

## SUSANNAH INQUIRIES

I have had a few people asking me about Carlisle Floyd's highly dramatic and melodic opera. Their questions are basically the same. They want to know if this work is, as one person put it, "a lot of noises strung together and called music". Another writer wanted to know if there were a melody within "a country mile" of the work. The answer to the first question is decidedly no and a decisive yes to the second.

Since the 1950's Broadway and opera have become increasingly more aware of each other. Composers like Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Kurt Weill, and Gian-Carlo Menotti all wrote shows for Broadway that have a kinship with opera. Carlisle Floyd's SUSANNAH had its premiere in 1955. As did several of his contemporaries, including Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore and Kurt Weill among others, Floyd often incorporates known ballads or folk songs in his work or writes in the style of the folk tradition. These compositions have been defined as folk operas and some of them might well be done on Broadway today side by side with Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The chasm has grown more narrow between the opera house and Shubert Alley in the last half century.

The characters in these musical dramas are simple folk, quite often, but they are given strong dramatic and lyrical life by the composers. They are real people and their stories are told in a realistic manner in locales familiar to us. As a result, we identify easily with them. They are readily accessible to us, especially Carlisle Floyd's SUSANNAH

.I normally don't comment on productions by Virginia Opera until I have seen them. However, because many of us seem to be skittish about contemporary music, I decided to share, briefly, my thoughts about SUSANNAH WITH YOU. This emotionally shattering masterpiece of musical theatre is not to be missed. I'll discuss again after I, and I hope you, have seen it.