rooms" leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 3, m. 248.[68]

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[67] Ibid., 78.

[68] Ibid., 212.

Floyd uses two recognizable church melodies in the fourth scene of Act I,

"Blest Be the Tie that Binds" and the Doxology. The former appears in measure 60,

during a scene that takes place in the local Baptist church.[69] The congregation sings

the hymn; Love and Will join them at measure 68. As the congregation reacts,

disdainfully, to Love's presence at the service, the choir breaks into a fragmented

version of the melody at measure 70. Will and Love continue above the choir with

the hymn tune. First the women and then the men drop out completely. leaving only

the two soloists to finish the hymn with a spectacular. *fortissimo* flourish.

Musical Example 11. "Blest Be the Tie that Binds." In Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree.* Act I, Scene 4, mm. 59-63.[70. 71]
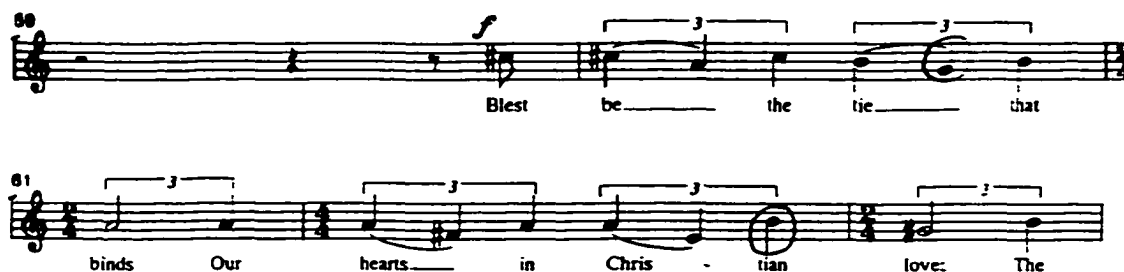
The transition to the next scene contains a rhythmically charged leitmotiv that

often appears when the meddling neighbor, Effie Belle, creates trouble for Love and

Rucker. The leitmotiv is characterized by an accented thirty-second note pattern that

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[69] Love Simpson attends the Cold Sassy Methodist church in the Burns novel.

[70] Ibid., 97.

[71] Intervals altered from the original hymn-tune are circled.

mirrors the rhythm of the corresponding character's name (see musical example 12).

Its initial appearance in the fifth measure of the opera highlights the character's

importance in the town. "Effie Belle" is coupled with "Blest Be the Tie" to effect the

transition between the two halves of Scene 4. The second half of the scene is

permeated by the "Effie Belle" motive. It appears both in fragmentation and in its

entirety (mm. 109-132), as Love and Will tell Rucker about the rude behavior of the

townspeople at the morning church service.

Musical Example 12. "Effie Belle" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 4, m. 93.[72]
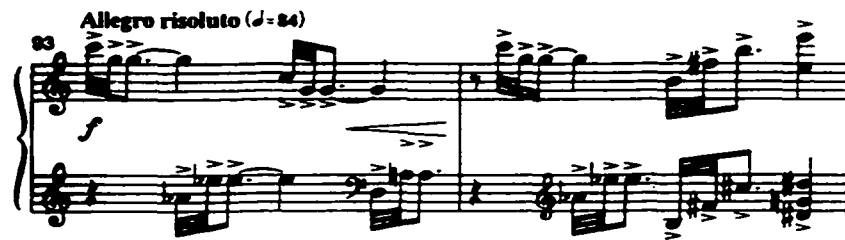
Eventually, as their anger is diffused and Rucker takes over, only the characteristic

rhythm from the first beat of the leitmotiv remains. This portion is combined with the

last beat of "Young Rucker," a new leitmotiv that will be described later in this

chapter (see musical example 13). "Effie Belle" reappears in the third act, in Scene 1,

as the character shops for a new hat.

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[72] Ibid., 105.

Musical Example 13. "Effie Belle" leitmotiv combined with "Young Rucker," Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*, mm.109-110.[73]

The "Effie Belle" leitmotiv is also heard in the epilogue, when the character speaks as the representative voice of the town, finally conceding her acceptance to Love. After Love announces her pregnancy to the community, the Effie Belle leitmotiv can be heard, chirping in the orchestra.

At the beginning of Act I, Scene 4, the townspeople sing a leitmotiv that reverently describes Rucker's deceased wife. A derivative of the same leitmotiv becomes a derogatory reference to Rucker's new wife at the end of the scene:

Musical Example 14. "That Sainted Woman" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 4, mm. 3-4.[74]

That saint - ed wom - an, not yet cold in her grave.

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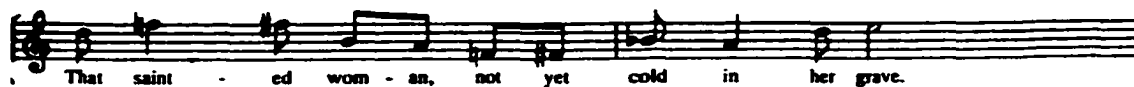
[73] Ibid., 107.

[74] Ibid.. 87.

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Musical Example 15. "This Shameless Hussy" leitmotiv. Act I, Scene 4, mm. 219-220.[75]

Rucker's sermon is one of the most powerful pieces in the opera. The second half of the sermon includes an expressively tender tune that returns later in the score. The melody serves as the most significant element of the leitmotiv, but the accompanying harmonic pattern also sometimes supports the returning statements.

Musical Example 16. "Sermon" leitmotiv, Act I, Scene 4, excerpted from mm. 172-175.[76]

The leitmotiv returns in Act II, Scene 1, when Love gazes tenderly upon her husband after he has performed an act of great kindness for her (mm. 130-131).

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[75] Ibid., 120.

[76] Ibid.

In the finale of the act, the Doxology is heard in its entirety. The tune

appears prominently within the context of an elaborate ensemble that will be

discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this study.

Act II

The three measures of tranquil introductory music in the first scene of Act II

bear a harmonic resemblance to the "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv heard previously. The

high register and slurred articulation contribute to the tranquil effect of the leitmotiv,

which, in contrast to the robust "Cold Sassy," lacks bass instruments. This "Tranquil

Cold Sassy" leads to the introspective statement of the first "Cold Sassy," (see

musical example 17). This new mood in the town colors the opening exchange

between Rucker and Love. The mood and the leitmotiv both disappear when Mary

Willis and Loma arrive, bringing "The Shame" with them. One of the subsequent

references to "Tranquil Cold Sassy" occurs when Love and Rucker resolve the tense

situation that arises when Clayton McAllister arrives from Texas to reclaim Love as

his former fiancée. When calm has been restored, and McAllister leaves town, the

same music returns (mm. 318-319). "Tranquil Cold Sassy" also reappears to

conclude the scene (mm. 378-379).

Love's influence begins to affect Rucker, causing a number of youthful

changes in the old man. An outward manifestation of these changes is apparent when

Rucker shaves off his copious beard and mustache, revealing a more youthful

countenance. When he presents his new face to his daughters, who are horrified, a

new, exuberant leitmotiv is heard. The "Young Rucker" leitmotiv (see musical

example 18), with its leaping, slurred perfect fourth opening, is heard numerous times

in the scene. The final sixteenth-note rhythmic cell of the leitmotiv is of especial

importance later in the opera. The leitmotiv is vigorously stated in the opening of Act

II, Scene 3, where the setting is Rucker and Love's home and the scene portrays

Rucker as laughing and youthful. "Young Rucker" is heard often in the scene, which

includes characters Rucker, Will, and Loma (mm. 27-55, m. 79). The motive often

appears in fragmentation.

Musical Example 17. "Tranquil Cold Sassy" leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 1, mm. 1-3.[77]

When Rucker, later in the scene, reveals to Love that he has installed indoor

plumbing during her absence, a *fortissimo* statement of "Young Rucker" punctuates

the climactic flush of the toilet. This particular statement of the leitmotiv reinforces

its association with the youthful changes in the protagonist, brought about by his new

relationship with Love. Earlier in the opera, it is evident that Rucker has refused to

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[77] Ibid., 130.

install plumbing during his decades of habitation in the house; now he has complied, to please his young wife. "Young Rucker" returns again in Act III, Scene I, at the moment when Rucker overwhelms the robbers in his store. The leitmotiv reappears when one of the robbers shoots Rucker, but the pitch pattern is altered. The melodic motion in this statement is now continuously descending, and lacks the ascending rebound found in the original statement (see musical example 19). The final ensemble of the opera, which appears in the epilogue, is constructed on "Young Rucker," as well. The ensemble takes place during the funeral party held in Rucker's honor.

Musical Example 18. "Young Rucker" leitmotiv, Act II, Scene I, mm. 111-112.[78]

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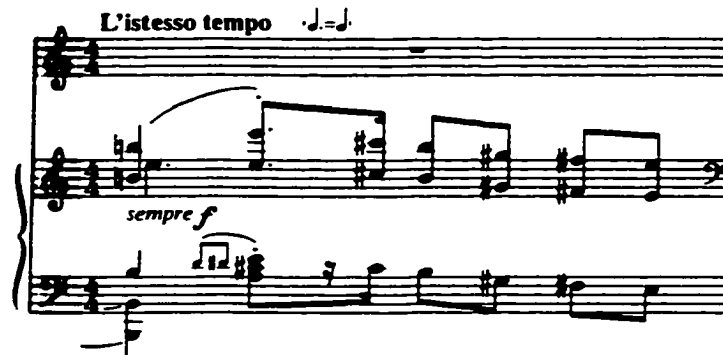
[78] Ibid., 141.

Musical Example 18, continued. "Young Rucker" leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 1, mm. 111-112. [79]

Musical Example 19. "Young Rucker" leitmotiv, altered, Act III, Scene 1, mm. 341-342. [80]
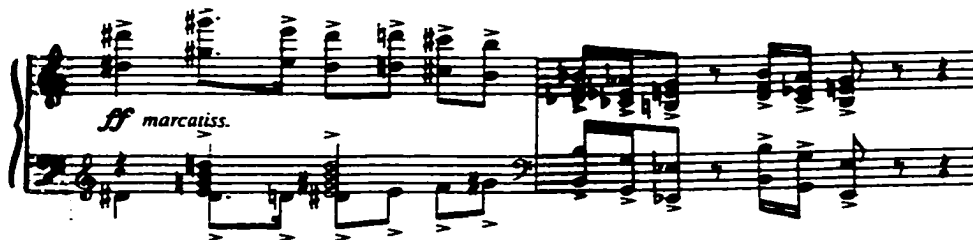
The character Clayton McAllister only appears in one scene of the opera: Act

II, Scene 1. The melody that later serves as a theme to his aria introduces McAllsiter

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[79] Ibid., 141.

[80] Ibid., 259.

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as he enters the stage. The same leitmotiv musically unifies his scene.

Musical Example 20. "Clayton McAllister," leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 1, excerpted from mm. 245-246.[81]

Rucker's second aria delivers a heartfelt revelation to Love about his romantic feelings for her. The melody is tender and warm, supported by a lush D-flat major orchestral accompaniment. The tune, with both its broad note values and forthrightly sincere intent, is similar in character to the "Sermon" leitmotiv from Act I.

Musical Example 21. "Rucker's Love," leitmotiv, Act II, Scene 3, excerpted from mm. 171-172.[82]

This leitmotiv returns in Act III, Scene 2, in measure 108, as Rucker lies dying and thanks Love for giving him a "whole new life." As Love tries to tell him about their unborn child, "Rucker's Love" is heard in the orchestral accompaniment. After Rucker's death, the leitmotiv is stated *fortissimo* in the orchestra, and is transformed

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[81] Ibid., 155.

[82] Ibid., 203.

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during the transition music that leads to the third scene (see musical example 22).

Finally, "Rucker's Love" can be heard in the orchestra in measure 189 of the

epilogue, as Love announces to the community that she is pregnant with Rucker's

child.

Musical Example 22. "Rucker's Love," transformed, Act III, Scene 2, mm. 155-158.[83]

Love's Act II, Scene 3 aria contains a wealth of new musical material. The

aria relies especially on the following mournful motive, with its octave leap and

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[83] Ibid., 282.

weeping descending minor second, for structural unity. The leitmotiv functions

melodically, and does appear in an altered intervallic structure later in the aria.

Musical Example 23. "Love's Past" motive, Act II, Scene 3, excerpted from mm. 209-210.[84]

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Act III

Many of the appearances of Floyd's leitmotivs in Act III have already been

mentioned above, since by this point in the score they are recurring statements of

material established in Acts I or II. A few new leitmotivs are, however, presented.

One occurs when Camp enters the stage, rolling a barrel through the store at Rucker's

behest. The hiccupping triplet and eighth-note/sixteenth-rest rhythm, and the

plodding, *pesante* bass line, illustrate Camp's lumbering awkwardness. When Camp

returns during the robbery scene, the leitmotiv also returns (mm. 307-309). The

"Camp" leitmotiv is shown below in musical example 24.

The robbery has its own characteristic leitmotiv, which primarily takes the

form of an insistent rhythmic figure. This leitmotiv permeates the entire robbery

scene (see musical example 25).

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[84] Ibid., 208.

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Musical Example 24. "Camp" leitmotiv, Act III, Scene 1, mm. 77-78.[85]
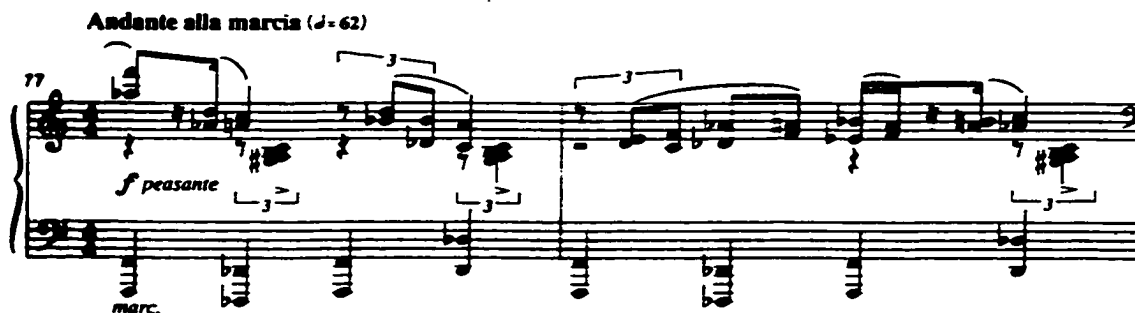
Musical Example 25. "Robbery" leitmotiv, Act III, Scene 2, excerpted from m. 227.[86]
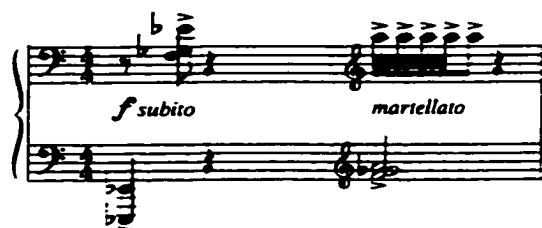
Will's Act III aria offers a boy's poignant response to his grandfather's death. The piece, with its sorrowfully lyrical theme, has been praised as one of the finest moments in the score (see musical example 26).[87]

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[85] Ibid., 227.

[86] Ibid., 246.

[87] Charles Ward. "Composer Finds a Hit in Comic Opera." *Houston Chronicle* (17 April 2000): 1.

Musical Example 26. Will's aria, theme, Act III, Scene 3, excerpted from mm. 1-6.[88]

Conclusions

Floyd demonstrates a variety of melodic styles throughout the opera, from original material, to recognizable hymn tunes, to narration set in approximated pitch. The melodic material in *Cold Sassy Tree* ranges from the memorably lyric, to the angularly descriptive. The variety of melodic character adds a richness and depth to the opera.

Floyd has also created an intricate web of recurring melodies in *Cold Sassy Tree*. The unique features of each melody often reflect characteristics of the personality or situation with which the melody is associated. The leitmotivs in *Cold Sassy Tree* function traditionally, serving to recall particular characters, sentiments, or events later in the opera. The statements occur either in the voice parts themselves or

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[88] Ibid., 284.

in the orchestra alone, sometimes offering insight into a character's thoughts. The numerous leitmotivs in the opera provide a structural unity that contributes significantly to the success of the score.

CHAPTER 5

ACT I

Many varied twentieth-century compositional techniques can be found in *Cold*

Sassy Tree. The combination of these various techniques creates the characteristic

sound of the score. The resulting harmonic language is decidedly tonal and

accessible, in spite of the inclusion of such varied ingredients. The following

characteristics of twentieth-century harmonic techniques are present in *Cold Sassy*

Tree: tone clusters, polytonality, tall chords (9ths, 11ths, 13ths, etc.), harmonic

parallelism, and "wrong-note" style. The tonal fabric often contains a mixture of both

tertian and non-tertian elements. Floyd employs typical twentieth-century rhythmic

devices as well. Many scenes are characterized by extreme rhythmic complexity,

mixed meter, and asymmetrical meters. Conversely, techniques associated with

romantic opera can also be found, such as recurring leitmotivs. Strong allusions to

tonal centers are also frequently present, sometimes reinforced by authentic cadences.

Examples of many of these various techniques may be observed in the first act of the

opera.

The first act of *Cold Sassy Tree* is the longest of the opera. It is divided into

four extensive scenes. An interlude connects scenes two and three; otherwise the

scenes are separated by breaks in both action and music. Scene four of the first act of

the opera exists in two large sections that take place in separate settings; the two

halves of the scene are connected by an orchestral interlude. The second half of the scene contains an extensive finale. Several aspects of scene four will be examined thoroughly below, as a representative sample of the compositional techniques found in the opera.

Table 3. Structural divisions of Act I, Scene 4.

Part One (A)   Part Two (B)

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┌─────────────┬─────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┬──────────────────┐
│   ┌─────┐   │   ┌─────┐   │        │    ┌──────┐      │    ┌──────┐      │
│   │  a  │   │   │  b  │   │        │    │  c   │      │    │  d   │      │
│   └─────┘   │   └─────┘   │   ▲    │    └──────┘      │    └──────┘      │
│             │             │   │    │                  │                  │
└─────────────┴─────────────┘   │    └──────────────────┴──────────────────┘
                                 │ Interlude
m. 1          m. 60                   m. 105             m. 215
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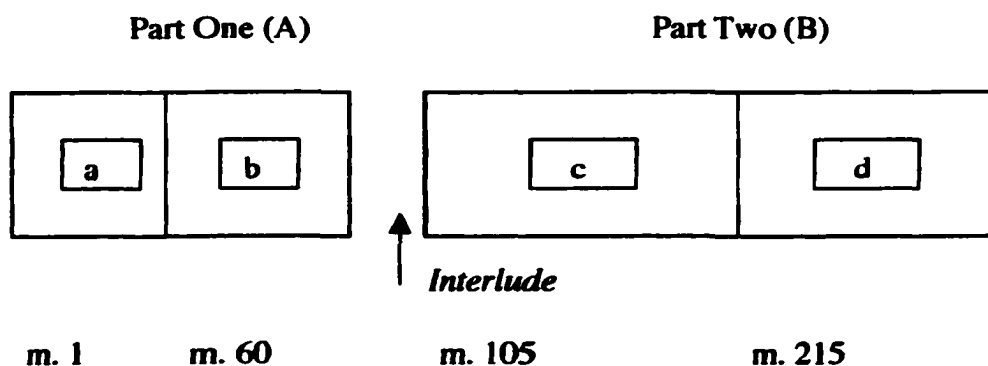
Tonality

Scene four begins in the key of D major, which is the primary key of the opera. It is also the key of the "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv identified in the previous chapter. The scene moves through several key centers but returns to tonic at both the end of interlude that concludes the first section and at the end of the scene. This reliance on D major at the end of the first act reinforces its importance as the central key of the entire piece.

A melodrama separates the two halves of part one of the scene. The "b" section of the first half contains a long, gradually climbing tonal scheme. The entire melodrama contains a pedal point E that acts as a dominant preparation for the long

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upcoming progression. The hymn that follows begins in the key of A major, though Floyd has included a minor "v" chord instead of the expected major dominant. Love and Will join the congregation at the anacrusis to measure sixty-eight, wherein begins the second verse of the hymn. Tension increases as the key level rises a half step to B-flat major. As the key center remains steady, the bass instruments of the orchestra punctuate the tonal fabric with foreign chords, creating a polytonal effect. A G-major chord appears in the bass line in measures sixty-nine and seventy-one, juxtaposed against the strong B-flat tonality above it. The G-major chords are followed by persistent A-major interjections in measures seventy-two through seventy-four. The bass line rises to join the rest of the ensemble in B-flat in measure seventy-five. The ascending movement of these pedal chords mirrors the heightening of the key level in the score, as well as the dramatic tension that is simultaneously increasing on stage.

The key level rises to B major with the advent of the third verse. The same polytonality suggested by the foreign bass chords persists. In the fourth verse, the key center ascends further, to C major. The verse ends triumphantly with a high C in the soprano, marking the climax of part one of the scene. The tonal level continues to climb in the interlude that connects the two halves of the scene. The interlude begins in C major, the final key of the hymn, and then moves through C-sharp (m. 142) before finally landing in D major (m. 105) (see table 4 below).

Movement from one key center to another often occurs by direct modulation. Traditional cadences are also sometimes used, however. Often these authentic and plagal cadences reinforce important structural points in the score. For example, part

Table 4. Harmonic structure of the second half of Act I, Scene four, part one, mm. 45-105, in Floyd, _Cold Sassy Tree_.

Tonal Center	E	A	Bb	B	C	C#	D
Measure Number	45	59	68	76	84	102	105

two of the fourth scene begins in the tonic key of D major. The binary sermon aria imbedded in the scene begins in G major and the "B" section of the aria centers around E-flat major, but defers to D major for its second half. The large tonal design of the Sermon, G to D, suggests a plagal flavor. Floyd's choice of tonality reflects the religious content of the aria.

Tone clusters and added note chords are an integral ingredient in the harmonic design of the score. A pervasive example of this technique is the "Cold Sassy" motive that permeates the entire opera (see chapter four, musical example 2). Another technique Floyd favors is the use of polychords. An example from Act I, Scene 1, that includes B-flat major, B major, and G major triads simultaneously appears in musical example 27.

Numerous examples of polytonality can be found in _Cold Sassy Tree_. An explicit example of bitonality appears in the interlude found in scene four. The pedal chords establish the tonal center as C-sharp, but the "Effie Belle" leitmotiv heard in

the high strings and brass is in C (natural), shown in musical example 28.

Musical Example 27. Polychords in *Cold Sassy Tree*, Act I, Scene 1, m. 92.[89]

Musical Example 28. Bitonality in *Cold Sassy Tree*, Act I, Scene 4, mm. 102-103.[90]
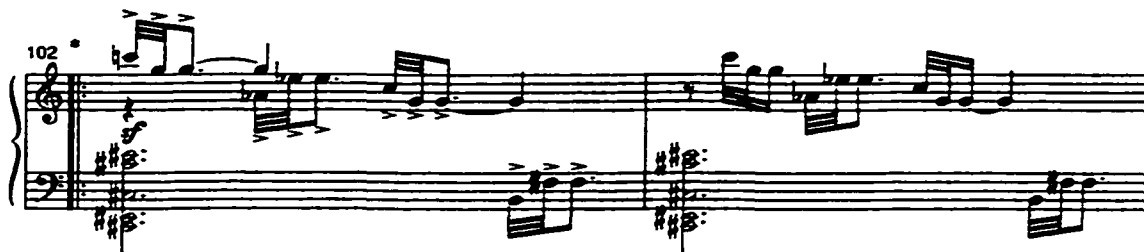
Texture and Rhythm

Floyd uses voice couplings to indicate loyalties among the characters. He also

uses texture to support the dramatic climate on stage. For example, Scene 4 opens

with a group of townspeople on their way to church. They sing reverently about

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[89] Floyd, *Cold Sassy Tree*. 13.

[90] Ibid.. 106.

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Rucker's first wife, proclaiming that Rucker and his new spouse are desecrating her memory. The chorus voices its unanimity on the subject by singing in a homogenous texture. The soprano part contains the leitmotiv labeled previously as "That Sainted Woman" (see chapter four). In measures five through seventeen, each phrase sung by the chorus is cast with the voice parts in parallel rhythmic motion. By measure eighteen, individuals become braver and voice their own solo defamations of Love Simpson. These solo lines are interrupted approximately every four measures by restatements of "That Sainted Woman," delivered by ensembles of two or more voices. The leitmotiv disappears after measure twenty-seven, as individual comments take over. The texture becomes increasingly polyphonic as well, as tempers flare and the group teeters close to cacophony. The section concludes in measure forty-three, after the people briefly reunite in a choral exclamation of "Jezebels are ev'rywhere, even in Cold Sassy Tree."

The hymn that concludes part one of the scene illustrates a gradual increase in rhythmic complexity, simultaneously reflecting a morphing texture. Rhythmic layering begins to separate the voice parts, illustrating the division between the two groups. The first verse of the hymn, sung by the congregation, is set in a traditional, homophonic texture. When Love and Will join the group in verse two, they sing the prescribed rhythm of the hymn tune, while the choir's statement of the same text breaks into rhythmic fragmentation (see musical example 29). The members of the congregation begin dropping out during the second half of the strophe.

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[91] Ibid., 99.

The same rhythmic dichotomy persists in the third verse, though even fewer singers remain in the choir, thinning the texture. By the second half of this verse, only a few of the men remain singing, along with the two unwitting soloists. The texture is further thinned when Love and Will sing the fourth and final verse alone; the entire congregation has now dropped out in protest of Love's presence at the service. The rhythm of the theme is altered in this final verse and decorative high notes are added, lending the character of a descant.

Heavy syncopation pervades much of the score. This rhythmic device contributes to the jocular mood that characterizes many of the scenes in the opera. The angularity created by the syncopation also emphasizes the jarring, colloquial speech of most of the characters (see musical example 30a).

A very disjunct type of voice leading in *Cold Sassy Tree* enhances the highly syncopated rhythmic style of many of the vocal passages in the opera. The first half of the sermon aria, as shown below, is heavily syncopated and rhythmically charged. A particular rhythmic cell organizes much of the section.

<u>Musical Example 30. Rhythmic cell in the Sermon aria.</u>
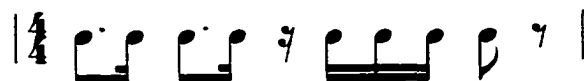
Frequent ties characterize the vocal line, creating a disjointed, angular, off-balance result that illustrates Rucker's awkward manner as he delivers his first sermon.

The ensemble at the end of the Act I finale illustrates once again Floyd's

Musical Example 30a. Syncopation in the Sermon aria, mm. 146-149.[92]

technique of pairing voices to indicate character relationships. Rucker, Love, and

Will sing the Doxology, while the women outside the window comment in pairs

about the sacrilege occurring inside. The two pairs of women unite into a

homogenous quartet, strengthening their cause. The Sheriff and the Mayor join the

women, further bolstering their platform. The commotion created by this ensemble

outside does not faze the other group, which literally gets the last word. Love, Will,

and Rucker unite in a *fortissimo* "Amen," sung in a very high register, after the

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[92] Ibid.. 112.

townspeople have concluded their indignant tirade.

Melodic Content

Many of the leitmotivs identified in chapter four illustrate the contrast

between the two broad categories of melodic character represented. The character of

the melodic material itself supports the dramatic characterizations on stage. For

example, "Rucker 1" is a broad-shouldered leitmotiv that refers, with its extreme

intervallic leaps, to the energetic buoyancy of the character. The solid grounding of

the leitmotiv in the key of E-flat major reveals the character's stalwart community

stature. An insistent, pervasive rhythmic figure comprises "Effie Belle." The

irritating, insistent chirp of the leitmotiv describes the character's meddling *modus

operandi*, as the hub of the town's gossip chain. The nagging quality of the "Effie

Belle" leitmotiv contributes, through its frequent repetition, to the tension created by

the composer in the Scene 4 finale.

Several leitmotivs appear in Scene 4, serving both to enhance structural

organization and to inform the audience. The melodic material in the interlude, for

example, maintains reminders of the unpleasant church service that preceded it. The

"Effie Belle" leitmotiv is initially dominant, with fragments of "Blest Be the Tie That

Binds" permeating measures 95-101. "Effie Belle" returns at the end of the interlude.

Part two of the fourth scene begins with a restatement of the "Cold Sassy"

leitmotiv. The "Effie Belle" leitmotiv returns in the orchestra, though, as Love and

Will reenter the stage at measure 109. The characteristic rhythm of "Effie Belle"

permeates the dialogue as Love relates the events of the morning church service to

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Rucker. As shown in the previous chapter, the final beat of "Young Rucker" begins

to invade the "Effie Belle" material, until it takes over altogether. This musical

representation reflects the dramatic action, as Rucker seeks to calm his wife and

offers a temporary solution to her crisis.

Floyd routinely pre-echoes the vocal statements of leitmotivs by first stating

them in the orchestra. This technique can be observed in measure fifty-two of scene

four, when the upcoming hymn tune, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," is foreshadowed

in the orchestra while Will delivers dialogue. After the melodrama, the scene

immediately resumes, in the interior of the church, where the congregation then sings

the hymn.

Form

Traditional formal structures are frequently discernable in the opera. Binary,

rounded binary, occasionally sonata-allegro, and especially ternary forms organize

sections of the score. Many excerpts of the score may be viewed as some version of a

hybrid of the above-mentioned formal structures. The broad formal scheme of scene

four is a hybrid that may be analyzed at least three different ways. The scene as a

whole resembles a rounded binary form, a rondo, and a sonata form.

The binary argument is supported by the clear division of the scene into

halves by both a scene change and an orchestral interlude (see table 5). The presence

of several other, smaller, binary forms imbedded within the scene also supports the

binary possibility. In other words, the microcosm reflects the macrocosm. For

example, Rucker's sermon aria exists in two halves. The "A" section of the aria is

further bisected into halves that are separated by a brief, recitative-like exchange between Rucker and Love. The "B" section of the sermon is also cast in halves, though the parts are less neatly divided than they were in the "A" section. This bipartite structure of the sermon reflects the overall two-part structure of the scene itself. The implication of a rounded binary occurs with a reprise of the first part of the scene appearing at measure 215. The accompaniment that was heard in measure six of the scene returns after Effie Belle's initial exclamation at the end of the sermon. The primary theme of the section is also present, with a new text and a modified intervallic structure ("This Shameless Hussy"). This restatement is truncated. The initial statement of the material was forty-three measures long, including the two-measure introduction, while the return lasts only sixteen measures.

Table 5. Rounded Binary Features, Act I, Scene 4.

A			B			(A')		
43 mm.	16	45	31	35	35	7	16	17
a		b	c		d		a'	b'
1	44	60	105	137	172	208	215	231

Sermon Aria
A   B

Measure Number ↑

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The sonata form argument is compelling as well, and may offer the most comprehensive formal solution for the scene. This solution respects the large divisions of the scene explained by the rounded binary. In the large "A" section of the scene, however, it is noteworthy that at the entrance of the second theme, the hymn tune "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," the tonal level rises to the dominant, or A major. The modulation is effected through a common chord, in an authentic cadence. The return of the "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv in tonic at measure 105 may be viewed either as a closing group in the "wrong" key, or the beginning of a development section. The nature of the material in measures 111 through 136 offers compelling support of the argument in favor of sonata form. These measures, in either of the afore-proposed analyses, comprise the first part of the large "B" section. Frequent partial quotations of themes heard earlier in the scene, or in one case, earlier in the opera, are combined with new material. This treatment of the themes, augmented by the voice-specific, alternating manner in which they are presented, suggests development (see table 6).

Table 6. Assignment of themes in the orchestral accompaniment in mm. 111-136.

• Love Simpson:	"Effie Belle," combined with the last beat of "Young Rucker"
• Rucker:	"Cold Sassy," second half
• Will Tweedy:	Free, new material

"Effie Belle" does appear once in the accompaniment to Rucker's sung dialogue,

when he refers to the "hateful" nature of the townspeople. The key center reached at the end of this section is F.

The Sermon aria that occurs next may be viewed as the focal point of the scene. The tonal scheme of the Sermon, described above, begins in G major, moves by authentic cadence to E-flat major, and ends in D major. Immediately following the sermon, however, a quick and unprepared allusion to F throws the listener back into the progressive action interrupted by the aria. This allusion supports the idea that the sermon may be viewed as an interpolation.

The recapitulation in this sonata structure is very short. It occurs at the same juncture as the rounding of the binary described above. The key level of the return is not tonic, but rather the subdominant, G major. The second theme of the exposition, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," is replaced by a different hymn: the Doxology. The Doxology begins in the key of the enharmonic leading tone to the tonic key of D, or D-flat major. The repeat of the theme is stated in tonic and the scene remains in D major through its conclusion. The relationship of the key that begins the recapitulation, G major, and the final key, tonic, reinforces the plagal allusions described in Rucker's sermon aria. The scene concludes with both the above-mentioned implied plagal reference and an explicit plagal cadence occurring in measures 244 through 245. These plagal references reinforce the strong religious content of the entire scene, which revolves around two separate church services.

The following three tables illustrate the structural delineations that suggest sonata form in Act I, Scene 4 of the opera:

Table 7. Act I, Scene 4.

Exposition

"Cold Sassy," Theme 1   Theme 2   Theme 2/ "Effie Belle"

Melodrama

m.1   16   27   45   60   68   76   84   93   102   104

D   E   A   Bb   B   C   C#   D

V   I
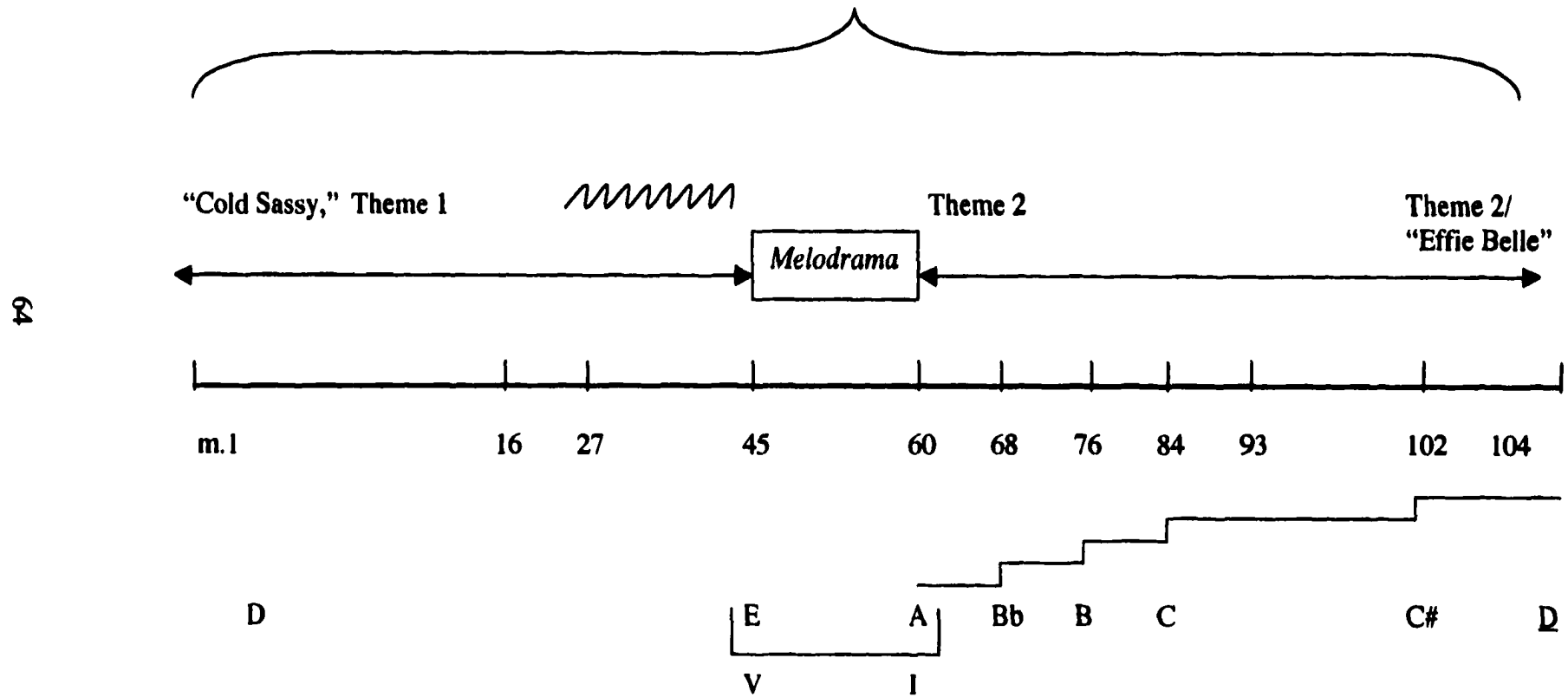
Theme 1: "That Sainted Woman"
Theme 2: "Blest Be the Ties That Bind"

Table 8. Act I, Scene 4.

Development

INTERPOLATION

"*Sermon Aria*"

EB/YR*

CS*

Free

A		B	
a a b [ ] a′ b′		c c′ c″ (c)	

| 105 | | | 119 | 121 | | 137 | 145 | | 150 | 154 | 160 161 | 165 | 169 | 172 | | 180 | | 188 | | 198 | | 207 | 208 | 210 |

DM   A   F   G   E   G   E   Bb Eb   F   D   F
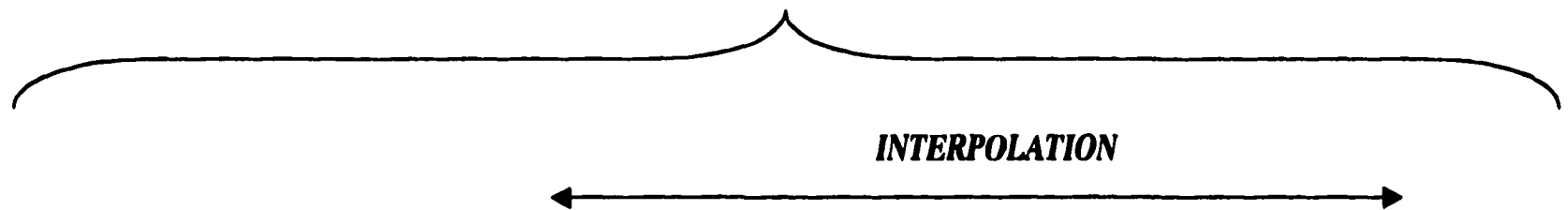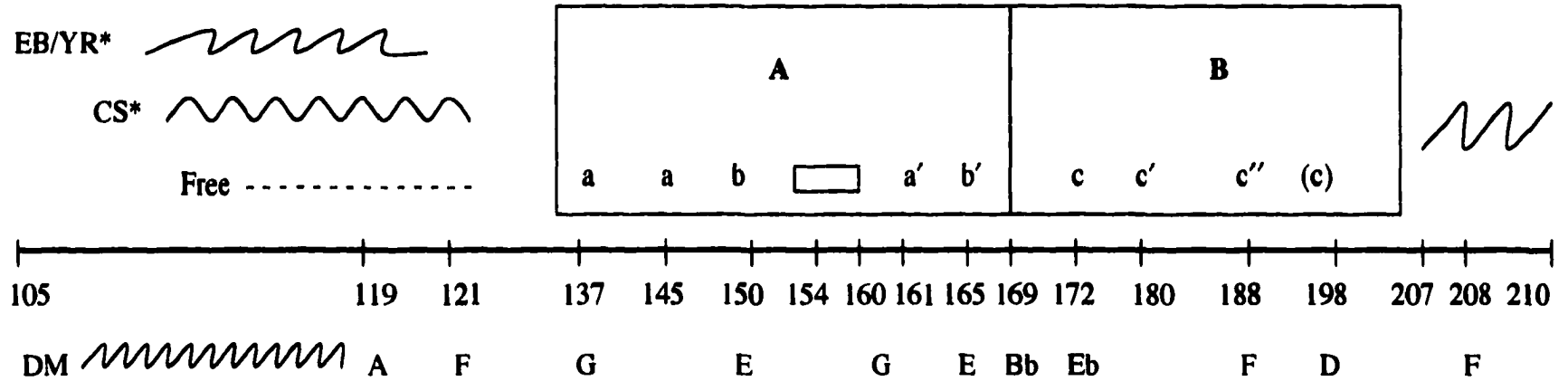
*EB = "Effie Belle" leitmotiv
*YR = "Young Rucker" leitmotiv
*CS = "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv

Table 9. Act I. Scene 4.

(Overlap)

Recapitulation

EB*	TSH*	Doxology	CS*
	(Theme 1) (Theme 1)	(Theme 2') (Theme 2')	

211   215   219   225   231   236   244   245   248

F   Bb   G   A   Db   D - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

(IV)   I   IV   I
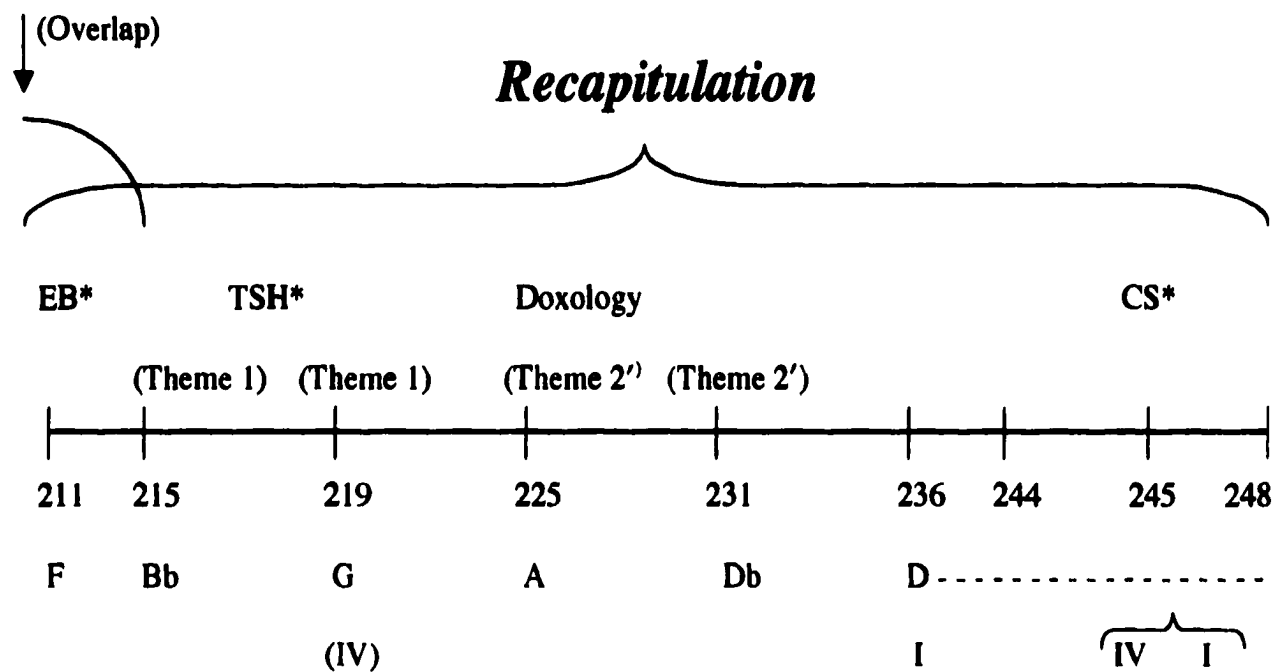
*EB = "Effie Belle" leitmotiv
*TSH = "That Shameless Hussy" leitmotiv
*CS = "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv

If one examines the textural scheme of the scene, features of a rondo are implied. Fairly regular alternation between homogenous and polyphonic textures exists. The Sermon aria poses a problem in this hypothesis, creating an inconsistency in the proposed pattern.

The final restatement of "Cold Sassy" at the end of the scene is a feature that contributes to the hybrid formal scheme of the scene. This appearance of the leitmotiv lends a rounded quality to the finale and supports the rondo possibility. The absence of one of the statements of "A," however, lessens the desirability of this option. Each of the "A" sections labeled below marks the appearance of "Cold Sassy."

Table 10. Rondo form hypothesis, with missing "A" section.

Section:	A	B	A	C	(A*)	D	A
Measure:	1	60	105	137	(208*)	231	245

* location of missing "A" section

The emphasis that this hypothesis places on the Sermon aria in its central location within the scene, labeled as "C" in table 10, is an interesting feature of the possibility, since the sermon is a strong focal point in the scene. Though the scene in its entirety is not totally symmetrical, many of its subsections show remarkable symmetry. Part one of the scene displays such characteristics, as does the Sermon aria itself.

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Characterizations

The sermon aria reveals, through musical suggestion, quite a lot about the personalities of the three characters present. The two sides of Rucker's personality are blatantly expressed. The "A" section of the sermon reflects the side of his demeanor exhibited publicly: exuberant, opinionated, and animated. In the second half of the sermon, Rucker relates God's words, creating a fervently spiritual, introspective mood, supported by rhythmic stasis in the orchestra. In this part of the sermon, Rucker reveals a side of his personality not often visible. Through the course of the opera, he displays this deeply spiritual and philosophical side only to Love and to Will. In the second half of the "B" section, Rucker speaks in his own voice, suddenly in a much lower register, suggesting his humility before God. The duality of Rucker's personality may be supported by the bipartite structure of the internal numbers within the scene. Love is portrayed throughout the opera as headstrong, a quality she vividly displayed at the end of the previous scene. Musical support of this characteristic shows when Love interrupts Rucker to critique his monologue as sacrilegious. The musical character of the phrase wherein she offers her heartfelt compliment to him after the sermon matches the introspective character of the preceding section, and shows her growing affection for Rucker. Further, a side of Will's personality is revealed when he shows his impetuous youth by bursting into applause at the end of the sermon. The scene delivers a snapshot view of all three of these characterizations, offering particular insight into Rucker's personality.

CHAPTER 6

ACT II

The second act is shorter than the first, and has only two settings: the exterior

and interior of Rucker's house. The three scenes of the second act flow smoothly,

although each scene is separated by complete breaks. The first and third scenes are

approximately the same length. A short scene between Will and Lightfoot separates

these two bookend scenes.

The emotional spectrum of the act is broad. Several comedic situations in the

first and third scenes create a sense of levity. Conversely, the final scene of the act

contains a climactic, shocking revelation.

Four arias are included in the second act. Scene one contains a virile aria for

the baritone character Clayton McAllister, "Love, I'm Here on a Mission," sung when

the character arrives in Cold Sassy to take Love Simpson back to Texas with him as

his bride. The short scene between Will and Lightfoot parallels the scene between the

two characters in Act I; this Act II scene contains Lightfoot's aria, "I Yearn So to

Know Things." (In the parallel scene of the first act, Will has an aria instead,

"Guardian Angel.") The third scene ends with dual arias by Rucker and Love. This

finale, of both the third scene and the act, will be described in detail below.

The finale of Act II represents the most significant of several climax points in

the opera. The situation that creates the dramatic need for the two arias at the end of

Act II is a result of tension that has been simmering since Rucker and Love first entered into their marriage, or "business arrangement." When Rucker suddenly kisses Love, his impulsive show of affection becomes the specific catalyst for the arias. Both arias contain deeply personal revelations.

This scene provides a prime example of a case wherein Floyd has removed Will from the scenario to serve a dramatic purpose. In the Burns novel, the scene occurs while Rucker, Love, and Will are on a car trip. At night, while boarding at a stranger's home, Will, as the narrator of the story, necessarily hears the dialogue between the two adults through the thin partition of a wall that separates the two areas of the guest bedroom. In Floyd's condensed version of the story, the scene occurs in the couple's home. Floyd has removed Will to enable the extreme intimacy of the ensuing scene. Rucker speaks first, revealing through his aria, "I've Known I Loved You," his true feelings for Love Simpson.

Rucker's Aria

Tonality

The aria exhibits several clear tonal centers. The five-measure transition to the aria contains two statements of the "Rented Rooms" leitmotiv over a pedal point A. The second statement of the leitmotiv rises, in measure 161, a semitone higher than the level of the first. The transition consequently foreshadows the tonal duality of the aria. The pedal point A yields to a G-sharp in measure 164, providing a dominant to the upcoming tonal center of C-sharp minor, the key of the introduction. At the beginning of the aria proper, a mode change places the key in D-flat major, the

tonic of the aria.

A frequent oscillation between a tonic triad and a minor "v" chord may be observed in the aria's accompaniment. Additionally, non-chord tones (frequently unresolved) have been liberally added throughout, creating the same tone cluster effect found so frequently in the opera. These combined harmonic devices, coupled with a tender melody, create an atmosphere of intense warmth. The rich string accompaniment, scored in low registers, contributes to the sensuous sound.

Musical Example 31. Chord oscillation and non-chord tones in Rucker's Act II, Scene 3 aria, m.171-172.[93]

At measure 178, the key center changes to D minor, as Rucker relates his struggle to ignore his attraction to Love while his first wife, who was terminally ill at the time, was still living. Various keys are explored in this section, between measures 178 and 189. The section ends with four measures of a G-sharp pedal tone that acts as a dominant to the subsequent tonic return of the theme at measure 190. Instead of remaining in tonic through end of the aria, the key level impulsively overextends, to

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[93] Floyd. *Cold Sassy Tree.* 203.

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B major, for the final statement of the theme in measure 198. This hyperextension of the key level underscores Rucker's emphatic plea, as he asks Love to forget their arrangement and become a "real wife" to him. As he loses a modicum of his confidence, the key level reverts to tonic and the piece ends. The lack of resolution at the end of the aria, as Rucker awaits Love's response, is starkly enhanced by an open fifth in measure 206. The static orchestral chord that accompanies the recitative-like conclusion in mm. 207-208 consists of an open fifth as well, with an added minor seventh and an added augmented fifth. The third of the chord is carefully avoided in the voice part; it appears only once in the relevant measures, as the anacrusis to the recitative (see musical example 32).

Chord clusters appear throughout the aria. Sometimes they are used coloristically or, more frequently, they are woven into the general tonal fabric. The accented clusters in musical example 33 add a punctuating emphasis to an important line of text. Occasionally, all of the pitches occurring simultaneously in the melody are included in the accompanying chord. Such is the case in the cluster found on the last two quarter notes of the measure in musical example 34.

Frequently the cluster chords in *Cold Sassy Tree* provide a static harmonic background against which other elements are juxtaposed. In measure 184, a structurally significant point as the dynamic climax of the aria, this technique can be observed (see musical example 35). In this capacity, clusters serve as a barometer of tension in the score, as well as an organic component of the opera's harmonic language.

Musical Example 32. Final measures of Rucker's Act II, Scene 3 aria.[94]

t' be a real wife t' me.

stringendo rallen.

know you cain't nev - er feel th' same,___ not towards an old man like me.

Musical Example 33. Cluster Chord in Rucker's Act II, Scene 2 Aria, m. 203.[95]

real wife t' me,

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[94]Ibid., 208.

[95] Ibid., 204.

Musical Example 34. Cluster Chord in Rucker's Act II, Scene 2 Aria, m. 176.[96]

Musical example 35. Cluster Chord in Rucker's Act II, Scene 2 Aria, m. 184.[97]

Polychords are used in the same ways as the clusters described above. They are especially prevalent in a coloristic capacity. The dissonance created by a given polychord may serve to color a mood, particularly one of unease or uncertainty, as in the following example occurring in the penultimate measure of the aria's

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[96] Ibid., 204.

[97] Ibid., 205.

introduction.

<u>Musical Example 36. Polychords in Rucker's Act II, Scene 2 Aria, m. 170.</u>[98]

Melody

The theme of Rucker's Act II, Scene 3 aria highlights the composer's acuity

as a melodist. The character of the theme reflects Rucker's tentative, yet fervent

attitude. The voice line is comprised of small intervals; a perfect fourth is the largest

leap in the first eight measures. The entire passage spans only an octave. The

closeness of both range and intervals mirrors the intimacy that Rucker projects

through his text and demeanor.

The aria's theme illustrates the "wrong-note" style of composition favored by

some twentieth-century composers and found prolifically in *Cold Sassy Tree*. In its

second measure, the theme moves unexpectedly through G natural, a non-chord tone

in the tonic of D-flat major, before finding the expected G-flat two notes later. The

melodic pattern most often associated with motive "x" in the aria also displays a

[98] Ibid., 203.

conflict between semitones, this time between D-sharp and D-natural.

Musical Example 37. Motive "x," Rucker's Act II, Scene 3 Aria.
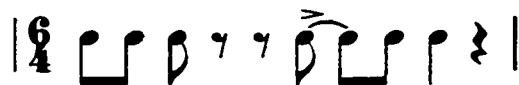
Musical Example 38. Pitches frequently accompanying Motive "x."[99]

Form

The form of the aria most closely resembles a ternary structure, but hybrid

features are apparent as well (see table 11). In the "B" section, for example, the

combination of an irregular meter, a new key center, an element of harmonic

exploration, and an accompaniment figure that alternates between an agitato and

breathless character suggests development. The aria also contains an extra statement

of the "A" section, after the prescribed ternary has been completed. This extra reprise

also boosts the key level of the aria beyond tonic, as described above.

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[99] Ibid., 165.

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Table 11.

Formal Description of Rucker's Act II, Scene 3 Aria.

Climax

Intro	A	B	A'	A''
5 + 6 mm.	8 m.	12 m.	8 m.	9 + 2 mm.

159   165   170   171   178   186   190   196   198   205   208

DbM   dm   g#m   DbM   (f#)   B   Db

p   mp   mp < mf < f   pp mf   p mp mf   pp
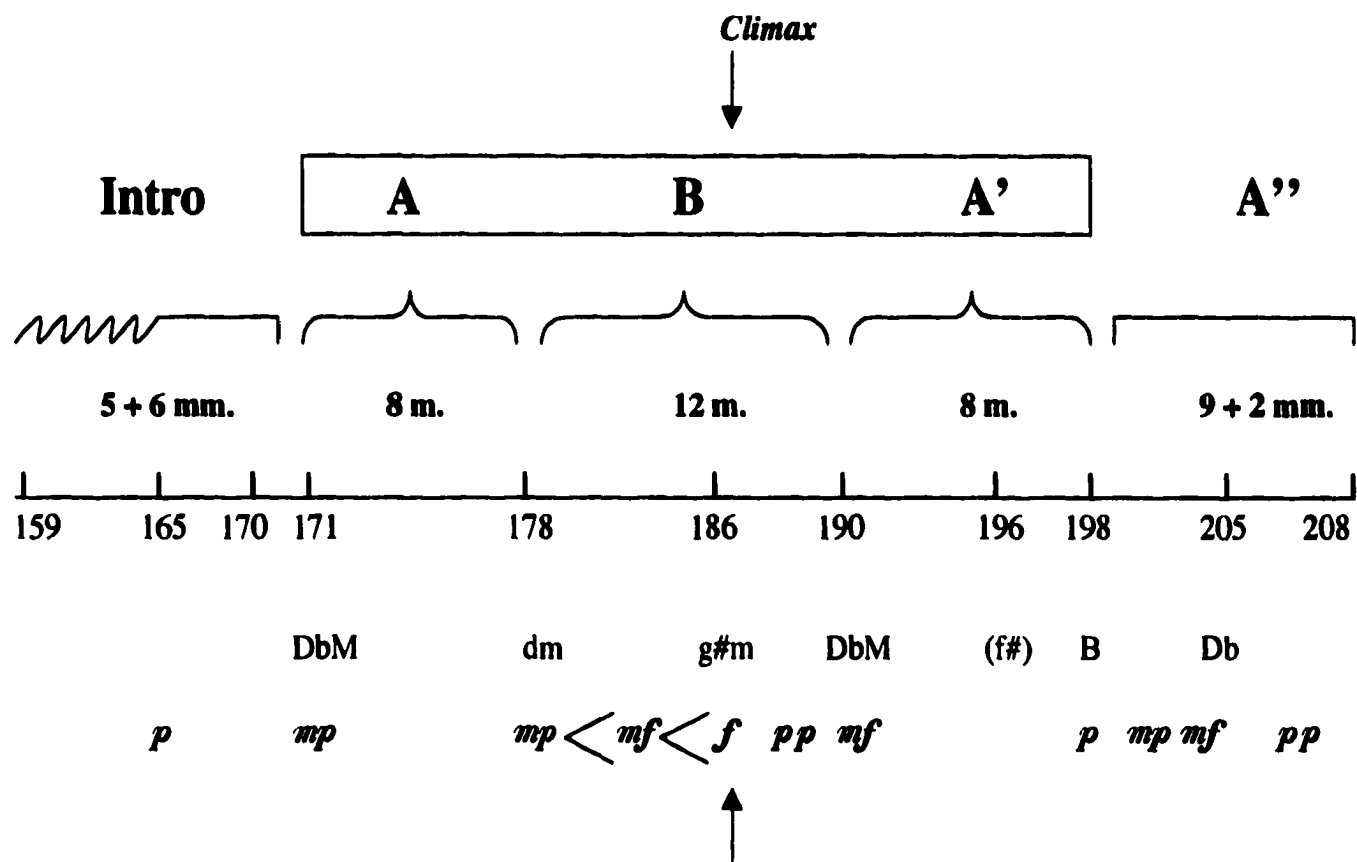
The aria displays symmetrical dimensions, with the first two statements of "A" lasting eight measures each. The central section is twelve measures long. The final, "extra" statement of "A" is extended by three measures, including the two-measure quasi recitative that serves as an afterthought of a coda. The introduction to the aria lasts only six measures; therefore the last statement of "A" and the coda slightly outweigh the introduction's dimensions at eleven measures. The overbalancing of the final section of the aria may mirror the overextension of the key level as well as the added repetition of "A." Alternatively, the inclusion of the five-measure "Rented Rooms" transition as the first introduction to the aria creates a symmetrically balanced solution.

Love's Aria

Love's Act II aria may be considered the climax of the entire opera. Her revelation about her childhood rape is one of the two most shocking events in the opera, along with the on-stage shooting that occurs during the following act. The location of the aria contributes to the piece's emotional success. The aria occurs at the end of the second act, perhaps coincidentally at the golden section of the opera as a whole; the aria begins in measure 1,475, out of a total 2,323 measures in the entire score. The golden section label, determined in this case by measure numbers, may be superficial within the scope of the entire opera, wherein numerous tempo changes alter the temporal value of a measure of music.

Melody and Rhythm

Love's second aria is unlike many of the other arias in the score in that it is

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not lyrical. Rather, it unfolds as a narrative. The orchestra plays an active role, practically portraying another character within the piece. The voice and the orchestra show a duet-like dependence on each other, interacting melodically and rhythmically throughout the aria.

The introduction to Love's aria maintains the same organizing rhythm as was found in Rucker's aria, labeled motive "x" above, though the motive lacks the tie previously included. An entirely new pitch pattern accompanies the rhythmic motive, resulting in the leitmotiv identified as "Love's Past" (see chapter 4). This leitmotiv, "Love's Past," will be labeled "y" for the purpose of further analysis. Another primary motive unifies the aria, consisting of two voices moving in a churning, queasy contrary motion. This motive echoes, in the lower voice, the same semitone dichotomy found in Rucker's aria. The disputed pitches in this case are E-natural and E-flat.

Musical Example 39. Motive "z" in Love's Act II, Scene 3 aria, mm. 225-226.[100]

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[100] Ibid.. 209.

The fragmented voice part is tentative at the beginning. and gains conviction and momentum as the aria proceeds. In measure 225, the soprano echoes, in stretto, the pitch pattern of motive "z" in the orchestra (see musical example 39). Love introduces the background of the event in measures 225 through 228. When her description of the night of the rape begins in measure 230. after a repeated statement of "Love's Past," the vocal line consistently hesitates for the duration of an eighth rest when delivering each phrase of commentary. Concurrently. the orchestra plods purposefully ahead, reflecting the embodiment of the uncontrollable events of that night.

Orchestral effects paint a suspenseful atmosphere in mm. 230-237, wherein Love describes first hearing and then seeing her attacker. The orchestra first tiptoes with an augmented statement of "z," pianissimo and staccato. In mm. 235-237, the strings are scored *sempre glissandi*; the effect is a bizarre, glassy, web of sound.

Musical Example 40. Motive "y²" in Love's Act II, Scene 3 Aria, m.267.[101]

A new theme appears with the climax of the aria (see musical example 40).

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[101] Ibid.. 214.

This theme, "y^2" shares the first two pitches of "y," and effectively replaces "y" through the end of the aria. Perhaps the new theme represents Love, permanently scarred by the experience. Theme "y^2" reappears in measure 267, as Love describes telling her former fiancé, Clayton McAllister, about the attack.

Tonality

Semitone relationships, wherein the relevant pitches appear simultaneously as clusters or as conflicting tonal centers, continue to play a significant role in the harmonic structure of the opera. The aria alternates between clear tonal centers and moments of tonal ambiguity. The aria proper begins in F minor, but the tonality of the introduction that precedes it is ambiguous. The introduction begins with a pedal point A and the first statement of "Love's Past." In the following eight measures a tonal center is avoided, with only a series of ambiguous tone clusters in the orchestra. The "A" section of the aria begins in measure 225, where F minor is first implied. The F minor key center remains constant through measure 239, as motive "z" is repeated over and over, twelve times in whole or in part, in a span of fifteen measures.

The aria lacks a conventional use of functional harmony. Rather, the established key centers move in a tertian pattern, without standard cadences. The tonal level sinks a minor third, from F minor, to D minor in 241, where motive "z" resumes. The key center is unstable, with a prominent E pedal point in measure 242 and ascending parallel polychords in m. 243 (see musical example 41). Again, the tonal level drops by minor third to B minor for two measures in mm. 244-245, by

major third to G minor in m. 246, and finally to E-flat minor in 247. A surprise leap

to G-sharp minor then follows in measure 248, where a G-sharp minor triad alternates

with a G-augmented triad for two measures, leading to the climax of the aria. The

key level drops by third again, in the measure of the aria's climax, to E minor, the

tonal goal of this lengthy tertian progression.

Musical Example 41. Polychords, Love's Act II, Scene 3 Aria.[102]

The tonal center slides to the final key area of the aria, E-flat major, for the

final section of the piece. In this portion, Love delivers a segment of text that is

extremely important to the plot of the opera, underscoring the importance of the

concurrent key level. She explains to Rucker, in mm. 262 through 275, how her

entire life has been altered since the attack and how, since Clayton McAllister

rejected her some years earlier after learning of the rape, she has held a very low

opinion of herself. The key level of this segment of the aria, E-flat major, seems to

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[102] Ibid.. 211.

appear at textually significant junctures in the score, having also appeared in the central section of Rucker's sermon aria (see chapter 5).

As the aria ends, the "Rented Rooms" leitmotiv appears in the final measures, rapidly dissolving into an E natural/ D-sharp pedal point, over which the concluding recitative is sung. The aforementioned pitches in this semitone clash are also the final two keys of the aria. The final, pointillistic orchestral A-flats serve as dominant preparations for the upcoming conclusion to the scene (see musical example 42).

<u>Musical Example 42. Final measures of Love's Act II, Scene 3 Aria, mm. 275-278.</u> [103]

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[103] Ibid., 216.

Form

The organizing elements of the aria subtly unify the score, rather than suggesting clear structural implications. The aria is a hybrid, with features of an alternating form. The aria consists of three large sections. Each is a repetition of "A," identified by the presence of motive "z" at varying pitch levels. Simultaneously, however, motive "z" alternates with motive "y" ("Love's Past"), and later "y^2." The overwhelming effect of the aria, however, is one of unrelenting forward motion toward a climax. The continuous harmonic progression described above, the dynamic scheme, and also successively shorter phrase groups creating a rhythmic crescendo drive this steady forward propulsion (see table 12). The result of this propulsion toward the climax of the aria suggests an overall wedge design (see table 13).

Table 12. Rhythmic crescendo in Love's Act II, Scene 3 Aria.
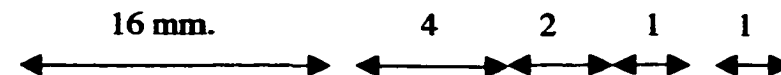
Length:		16 mm.		4	2	1	1
Measure:	225		241		244	246	247
Pedal Point:	F		D		B	G	Eb

Table 13.

Formal Scheme of
Love's Act II. Scene 3 Aria.

Climax (ff)

A''

A'

A

m. 225				241	244	246	247	248	250	262	275
Fm				Dm	Bm	Gm	Ebm	G#m	Em	Eb	E/D#

Key center – predominant motion by thirds

[V - I]
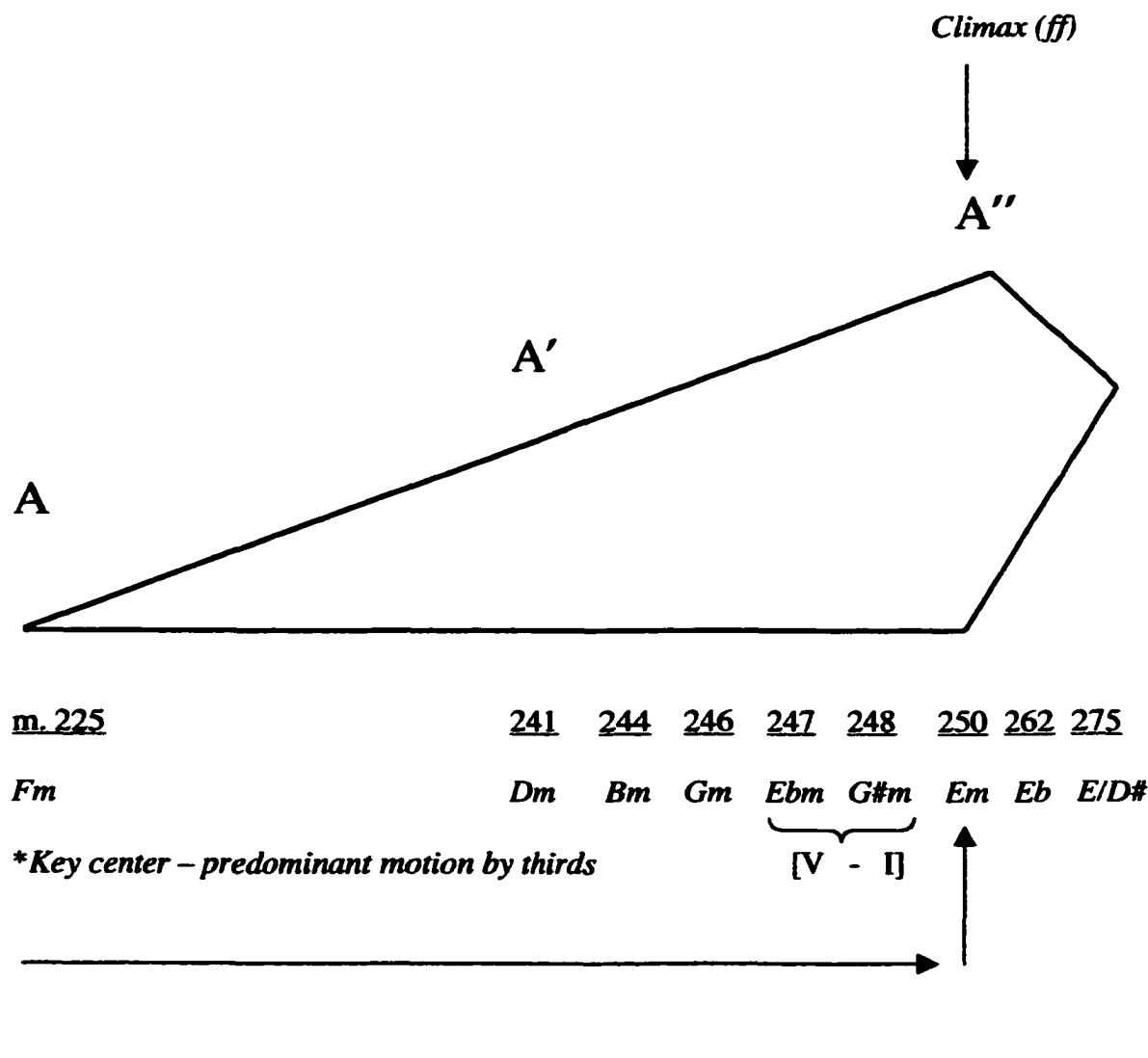
The Conclusion of the Act

The act concludes quickly. The resolution to the climactic crisis point established in Love's aria lasts only twenty-one measures. Rucker responds to Love's story of the attack by consoling her and by continuing his plea to modify their relationship. The comforting D-flat major tonic of Rucker's aria returns, with the "Rucker's Love" leitmotiv in the orchestra, as he consoles Love. When she gratefully accepts her husband's soothing words, the "Sermon" leitmotiv returns, recalling the moment in Act I when Love responded tenderly to his philosophical monologue. By this point in the opera, the "Sermon" leitmotiv often implies Love's growing fondness for Rucker. This particular example illustrates how Floyd sometimes includes a leitmotiv reference to reveal to the audience "things the characters are themselves unaware of."[104]

With the appearance of the "Sermon," the key center provides an answer to the unresolved situation represented by the ambiguous semitone chord (E natural/ D-sharp) found in the final measure of Love's aria (see musical example 42 above). The E-major key center is the tonal "answer" to this question left previously unresolved, just as the initial F minor tonal center of Love's aria provides the missing third to the open fifth found at the end of Rucker's aria. The postlude of the short duet remains in E major until the final four measures of the piece, when the tonal level settles in the D major tonic of the opera.

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[104] Floyd, "The Making of an Opera: Some Considerations" In *Perspectives, Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theater: A Series of Fifteen Monographs* (Washington D.C.: OPERA America, 1983): 24.

A Comparison of the Two Arias

The two arias examined in this chapter exhibit many opposing characteristics. Rucker's aria is tuneful and harmonically stable, while Love's aria is an unstable, rambling narrative. The form of Rucker's aria resembles a ternary structure. The remarkable symmetry of his aria further suggests stability. In contrast, all of the combined elements of Love's aria propel the piece forward toward a recognizable climax, with the formal scheme resembling a wedge. Rucker's aria contains primarily new material, while Love's subsequent aria relies on, in addition to new material, previously established leitmotivs as well as a rhythmic cell from Rucker's aria. An evolution occurs in her aria, represented by motivic material that elucidates the changes in Love after her attack.

The entire scene complex, including the two arias and the short subsequent duet, viewed as a whole, suggests another rounded binary structure. Rucker's aria serves as the large "A" section, Love's aria as the "B" section, and the short allusion back to Rucker's aria as the return to "A" ("A'"). Interestingly, this structure mirrors the global formal implications of the large scene complex at the end of the first act, described in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER 7

ACT III

The final act of *Cold Sassy Tree* consists of three scenes and an extensive epilogue. A complete scene change and the absence of a connecting interlude imply a break between the first two scenes, while the second and third scenes play continuously, without a pause. The body of the third scene is very short, lasting only eighty-three measures. Of these eighty-three measures, Will's final aria comprises sixty-seven measures. The third scene continues directly into the epilogue, which comprises the final 122 measures of the opera. The act is weighted more heavily toward its front side, as the first scene is much longer than the third at 365 measures.

Scene one of the last act includes a charming situation in the general store between Love and a few of the ladies from town. The benign, and occasionally comic, atmosphere created by this vignette heightens the shock value of the subsequent half of the scene, which contains the second cataclysmic event in the opera: the robbery of the store and the shooting.

Floyd's close juxtaposition of these comic and shocking elements has forerunners in other mainstays of the operatic repertory. *Don Giovanni, Carmen,* and *La Bohème* all exhibit similarly pitted scenarios. In the second and final act of *Don Giovanni,* a festive atmosphere incorporating comic elements between Leporello and the Don is abruptly interrupted by the entrance of the statue of the Commendatore,

which proceeds to drag Giovanni to hell. *Carmen* also concludes with two strongly opposing situations. Its fourth act begins with a grandiose, festive procession involving a large chorus and many supernumeraries; the scene abruptly reduces into the violent love duet between Carmen and José, concluding with José stabbing Carmen to death. In the final act of *La Bohème*, Rodolfo and his friends engage in a series of comic and rollicking dances. The sudden entrance of Musetta, who announces Mimi's imminently fatal condition, is a jolt to both the group of friends and to the audience. Floyd's final act of *Cold Sassy Tree* mirrors these other examples, with comedy turning quickly and unexpectedly to tragedy.

Scene two of *Cold Sassy Tree's* third act focuses on Rucker's death, and the last scene reveals Will's reaction to the loss of his grandfather. The epilogue, introduced by a narrative describing Rucker's request for a party instead of a funeral, portrays the town gathering in celebration of Rucker's life. Floyd chooses to reintroduce Rucker's character in this scene, conveying in his own voice the words captured in his will. This stage decision adroitly lends the effect of the parallel scene in the novel, wherein the reader may imagine Rucker's voice echoed in the reading of the will.

Scene 1 Vignette

The third act begins like the first, with a *tutti* presentation of the "Cold Sassy" leitmotiv. The statement is truncated, followed immediately by "Young Rucker," in measures two and three. After this broad, *forte* gesture, the dynamic level drops suddenly and the orchestration thins in measure four, as the scene quickly turns into

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another melodrama, which serves as an introduction to the act. The result of the

opening is to catapult the listener into a scene already in progress, effecting a quick

return to the action at hand after the intermission.

The town gossip motive introduces the narrative in measure five. This motive

alternates with melodic material derived from the first two measures of "Cold Sassy."

These orchestral statements of the two leitmotivs serve as strong references to the

town and its people, as Will relates the town's reaction to Rucker's latest escapades.

The choice of the chirping "Gossip" motive implies the quality of the town's reaction

to Rucker's installation of modern plumbing after years of stubborn refusal, and to his

now public flirtations with Love. The orchestral commentary, which consists initially

of sparse interjections of the two leitmotivs over pedal points, becomes busier by

measure sixteen, suggesting increased verbal commentary from the town. The

harmonic rhythm of the introduction also increases gradually and steadily, as the

gossip gains momentum. The gradually increasing energy in the melodrama creates a

vibrant atmosphere for the vignette that seamlessly follows the introduction.

The subsequent scenario involves Love entertaining customers in the store, as

she displays her salesmanship skills. Love shows samples of new fabrics and hats to

Lula, Myrtis, Thelma Predmore, and Effie Belle Tate.[105] The musical character of

the scene is carefree, graceful and lilting. The 6/8 meter and the *Allegretto poco*

scherzando tempo designation contribute largely to this effect. The characters are

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[105] Lula and Myrtis are identified by first names only in the score.

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pitted against one another according to both their loyalties and their respective roles in store.

Texture

This short vignette from Scene 1 offers a lucid illustration of Floyd's technique of communicating character relationships through voice couplings. Love, as an outsider in the town and also the saleswoman in the store, delivers her text as an individual throughout the scene. Effie Belle, though the friends' ringleader, speaks as an individual as well. In contrast, Lula, Myrtis and Thelma, sing as a group, functioning in unanimous agreement. After Love suggests a "lovely lavender voile" to Thelma individually, Thelma becomes the center of attention. Consequently, Thelma assumes her own solo voice while the other two friends remain joined in purpose, illustrated by the homogenous texture of their tandem interjections. Camp and Rucker both speak as individuals when they appear later in the scene.

The counterpoint between the ladies' melodic lines is fascinating to examine. The ladies' first entrance appears with the three parts moving in parallel chords, in *fauxbourdon* style. The parts, especially those of Lula and Myrtis when Thelma has separated from the group, weave in and out of unison (see musical example 43). Occasionally, the two parts begin in unison, and then split. More predominantly, the parts begin on separate notes, subsequently shrink into unison, and then divide once more. Musical examples 43 and 44 illustrate two such situations. The final chord of each two-voice phrase alternates between consonance and dissonance. Though some of the dissonant phrase endings occur when Lula and Myrtis express disgust or

dismay, the quality of the chord does not appear to indicate consistently the ladies' agreement or disagreement with the preceding line of text.

Musical Example 43. Counterpoint between vocal lines. Act III, Scene 1, mm. 65-68. [106]

The interval structure of the two parts frequently includes major seconds. Intervals of a second are consistently prominent up to this point in the opera, and continue to appear here as a primary component of the harmonic language.

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[106] Floyd, 226.

The final interval of many of the ladies' phrases, for example, is a major second, as shown in musical examples 43 and 44. The frequency of the appearance of these major and minor seconds distills their dissonant effect (see musical example 44).

Musical Example 44. Counterpoint between vocal lines, Act III, Scene 1, mm. 124-127.[107]

In this scene, Floyd often scores the voice parts *a cappella*, in regular alternation with accompanied material (see musical examples 43 and 44). The stop

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[107] Ibid., 233.

and start of the orchestra contributes to the rollicking mood of the scene. The use of silence in the accompaniment also focuses attention on the ladies and their text.

As the scene progresses, the ladies' eagerness intensifies and the voice parts become slightly more independent. The melodic lines begin to overlap, and the parts spill over one another as the ladies fawn over the merchandise (see musical example 45).

Musical Example 45. Voice overlap in Act III, Scene 1, mm. 103-106.[108]

Rhythm

This scene is characterized by occasionally extreme rhythmic complexity. Such rhythmic intricacies include both polyrhythms and a predominant disagreement between triple and duple division within the bar. The first measures of the scene establish the rhythmic characteristics to come. The shifting silent beats in the first three measures, slipping later and later in the bar, establish a rhythmic complexity

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[108] Ibid., 130.

that will be a central element in the ensuing scene. The internal beat division

dichotomy prevalent in the scene appears already in the fourth measure, shown in

musical example 46.

Musical Example 46. Act III, Scene 1, First Measures of "Hat" Vignette, mm. 25-28.[109]

The ladies' music, in 6/8, switches frequently and swiftly between triple and

duple division, giving the effect of three-plus-three, versus two-plus-two-plus-two.

Occasionally, the duple/triple disagreement described above is further layered, when

both triplets and duplets appear simultaneously within the measure, resulting in a

polyrhythm. In these cases, often the vocal line maintains one pattern while the

opposing rhythmic group occurs in the orchestra.

The nine-measure interruption that occurs when Camp enters the room

contains the most extensive rhythmic complexity of the vignette. Within this section,

quadruple beat divisions frequently clash with concurrent triple beat divisions. In

addition, rhythmic intricacy and syncopation characterize the melodic line, adding

another layer of complexity (see musical example 47).

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[109] Floyd. 222.

Musical Example 47. Rhythmic complexity and mode mixture in Act III, Scene 1, mm. 79-80.[110]

(As she is doing this, Camp enters from the rear, rolling an empty barrel across the floor. Love stands up, pattern in hand. As she steps forward to show the pattern to Mrs. Predmore, Camp rolls the barrel directly between them and, startled, all the women step back quickly with little cries of surprise.)

Alternating meters contribute to both structural divisions and dramatic characterizations in the scene. The composer set the lumbering, heavy, "Camp" segment of the scene in common time. When Love speaks to Camp, her melodic character changes. Her previously lighthearted, easy manner becomes accusatory,

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[110] Floyd, 227.

characterized by successively narrowing intervals, as she conforms to the square

meter. Effie Belle's music is also set in a stubborn, sensible common time. The

alternation between 6/8 meter and common time suggests formal divisions within the

scene as well (see table 14).

Table 14. Formal scheme of Act III, Scene 1 vignette.

A	B	A	C	A	C′	A
m. 25 ———— 76	77——85	86———115	116—123	124 ——141	142—152	153–158
6 8	4 4	6 8	4 4	6 8	4 4	6 8
3 + 3 or 2 + 2 + 2	♪♪♪♪ v. ♪♪♪	3 + 3 or 2 + 2 + 2	*heavy syncopation*	3 + 3 or 2+ 2+ 2	*rhythmic simplicity*	3 + 3

Form

The formal design of the scene resembles a rondo. Rhythmic and metric

characteristics, rather than tonal level or thematic material, create the sectional

divisions of the structural design. The regular alternation between the ladies' music,

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in 6/8 meter, and other material creates the rondo implication. Varying rhythmic characteristics also delineate each section of the rondo. Table 14 illustrates the large formal design of the vignette.

Tonality

Tonal centers, though frequently discernable in the vignette, do not heavily impact the structure of the scene. As in many other scenes in the opera, including those described in the previous chapters, pedal points often establish key centricity in this scene. Floyd favors root movement by thirds rather than by the parameters expected in traditional functional harmony. The vignette includes a long series of tonal centers separated by thirds. Occasionally, an authentic cadence may introduce an upcoming tonal center within the context of the overall tertian scheme. The progression of tonal centers is illustrated below in table 15.

Table 15. Key Center Movement by Thirds in Act III, Scene 1, mm. 25-90.

Measure:	25	39	57	70	77	83	86	90	94	98
Key:	G	Eb	C	Ab	F	(D)*	B	G	Eb	B

* (Fleeting allusion)

Mode mixture is also prevalent in this scene. The tonal centers identified above hover between major and minor, sometimes showing elements of both modes simultaneously. In the first measures of the vignette, a disagreement between the keys of G major and G minor surfaces, shown in musical example 46. Each of the

subsequent returns of the "A" section reflects modal ambiguity as well. The return at measure eighty-six implies both B major and B minor; the return at measure 124 combines E-flat major and E-flat minor; and the final return of the "A" section at measure 153 hovers between D major and D minor. The "Camp" section, measures seventy-seven through eighty-five, oscillates between F major and F minor, as can be seen in musical example 47.

Conclusions

The personalities on stage in this short scene are further defined by the music that characterizes each individual or group. The alternation of musical material, using the techniques described above, lends two overriding musical representations of the characters in the vignette. The global effect of the scene is one of alternation between the two characteristics: a lilting elegance, personified by Love and the ladies, and a pedestrian, earthbound drabness, exemplified by both Camp and Effie Belle.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* is an opera that is finding success with musicians and non-musicians alike. The composer's own libretto, true to the Burns original novel, offers a combination of both comic and tragic situations, and contributes significantly to the success and appeal of the opera. The comedic scenes are very successful, inspiring peals of laughter from the audience, and the tragic scenes are poignantly vivid.

Cold Sassy Tree contains a healthy mixture of both twentieth-century and non-twentieth-century compositional devices. The resulting language is uniquely Floydian. The score is predominantly tonal, though various harmonic devices serve to embellish this tonal fabric.

The prominent harmonic characteristics found in the excerpts discussed in chapters four through seven include a heavy reliance on major and minor seconds. These seconds are used harmonically in both opposing key center relationships and in cluster chords. The same intervals frequently function melodically to create a tonal ambiguity, when both major and minor seconds built on the same pitch appear in close proximity.

Floyd often uses polychords coloristically in the opera, especially scoring them at moments of tension or including them to enhance the impact of important

text. Cluster chords figure prominently in Floyd's unique harmonic language, permeating the entire score, even the sections that are strongly tonal.

The tonal fabric often contains a mixture of both tertian and non-tertian elements. Although the overall chord quality of the piece reflects tertian structure, non-chord tones or added tones frequently embellish many of these tertian sonorities. Even within predominantly tonal landscapes, Floyd often prefers root movement by thirds. Recognizable cadences sometimes reinforce the strong tonal allusions in the score, however. Contrapuntal interplay between independent voice parts and between voice parts and the orchestra is frequently present.

The melodic style in *Cold Sassy Tree* is alternatively angular and lyrical. Spoken dialogue, set as melodrama, contrasts with the recitative of the score. Floyd relies on an intricate leitmotiv structure to unify his opera. The leitmotivs also serve to enhance audience understanding of characterization and character development.

Floyd's richly and intricately constructed rhythmic landscape alternates between candid simplicity and extreme complexity. Irregular meters appear with frequency. Meter sometimes plays a structural role in the opera as well, defining formal boundaries within subsections of the score.

The three acts of the opera include a number of arias and ensembles. Many of these arias are excerptable (see table 16). Though the opera is not constructed as a "numbers opera," *per se*, independent scenes exist within the score, often separated by breaks to accommodate set changes.

The opera is a *tour de force* for the production staff. The first act alone includes six major set changes. Numerous asides that occur in independent settings

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occur in the act as well.

Table 16. Arias in *Cold Sassy Tree.*

Character	Location	Title
Will	Act I, Scene 2	"Guardian Angel"
Love	Act I, Scene 3	"Rented Rooms"
Rucker	Act I, Scene 4	"Sermon Aria"
Clayton McAllister	Act II, Scene 1	"Love, I'm Here on a Mission"
Lightfoot	Act II, Scene 2	"I Yearn So to Know Things"
Rucker	Act II, Scene 3	"I've Known I Loved You"
Love	Act II, Scene 3	"Something Happened"
Will	Act III, Scene 3	"Sometimes the Pain of Missing Him"

The opera has a small core cast, but also includes numerous *comprimario* roles. The chorus activity is limited; only Act I, Scene 4 and Act III, Scene 3 include the chorus. The intervallic structure of the vocal lines in the opera makes the parts challenging, as do the sometimes-difficult rhythms. The overall difficulty level of the vocal parts is not prohibitive, however. The orchestra parts are moderately difficult as well. For the conductor, the numerous sections of melodrama impose a particular challenge. The timing between the stage and the pit becomes especially difficult to coordinate in those parts.

The opera contains numerous smaller, recognizable formal structures, some of which have been described in the previous chapters of this study. Overall, however, the dramatic tension in the opera as a whole steadily increases throughout the first two acts, plateauing after Rucker's shooting and subsequent death in Act III.

Table 17. *Cold Sassy Tree:* Points of conflict, and increasing tension in the opera.

Act I	Act II	Act III

Tension

Events: *A*   *B*   *C*   *D*   *E*
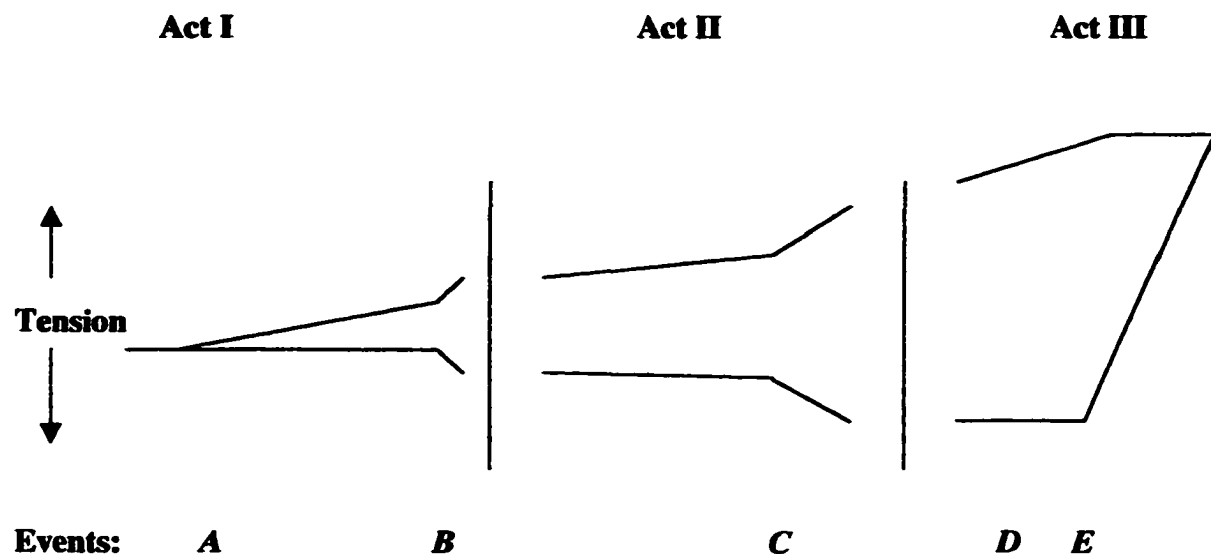
A = Rucker's marriage announcement
B = Church service confrontation
C = Rucker's and Love's revelations
D = The shooting
E = Rucker's death

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Based on prior analyses of earlier Floyd operas, particularly *Susannah* and *Slow Dusk*, [111] *Cold Sassy Tree* shares some characteristics with the composer's earlier works. Shared features of the older scores and Floyd's newest opera include reliance on pedal points, parallelism, and unprepared modulation to distant keys. Floyd continues, in *Cold Sassy Tree*, to develop his characteristic use of leitmotivs and his well-known affinity for folk-like tunes and hymns remains apparent. As previously cited, Floyd consistently employs spoken dialogue in his scores, a characteristic expanded in *Cold Sassy Tree*.

Floyd states that the harmonic language in *Cold Sassy Tree*, like that of his other operas, is specific to the piece itself, and is inspired by the libretto. [112] He maintains that each individual subject matter determines the musical language of its respective score. [113] Though rich with a variety of traditionally conservative and "modern" techniques, *Cold Sassy Tree* is unfettered by artificial over-complications. In this way, the score is reflective of the basic human values raised up in the libretto, layered with situations and emotions but ultimately clear and empathetic.

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[111] See McDevitt, 57-63.

[112] Carlisle Floyd, interview by the author, 02 March 2002, via telephone, tape recording.

[113] Ibid.

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Appendix 1

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Synopsis of the Opera

Setting: Cold Sassy Tree, Georgia
Date: 1900

Act I

The opera begins as several citizens of Cold Sassy Tree try to persuade the sheriff and mayor that the name of the town must be changed to something more "modern." Rucker Lattimore, pillar of the community and owner of the town general store, scandalizes the town by remarrying only three weeks after his first wife's death. His daughters Mary Willis and Loma bemoan the news and anticipate the town's inevitable reaction to their father's decision to marry a woman half his age.

Will has a run-in with the boys of Milltown. Lightfoot McClendon appears on the scene. Will calls her his "guardian angel" and the two part tenderly.

Rucker brings Love Simpson home as his new wife. The two explain the terms of their marriage, or "business arrangement," to the rest of the family. Love explains something about her past to Mary Willis and Loma, describing the rented rooms that have always been her temporary homes.

The townspeople react to the new marriage, blaming the entire situation on Love. They shun her at church, so Rucker insists upon holding church at home. The scene climaxes in a rousing ensemble as the townspeople hear Rucker, Love and Will singing the doxology through the parlor window.

Act II

Rucker's daughters resist accepting his new wife. Meanwhile, Rucker begins to appear more youthful. A stranger named Clayton McAllister arrives from Texas and reveals something about Love's past. Lightfoot has to drop out of school to help her mother, who is sick with tuberculosis. Rucker demands that Will apologize for spreading wild stories about his Aunt Loma. Love returns from a shopping trip to

Atlanta to find a surprise from Rucker waiting for her. Their excitement culminates in each of the two revealing something deeply personal to the other.

Act III

Love's skill as a milliner brings her closer to acceptance with the town ladies. Two robbers hold up the general store at gunpoint and Rucker is shot. Love tries to communicate something important to Rucker on his deathbed, but she isn't sure whether he has heard her say that she will have his child. The town gathers to celebrate Rucker's life.

**Telephone Interview with Carlisle Floyd,
Conducted by Susanne Sheston**

02 March 2002

SS: How did the *Cold Sassy Tree** commission first come about?

CF: The commission to write the opera?

SS: Yes.

CF: The commission came about because I was. . . drawn to the novel, because it
         contained appealing characters and dramatic situations and comic situations,
         but I saw that there were several problems with converting it into a libretto.
         But I gave the novel to my friend and colleague, David Gockley, at the
         Houston Grand Opera, to read, and to see how someone not from the south
         would respond to it; he's from Pennsylvania. Well, he fell in love with it.
         And immediately started urging me to think of it in terms of an opera, and
         even talking about a commission. But I hesitated, and just postponed
         accepting a commission or even getting that far with it at that point, and really
         studied the book, before I felt like I could come up with a workable libretto
         for the stage; there were so many problems. So I held off about 18 months,
         but I finally decided I felt we could proceed to give some shape to the novel
         for the stage. And at that point it was agreed to talk about the commission.

         And then it was up to my publisher and them to negotiate the commission, as
         it always is. He [David Gockley] had been urging the commission from the
         beginning, but I didn't want to accept it until I knew that it was something that
         I could fulfill.

SS: How much time did you spend writing the libretto?

CF: The libretto? Well, probably. . .I would guess some 18 months.

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* Cold Sassy Tree will be abbreviated throughout the transcript as CST.

SS: I imagine it must have been one of the more challenging librettos that you've worked on, is that true?

CF: None more so.

SS: It is a fascinating book . . .

CF: Well, if you know the book, you know it's very episodic, and it's a real narrative kind of book. And you can't create any kind of narrative dramatic tension without what we call a "through line." So, that was (laughs). . . After I read the book the last time I never went back to it. I really felt I had to recreate something pretty much on my own for the stage.

SS: Do you usually, or did you in this case, begin writing music before the libretto was done?

CF: Oh, no, no, no, I never do that!

SS: So the whole thing is finished before those ideas come?

CF: Well, finished so far as the libretto can be finished. You can expect to make adjustments after you begin to set it to music, then it takes a different life. It's finished "tentatively," let's put it that way.

SS: I see. I did examine several of the differences in my paper between the libretto and the novel, and I was curious about the character of Hoyt Tweedy being eliminated. Could you talk a little bit about that decision?

CF: Well, first of all, I thought he was a rather weak character in the book. And I was more interested in focusing entirely on the relationship of Will Tweedy and his grandfather. And I didn't want to have an intervening character. And I felt the relationship of Will with his grandfather was so much stronger than that with his father.

SS: Yes. Ultimately I agree; it was a strong choice.

CF: And I just thought it would be another character on the stage that wouldn't have a lot to do. And, after all, Camp Williams is there for comedy. . . I did it for those purposes; I felt it was not all that strong a character to begin with, and secondly I thought it would diminish the focus between Will and his grandfather and those are the main characters.

SS: Have you met in your own life experiences Effie Belles or Rucker Lattimore types?

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CF: (Laughs.) Well, yes, I think we've all met Effie Belle types. I think they invade just about everywhere. I would love to say I've met people who have a lot of Rucker's very strong individuality. And sort of, very dynamic, dominant people with varied personalities. . . I think he's a remarkable character. I guess I've met people, certainly other men, and perhaps women as well, who carry a complete disregard for what people thought. And they're probably very much biased to their own [thoughts]. A stage director friend of mine said, and it was very helpful to me when I was doing the libretto, that "Rucker doesn't have an insecure cell in his body!" That's not something we can say for very many people. (Laughs.) At least that I know of.

        But, I felt definitely that there were things I wanted to do in my version that were a little different from the book, for Rucker. I wanted to make his character reveal itself very, very gradually, so that you have one impression of him in the body of the first act—you think you get an idea that that's about all there is to this man, and then something later follows that confirms it. . .

SS: And the name itself, from Blakeslee to Lattimore, was that a lyrical choice?

CF: A choice purely for intelligibility. And also, Blakeslee is a very difficult name to even pronounce, much less sing. That was purely for practical reasons.

SS: What sort of large-scale musical plan, if any, do you create as you begin to write a new opera?

CF: Well, you're starting each scene with an idea of how it's shaped, based on the libretto, where the climactic points come, how to build towards the curtain or a scene ending. All of that very much determines the piece's structure; to me it's insoluble, it's really one. You can't force the music to conform, or if you do you pay the price. You can say, "Well, the music. . .the climactic point in the music is here, the climactic point of the drama is here." You can do that, but it's not going to pay off for you. Two things are going to tell you: in the first place how the dramatic scenes play in the music and [if] there's no justification for the climactic scenes in the music. So it's a matter of letting those two things determine it. Did I make that clear?

SS: Yes. So, do you have a certain tonal scheme in mind before you start, or is that also a result of the organic process, for example?

CF: Organic is the word, as far as I'm concerned. I don't have that much of a tonal relationship, except I was very much attracted to the idea of it being in D.

SS: The piece has several arias in it—

CF: Yes, an anthology of arias!

SS: Yes. I was wondering if you believe, personally, that an opera should have several arias in order to be successful?

CF: I think it's a very big plus, or a very big bonus, because it's those particular moments of crystallization that are one of the glories of the operatic form. I think. . . the answer is a pretty emphatic "yes," that I believe very much in set pieces, but they can't arrive arbitrarily. You have to go into them and also come out of them very carefully, so that they don't seem in any way gratuitous, inserted for the purpose of just inserting a set piece. They should basically be ... an audience should only be aware of them as [they go] along, I feel.

SS: Do you have a certain length in mind, in hours and minutes, when you start a score, such as CST?

CF: Well, I have kind of an outside limit of what I can get—how can I put it—a maximum number of minutes that I think is practical. Just in terms of my experience in the theater, in any opera with a playing time of more than three hours, and I've done that kind of piece, you risk the audience getting the feeling it's too long, even if it's very compressed.

In CST—well, it depends on the material. The longest opera I suppose I've written is *The Passion of Jonathan Wade*. It's about three hours and a half—with intermission, three hours and forty minutes. But it's a very big-scaled opera, in terms of subject matter and forces and characters, and I really couldn't get it down to less than that. CST is not that big a canvas, although it's a much bigger canvas than I had originally imagined, as I was reminded after we got into rehearsals. But I felt it should not, certainly, exceed—my ideal length for any opera is around two hours and a half, with intermissions. I think that's perfect for an audience. I think that if it's less than that, that audiences like it even more. But I felt for the material in CST it should not exceed two hours and a half, and it think it's about two hours and forty minutes.

SS: Do you have a regular working schedule that you adhere to when you're doing a major project like CST?

CF: Oh, yes, I refer to it as being in training.

SS: A certain number of hours per day?

CF: Well, basically yes, I work mornings and afternoons.

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SS: Do you find comedy more difficult to write?

CF: By far. I felt that I was really impeded initially with CST, simply because I had never written a comedy. Comedy is just not nearly as direct, in terms of emotions. And I had the feeling in the first part, well the first scene, that I'd never really written an opera before. I realize that it's pretty idiotic, but the material is very different that what I've treated. Once I got to the—I'm sure you know the opera by now—the "Rented Rooms" section, then I felt perfectly at home. I thought, " I know how to do this."

SS: That's interesting. Well, the comic sections are very successful; did you find yourself rewriting those. . .?

CF: No, I just decided to do what my instincts told me. I always revise, although I think that I did less rewriting, revising in doing CST, than probably in any previous opera. Which I won't say it's better or worse, it's just the way it turned out. I kept thinking, "Well, I'll go back and restate this." But then I decided, "I'm just going to leave it the way it is." But, the comic scenes—I decided to trust my own instincts about it, because it's always a matter of pacing.

SS: I noticed in your OPERA America article, I believe it's from '82 or so, you talked about the importance of the composer's responsibility in determining the dramatic pacing. How does a composer learn that skill?

CF: Well, the first prerequisite is theater blood, particularly just an instinct for the theater and an instinct for the stage. Other than that, you learn it by your own experience, watching very carefully what goes on, particularly the pacing of a scene, and so on. You should be the first one to bore, let's put it that way, if it starts to lag. Composers can get very enchanted with their music, and all those other things happening on the stage. It's *deadly* when that happens. But you're your own judge, one must first be. And [then there's] the input of all those people you always work with in theater: stage directors, and anyone   . else you can survive, who are always very free and quick to tell you if they think that something is dragging, or needs to be trimmed. I can usually do it myself, and usually in my head, without those people. But in the case of CST, it was good to have the suggestions of the conductor and the stage director for some possible cuts that I made. And once they were made, I thought, "Well, thank God that they suggested them," because they were perfectly right.

SS: Did you make any changes in the score after the first production?

CF: Very little, almost none. I think I took out a few measures in Rucker's aria in the second act.

SS: Would you say that your musical language is intentionally specific to each of
        the scores or librettos that you've written, or are those changes in style sort of
        a result of stylistic evolution throughout your career. In other words, does the
        musical language suit a certain piece...?

CF: No, to me the material determines it. I think if you heard *Of Mice and Men,* of
        mine, you would find that the music sounds quite different, in many ways. I
        feel that it's all still recognizably mine, for better or for worse. But the
        dramatic material really determines what you would go with.

SS: Something I find especially fascinating about CST, regarding the harmonic
        language—upon analyzing it—is that it is rich with many so-called "modern"
        devices, but achieves a very accessible, pleasurable, listen. That's very
        different than so many other scores today that might contain the same devices
        but don't achieve the same product. Do you consciously set out to create
        something accessible?

CF: No. I'm very happy if my taste matches the audience (laughs). No, I think
        that's a very perilous way to proceed, if you try to guess what the audience is
        going to respond to, and then write deliberately for the audience. You know,
        if you've been in it for a long time, and I have, you pretty much know what an
        audience will respond to. But I don't write with that in mind. I certainly
        don't write *without* the audience in mind. But, I think if you leave CST, you
        don't come away with the harmonic language of the "robbery" scene; I think
        you come away with something much more broadly lyrical. But for those
        things, they do require that—that kind of color. That's just part of the whole
        picture you create. You need a very big palette. I think many composers may
        start an opera based on their own musical language, and shoehorn the libretto
        into it. And I think those composers are better off, probably, writing concert
        music than writing music [with a libretto]. And a very fine composer that I
        know, a very astute, very honest composer said, "I thought I would never
        write a piano concerto and I would never write an opera, because I didn't feel
        that I could adapt my idiom to the demands of those forms." He said, "I've
        written a piano concerto now; I hope I'm not weakening!" (Laughs.) But, I
        felt that was very astute, that he realized what was required for opera, in terms
        of a certain degree of eclecticism, you know.

SS: What direction would you like to see American opera go in the next twenty
        years?

CF: I would just like to see more work done that audiences can respond to, both
        dramatically and musically—that's a pretty generic answer. But, I think the
        first requirement is a libretto that's stage-worthy, and that embodies characters
        whose lives the audience can easily participate in. Musical language is

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another matter. I think audiences, if they're informed of what's happening on the stage, they're not nearly—they aren't *as* critical of musical language. Of course, there will always be people who will be critical. I think the important thing is to put operas out there that are compelling dramatically as we have come to expect from the theater.

SS: Do you have any particular advice that you would give an opera composer today? My husband is an opera composer, by the way.

CF: Oh, really. (Pauses.) It's a tough world. (Laughs.) I would say number one: working in the theater requires the ability and willingness to collaborate. And it's decidedly an arena in which many heads are better than one, on many occasions. But, the final decision, of course, should be the composer's. But, if you can't accept the responses—the informed responses—of the professionals you work with, and at least evaluate what they've said, what suggestions are made, you're better off just writing for the concert stage.

SS: Do you still have students?

CF: Not at the moment, no. I retired from academic life six years ago.

SS: Are you working on another operatic project?

CF: No, not at the moment. . .

SS: Well, thank you very much for your time and insights.

CF: You're welcome, and good luck to you. And good luck to your husband as well. (Pauses.) And my sympathy!

SS: (Laughs.) I'll tell him that.

CF: It sounds like he's off to a good start, though.

SS: Thank you again.

Instrumentation List

Cold Sassy Tree
By Carlisle Floyd

Flute 1
Flute 2 with Piccolo
Oboe 1
Oboe 2 with English horn
Clarinet 1
Clarinet 2 with Bass clarinet
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2 with Contra Bassoon

Horns 1,2,3,4
Trumpets 1,2
Trombones 1,2
Tuba

Timpani
Percussion 1,2,3

Harp
Piano with Celeste

Strings

Appendix 4

List of Operas by Carlisle Floyd
(Librettos by the Composer)

Slow Dusk	1949
The Fugitives (withdrawn)	1951
Susannah	1955
Wuthering Heights	1958
The Passion of Jonathan Wade	1962
The Sojourner and Molly Sinclair	1963
Markheim	1966
Of Mice and Men	1970
Flower and Hawk (monodrama)	1972
Bilby's Doll	1976
Willie Stark	1981
Cold Sassy Tree	2000