

MACLEOD, SCOTT R., D.M.A. *Creating the Southern Voice in American Opera Composition*. (2012)
Directed by Dr. Carla LeFevre. 51 pp.

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine possible compositional trends in contemporary American operas based on Southern librettos, through an analysis of three operas: Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000), based on the story by Olive Ann Burns; Lee Hoiby's *Summer and Smoke* (1971), based on the play by Tennessee Williams; and Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1954), based on Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes*. These operas were specifically chosen because of their similarities in setting, including period and location. When possible, living composers were interviewed as primary sources.

Emergent characteristics include extensive use of blues and folk styles, recreations of Southern musical forms, and text setting that mimics characteristics of the Southern accent. All three operas utilize wide vocal range, languid tempo, and rounded vocal lines in their characterization of female Southern charm. Depictions of race and class also influence compositional choices, in that rural and lower class characters are often assigned folk styles, while upper class characters are more often represented with European musical traits. This analysis provides a basis for identifying recurrent themes in the Southern opera genre.

CREATING THE SOUTHERN VOICE IN AMERICAN OPERA COMPOSITION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Greensboro
2012

Approved by

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Dedicated to my Grandmother, Lonnie Sandlin, who is the most perfect representation of Southern grace I have ever encountered.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Considering Southern Opera

The Southern United States is a region rich with literary and musical traditions. Boasting authors such as Olive Ann Burns, Lillian Hellman, Tennessee Williams, Thomas Wolfe, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Mitchell, Harper Lee, and James Dickey, twentieth century Southern literature plays a significant role in defining regional character and mannerism in post-Victorian society.¹ The South is also commonly recognized as the birthplace of many innately American musical forms, including jazz, ragtime, blues, gospel, bluegrass, spirituals, and minstrelsy. Modern-day literary and musical products of the South are often highly distinguishable, tracing their roots to the South's proud social and artistic heritage, sense of family and religion, politics, racial complexities, class, and dialect.²

In many ways, Southern music and literature are historically complementary. William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Richard Wright drew upon the blues as inspiration in their writing.³ Tennessee Williams hoped that Elvis Presley would play one of the lead characters in his play *Orpheus Descending*, and wrote blues lyrics later set by composer

¹ Louis Decimus Rubin, *The History of Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 3-4.

² Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music/American Music* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 1-4.

³ William Ferris, "Southern Literature: A Blending of Oral, Visual, and Musical Voices," *Daedalus* 141 (2012): 144.

Paul Bowles.¹ Lee Smith titled three of her novels after Southern fiddle tunes she had heard as a child.²

A wonderful synthesis of Southern musical and literary traditions is represented in the twentieth and twenty-first century opera genre. Many composers are attracted to the sounds and styles of the South, and a wealth of Southern opera repertoire now exists. These works are most often adaptations of well-known Southern plays or novels. In capturing the essence of the environment in which these stories are set, the composer attempts to develop a musical language to match the intended culture, geography and period.

A wide precedence for nationalistic soundscapes occurs in many facets of the opera tradition; one can consider Bizet's *Carmen*, Delibes' *Lakmé*, and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* as prime examples. Bizet demonstrated the sounds of Spain in *Carmen* with a tango-inspired interpretation of the *habanera* and intermittent flamenco themes.³ Delibes infused *Lakmé* with modal harmonies to emblemize British India.⁴ Puccini utilized the pentatonic scale in *Madama Butterfly* and also quoted Japanese folk songs.⁵ How, then, does the modern-day composer capture the sounds of the American South? What devices does he/she utilize? What, if any, parallels can be drawn between various composers working within these parameters?

¹ (Ferris 2012, 145). Bowles also wrote incidental music for the original production of Williams' *Summer and Smoke*. Bowles was a respected author as well as a composer.

² (Ferris 2012, 148)

³ Elizabeth Kerstes and Michael Christoforidis, "Confronting Carmen beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet's opera in Madrid, 1887–1888," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20 (2008): 80-82.

⁴ William E. Studwell, "Lakme," *St. James Opera Encyclopedia* (2001): 423-425.

⁵ Burton D. Fisher, *Puccini's Madama Butterfly* (Miami: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2001):18.

This dissertation explores these questions through an analysis of three operas: Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000), based on the story by Olive Ann Burns; Lee Hoiby's *Summer and Smoke* (1971), based on the play by Tennessee Williams; and Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1954), based on Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes*. These operas were specifically chosen because of their similarities in setting, including period and location. The action takes place between 1900 and 1916, those fragile years between the turn of the twentieth century and the United States' entry into World War One. Each is geographically centralized within the "Deep South," specifically Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Two composers, Lee Hoiby and Marc Blitzstein, were native to the Northern United States, while Carlisle Floyd is a lifelong Southerner; though this treatise does not explore stereotype or regional perception, it is nonetheless worth noting that different attitudes and influences may have had some effect in shaping compositional decisions.

In preparing this dissertation, I interviewed composers Carlisle Floyd, Jake Heggie, and J. Mark Scarce, all respected composers of Southern operas. Their observations provided insight into the compositional process and specific techniques of text setting, musical choice, and other key aspects related to Southern opera composition.

Defining the Southern United States

Because of the diverse ethnic and social background of the United States, a wide and complex array of musical forms can be associated with various regions. The American South, like the rest of the U.S., is a geographically evolving region full of

different traditions and socio-cultural fabric. Its exact location depends on context. The United States Census Bureau, for example, defines the Southern United States as the sixteen states extending from Texas to Delaware and bordering the Atlantic Ocean.⁶ Many label the “Dixie” States – those that first seceded and formed the Confederacy – as the true South.⁷ The South is comprised of gulf states, Appalachia, and middle and upper regions.

For the purposes of this treatise, the three operas explored are all set within the Deep South, which is traditionally comprised of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. These states, along with Florida and Texas, represent the first states to secede from the Union.⁸ Their antebellum economy relied heavily on cotton and tobacco crops harvested by the slave trade.⁹ The region is known for its hot climate, protestant following, political unity, and deep historical pride. When an outsider conceives of the South, its culture, and its subsequent stereotypes, this is the region that most frequently comes to mind.

Southern Musical Tradition

It is difficult to pin down a musical style that is entirely indigenous to the South.

Stemming from European, African, and occasionally Native and Latin American

⁶ United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf (accessed May 12, 2012)

⁷ Allan Metcalf, *How We Talk: American Regional English Today* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 5.

⁸ John Everett-Heath, ed., “The Deep South” in *Concise Dictionary of World Place-Names*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t209.e1775> (accessed May 20, 2012).

⁹ Blaine A. Brownell, “The South,” *The Oxford Companion to United States History* ed. Paul S. Boyer, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t119.e1437> (accessed May 20, 2012).

influences, American music's history is one of borrowed cultures. Southern music history is as conflicted as its political history; the genteel South was in stark opposition to a defiant rebel state, the rural countryside withdrew from its urban neighbors, and the quiet plantation contrasted from the progressive industrial city center. Southern musical styles were often imitative of sounds from the North, and the Northern concept of Southern music was often a caricature steeped in mythology and stereotype.¹⁰ Regardless, a soundscape emerged from the antebellum and post-war South that is readily familiar and directly associated with the region.

Understanding the various styles that are indicative of the South facilitates an understanding of the devices that were later used in Southern opera composition. The "birth of pop music" in America, according to historian Ken Emerson, can be traced to Andrew's Eagle Ice Cream Saloon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1847. It was here that a young Stephen Foster won first prize in a songwriting competition with his instant success "Oh! Susanna."¹¹ A lifetime native of the North, Stephen Foster romanticized and idealized the Southern plantation in song, and at the same time exoticized African-American society prior to the Emancipation Proclamation.¹² Foster learned folk idioms from his Southern mother and accompanying black servants. He was intrigued by the new minstrel acts that came up the Mississippi River on steamships and then traveled eastward to major cultural hubs. His combination of classical European training and

¹⁰ (Malone and Stricklin 2003, 1-2)

¹¹ Ken Emerson, *Doo-dah!: Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 127.

¹² Arthur Krim, "Stephen Foster and His Musical Geography of the South," in *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Music from Country to Classical and Blues to Pop*, ed. George O. Carney (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 15-23.

interest in rural folk (largely African) entertainment proved to be a combination that captured the nostalgic, sentimental charm of the mythological South.¹³

Foster bridged the gap between folk and fine art, a gap that was acknowledged (perhaps even embraced) by the antebellum South. Prior to Foster's popularity, social organizations such as Charleston's Saint Cecilia Society sponsored private "high art" concerts, and touring French musical groups played to exclusive, high-paying audiences and patrons. Plantation balls were embraced by the bourgeoisie, and admission to music conservatories was reserved for the elite.¹⁴ At the same time, country dances and string bands entertained the working poor and servant population. The fiddle, with its convenient small size, was heard "anywhere a crowd gathered" and "constituted America's largest and most important body of folk music preserved and transmitted without benefit of written scores."¹⁵ The five-string banjo and guitar became synonymous with Appalachia and the "hillbilly" sound eventually found its way into impoverished and black communities all over the south.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, classical and folk compositions were reinterpreted with syncopated rhythms. Largely popularized by Southern black musicians and initially imitative of banjo melodies, this musical practice evolved into the ragtime genre. Ragtime was influenced by the popularity of marches by composers such as John Philip Sousa, and was primarily composed for piano.¹⁶ Typical ragtime compositions contained straight eighth notes in the left hand, similar to a tuba "oompah" in a march,

¹³ (Krim 2003, 15-23)

¹⁴ (Malone and Stricklin 2003, 13)

¹⁵ (Malone and Stricklin 2003,11)

¹⁶ Rex Harris, *The Story of Jazz* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960), 29.

and syncopated rhythms in the right hand. Ragtime flourished and spread around the turn of the century due to celebrated contributions from Scott Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb. Around this same time, black folk singers in New Orleans began to develop the twelve-bar blues. Stemming from the traditions of slave field hollers, spirituals, rich storytelling, and improvisation, the blues provided an outlet for the hardship and toil of the Southern black community to be expressed in a colorful, passionate, and sometimes humorous fashion. Both ragtime and blues played a significant role in the development of twentieth century jazz. In the words of jazz artist Sydney Becher, jazz “wasn’t spirituals or blues or ragtime, but everything all at once, each one putting something over the other.”¹⁷

Southern audiences that preferred European classical influence were often drawn to the compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Gottschalk was generally acknowledged by the nineteenth century music elite as the first American to gain international respect through the composition of native subjects.¹⁸ His compositions were well known in urban centers across the United States. Born in New Orleans in 1829 to a French-Haitian mother and American father, Gottschalk was the product of classical training and Creole influence. He was exposed to opera at an early age and took violin and piano lessons. He moved to France at the age of thirteen to continue his musical studies; it was there that he developed a compositional method that fused European song and symphony with American folk themes. In 1849 he wrote four compositions based on

¹⁷ Lewis Porter and Michael Ullman, *Jazz: From Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993), 11.

¹⁸ Bill F. Faucett, *Music in America 1860-1918* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2008), 7.

American melodies under the pen name “Gottschalk of Louisiana.” One of these pieces, “Banjo,” incorporated elements of Stephen Foster’s “De Camptown Races.”¹⁹ Gottschalk toured extensively throughout the United States and Caribbean until his untimely death in 1869.

Turn-of-the-century Southern audiences also had access to traveling European artists, and sometimes mounted European works within their own communities. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was performed for American audiences over 100 times between 1879 and 1881, including at least one black public school version in New Orleans.²⁰ Though not as accessible to lower class audiences, promoters such as Phineas T. Barnum realized the wide appeal of artist imports such as Jenny Lind²¹ and Norwegian violinist Ole Bull. Their Southern tours were widely attended by diverse audiences. Southern cultural epicenters such as Atlanta, New Orleans, and Charleston supported symphonies and opera productions.

Finally, indigenous music from the U.S.-Mexican border led to the popularity of mariachi music and Tex-Mex ensembles. Major recording companies introduced mariachi music to American audiences in 1909,²² and waves of immigrants descended upon U.S. soil following the 1910 Mexican Revolution.²³ Mariachi folk melodies were often transmitted orally and appealed to urban Mexican-American communities.²⁴ As with the other Southern musical genres around the turn of the century, mariachi music

¹⁹ (Krim 2003, 21)

²⁰ (Faucett 2008, 246), (Porter and Ullman 1993, 7)

²¹ Jenny Lind’s American tour is the theme of Libby Larsen’s opera *Barnum’s Bird*.

²² Daniel Sheehy, *Mariachi Music in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

²³ L. C. Salazar, “From Fiesta to Festival: Mariachi Music in California and the Southwestern United States” (PhD diss, University of California Los Angeles, 2011), 69.

²⁴ (Sheehy 2011, 32)

influenced, and was influenced by, music from surrounding cultures and communities.

Overall, Southern music traditions in the early twentieth century were influenced by a wide array of sources, which came together to form a distinct and diverse sound palette.

CHAPTER II

SOUTHERN OPERAS

Overview of Southern Operas

Operatic settings of Southern novels and plays are numerous. Perhaps the best-known representative of this genre is Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, set in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1920s. Based on the novel by Dorothy and Dubose Heyward, *Porgy and Bess* deals with African-American characters living in fictitious Catfish Row. Since its 1935 debut, *Porgy and Bess* has been widely performed and freely adapted to other genres such as jazz, orchestra, cabaret, and popular music. Excerpts from the opera, including "Summertime," "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin,'" and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" are often recognized by a wide array of audiences, domestic and abroad. In many ways, *Porgy and Bess* established several of the idioms that are commonly utilized in other works within the Southern opera genre, including languid tempi, blue notes, and jazz references.

More recently, Carlisle Floyd has emerged as the preeminent composer of Southern opera. *Susannah*, set in the Tennessee foothills in the mid-1950s, won a New York Music Critics Circle Award for Best New Opera in 1956 and stands among the most performed American operas. It is noted for its Appalachian-style folk melodies (particularly "The Trees on the Mountain") and the vibrant mountain dialect of its libretto, also written by Floyd. Other Southern works by this composer include *Slow*

*Dusk, Willie Stark*¹, *The Passion of Jonathan Wade, Markheim*, and *Cold Sassy Tree* (analyzed below).

A considerable number of Southern operas has been written and performed within the last twenty years. Notable works include *Dead Man Walking* (2000) by Jake Heggie and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1998) by André Previn. Other works within the Southern opera genre include Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* (1910; first performed 1972), Robert Ward's *Claudia Legare* (1978), Alice Parker's *Ponder Heart* (1982), J. Mark Scearce's *Kitty Hawk* (1999), Jake Heggie's *To Hell and Back* (2006), and William Grant Still's *Highway One* (1963), as well as Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1948) and Lee Hoiby's *Summer and Smoke* (1971), discussed below. Opera companies such as the Metropolitan Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera have expanded their commissions of contemporary American operas in recent programming. Smaller companies such as the Center for Contemporary Opera (NY) and Long Leaf Opera (NC)² exclusively devote their programming to contemporary American opera. At the time of this writing several new works are being commissioned and composed.

Characteristics of Southern Opera Composition

As demonstrated in the following sections, composers use many different methods to create a Southern setting within an opera. Assorted combinations of these

¹ Adapted from Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *All the King's Men*.

² Long Leaf Opera ceased operations in 2012, citing poor economy and the death of one of its founding members.

devices create varied effects. The result is differing works that portray various aspects of the complex Southern soundscape.

A straightforward way of capturing Southern essence is to incorporate existing Southern musical genres into the larger composition. In *Cold Sassy Tree* the listener can hear elements of folk styles and a popular hymn setting. Lee Hoiby included Mexican musical traditions to indicate ambience and characterization in *Summer and Smoke*. Marc Blitzstein drew from many different Southern musical traditions in *Regina*, including jazz, ragtime, blues, gospel, Gottschalk references, and European influences of the Victorian Age, including polka and Viennese waltz. While actual musical quotations are infrequent, the integrity of the musical styles and idioms in these examples are largely kept intact. These highly familiar musical forms portray an unquestionable geographic setting to anyone familiar with Southern music traditions.

Implicit incorporation of Southern musical elements is another device commonly used by Southern opera composers. While Blitzstein extensively recreates different musical styles, Hoiby and Floyd tend to borrow elements of these forms without going so far as actually recreating them. Jazz/blues influences, especially blue notes and languid, swung tempi, are abundant in all three works. Syncopation suggestive of ragtime is a common element as well, especially in *Cold Sassy Tree*. Simple folk elements that can be found in the songs of Stephen Foster, as well as later composers such as Aaron Copland, are also widely utilized.

Text setting of Southern dialect also plays a large role in effectively demonstrating regionalism. In Southern speech, “characteristic stress, which is often

heavier than in general American speech, is achieved through lengthening of vowels and more pronounced pitch change.”³ North Carolina composer J. Mark Scarce produces a rhythmic dictation of text (as if it were spoken) before melodic setting, and finds that Southern English often tends to reduce itself to a triplet subdivision.⁴ San Francisco-based composer Jake Heggie has a propensity for emulating accents in spoken language, and conjectures that he instinctively carries that trait into his own composition. He also borrows qualities from established Southern musical forms, including gospel, folk, jazz, and rock.⁵

Carlisle Floyd is often acknowledged for his careful, deliberate attention to prosody. He is mindful that “accented speech syllables are matched with strong beats, and correspondingly unaccented speech syllables are placed on weak beats.”⁶ Floyd has two distinct advantages when setting text. First, he writes his own libretti, which allows for the sentence structure, word flow, and cadence desirable for optimum word placement and tempo. Second, he is a native Southerner, hailing from South Carolina and dividing his adult life between northern Florida and Texas, which provides him an innate understanding of Southern speech. This may be the reason why he tends to utilize less regional musical form and instead allows the text to express the characters and region.

³ Gillian Lane-Plescia, liner notes to *Accents of the American South, V. 2: A Resource for Actors*, cassette tape, 1999, 10.

⁴ J. Mark Scarce, e-mail message to composer, September 20, 2011.

⁵ Jake Heggie, e-mail message to composer, May 27, 2012.

⁶ Carlisle Floyd, e-mail message to composer, October 25, 2011.

CHAPTER III

COLD SASSY TREE

Background

Cold Sassy Tree by Carlisle Floyd is a whimsical exploration of rural Southern culture. Set in small town Georgia in 1906, it is a snapshot of Southern family relationships, class stratification, and stout religious convictions. It tells the story of fourteen-year-old Will Tweedy, his recently widowed Grandpa, and the colorful citizens of Cold Sassy. The novel by Olive Ann Burns is written in a highly colloquial manner, with abundant references to Southern dialect and metaphors. Floyd created a libretto that embraced the charm and storyline of the original novel, but adapted it freely to his preferred narrative. Floyd was attracted to the novel's lifelike humanity, sharp contrasts, and "the healing and transformative power of love."¹ This was his first comic opera.

Southern Musical Elements

Of the three operas presently explored, *Cold Sassy Tree* is perhaps the least obvious in its Southern musical characteristics. Instead of inserting a wide array of overtly Southern instrumental cues into his score, Floyd often looks to careful text setting to communicate the "Southern-ness" of the composition. Musically, *Cold Sassy Tree* adheres to an Aaron Copland-esque Americana style. Harmonies are spacious, and

¹ Carlisle Floyd, liner notes to *Cold Sassy Tree* (Houston Grand Opera, conducted by Patrick Summers, NY: Albany Records 758/59, CD, 2005).

rhythms are highly syncopated. Melodic phrases are often jagged, lively, and declamatory, featuring frequent intervallic leaps and interjecting punctuation statements in the orchestra, though at times of sentimentality the writing is quite linear and even. Percussive elements, such as chimes and xylophone, add to the suggestion of Copland in the musical texture. Similar to much of Copland's repertoire, the orchestration suggests old, rugged America; if not for Floyd's libretto, much of the score might convey a generic Western or country locale. There are some indicators, however, that anchor the score to the South. Though the hymn "Blest Be the Tie" is not originally native to the South, Floyd's adaptation at the end of Act I pays tribute to the Southern Baptist hymn tradition.¹ There are also several instances of "blue notes" – flat notes within the normal diatonic scale that often include scale degrees three, five, and seven. Will's Act III, Scene 3 aria, "Sometimes the pain o' missin' him," has distinctive blues elements; the beginning of the arioso tonicizes the key of B minor, and repeatedly outlines a flat fifth blue note (F natural) before tonicizing C minor. This pattern of flatted fifths – the Southern blue note – repeats itself several times throughout the aria. The excerpt below is from the C minor section (Figure 1).

¹ James M. Volo and Dorothy Volo, "Antebellum Period" in *American Popular Culture Through History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 254.



Figure 1. “Sometimes the pain o’ missin’ him”

Cold Sassy Tree by Carlisle Floyd; Libretto by Carlisle Floyd and Olive Ann Burns
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The aria is sung in a slow blues tempo (*andante sostenuto*). Fiddle-style solo violin is an occasional ornament in this aria, as well as at other points within the opera, though it is sometimes doubled by another instrument as a coloring device. The aria also features the short-long-short motive, which is found frequently throughout the score.

The short-long-short rhythmic motive (sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth or eighth-quarter-eighth) is a salient characteristic of Americana music.² This motive was commonly utilized in ragtime music, which was popularized in New Orleans and spread through the South during the time period of *Cold Sassy Tree*. It was originally popularized in antebellum African American music and was widely utilized in rural folk music and minstrel acts. Examples of this motive can be found in the first theme of Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag” (Figure 2), as well as Stephen Foster’s “Oh! Susannah” (Figure 3).

² Henry Martin and Keith Waters, *Jazz: The First 100 Years, V. 1* (Independence: Cengage Learning, 2005), 17.



Figure 2. "Maple Leaf Rag"



Figure 3. "Oh! Susannah"

Other examples of the short-long-short motive in Southern music include the Negro spiritual "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," the Louisiana satirical song "Musieu Bainjo" ("Mister Banjo"), and the 1899 Tin Pan Alley rag "Hello! ma Baby." Floyd refers to this motive repeatedly in *Cold Sassy Tree*, especially in comic scenes. An example of the motive is clearly demonstrated at the beginning of Act I, Scene 4, as the townspeople gossip about Rucker's marriage announcement (Figure 4).

Women:

Men:

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

Figure 4. *Cold Sassy Tree* Act II, Scene 3

Cold Sassy Tree by Carlisle Floyd; Libretto by Carlisle Floyd and Olive Ann Burns
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The short-long-short motive is a playful version of a triplet. This is consistent with the notion of Southern dialect falling into a triplet subdivision, as outlined by Scearce.³ The syncopated nature of these triplets becomes steadier in serious moments within the opera.

Text Setting

In addition to triplet subdivision, Southern speech is often identifiable with aspects of drawl. Perhaps Floyd, being a Southerner by birth and residency, was more comfortable with his innate understanding of subtle accent nuances. For whatever reason, *Cold Sassy Tree* seems to be more reliant on text setting elements and less on musical affect than the other operas compared here.

Drawl is defined as the “lengthening of certain vowels and intrusion of /ə/ between the vowels and following consonant.”⁴ Feagin notes that it is “one of the most

³ See page 13.

⁴ George Dorrill, *Sounding Southern: A Look at the Phonology of English in the South* (English in the Southern United States, ed. Stephen J. Nagle and Sara L. Sanders, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123.

noticeable aspects of white Southern speech.”⁵ In musically setting the text of his libretto, Floyd creates a texture that will strike most listeners as Southern. The first entrance of the score, by the Mayor, signals an undeniable Southern setting: “What y’ got there, Miss Effie Belle?” This text, composed by Floyd and based loosely on a subplot in Burns’ novel, contains several indicators that convey Southern speech: the replacement of “y” for you, the substitution of “y’ got” for “do you have,” the insistence on the prefix “Miss,” and the name “Effie Belle,” having both the characteristics of first and middle name used together and two characteristically Southern names in Effie and Belle.⁶ Floyd then places dominant words “there” and “Belle” on longer notes and stressed beats (“there” is set on a tie that anticipates beat two), setting up the conditions for drawl; the singer familiar with Southern speech will take this as a cue to pronounce these words as triphthongs (/ðɛ:jər/ and /bɛ:jəl/). With the first vocal entrance, Floyd unmistakably signals to the listener that he/she is listening to a Southern opera.

“Southernisms” pervade Floyd’s libretto. Apostrophes replace vowels and final consonants (especially the “g” in gerunds); double negatives are rampant (Sherriff: “Don’t nobody really know no more.”); and Southern idioms are found frequently (Mayor: “But he won’t never sign; he’ll jes’ raise Cain.”). The singer will add to this Southern texture by omitting appropriate diphthongs (such as /ai/, pronounced /a/), adding dip- and triphthongal glides in appropriate words,⁷ and softening the ends of words (particularly words that end in “y,” resulting in more of an /I/ sound than the northern /i/).

⁵ Rachael Allbritten, *Sounding Southern: Phonetic Features and Dialect Perceptions* (Doctoral diss, Georgetown University, 2011), 94.

⁶ Diane Eaton, *Is It True What They Say About Dixie?* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1988), 146.

⁷ (Allbritten 2011, 100)

By following Floyd’s careful transcription of Southern dialect (patterned after Burns’ own literary devices) and melodic inflection, as well as attending to some basic rules of Southern speech patterns, the singer can quite easily convey regionalism in sung delivery.

Floyd also employs a text setting element utilized by many Southern opera composers: intervallic upward leaps on strong beats that can be easily “bent” by the singer. This replicates the lilt of Southern dialect, especially in females. According to Lane-Plescia, “Upper class women of the Deep South often use a very wide range of pitch.”⁸ This element, along with exaggerated stress, graceful rhythms (often triplets), and vowel lengthening, replicates the typical cadence of upper-class Southern speech patterns. This compositional device is most apparent in situations where Southern women display a high degree of charm or grace. An example is found in the introduction to Love Simpson’s Act I, Scene 3 aria “Rented rooms, that’s all I’ve ever known” (Figure 5).

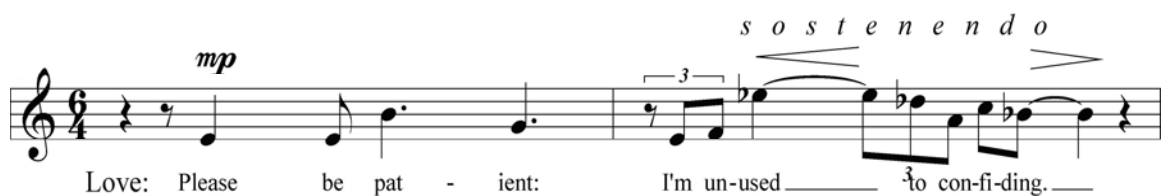


Figure 5. “Rented rooms, that’s all I’ve ever known”
 Cold Sassy Tree by Carlisle Floyd; Libretto by Carlisle Floyd and Olive Ann Burns
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It is important to note that Love is originally from Baltimore, so instances of this device are sparse within her musical texture. Perhaps these rare instances can be attributed to a

⁸ (Lane-Plescia 1999, 10)

sense of assimilation into Southern culture, as she attempts to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of Cold Sassy.

Though at times discreet in Southern musical references, *Cold Sassy Tree* nonetheless creates a regional soundscape that is decidedly Southern in quality. While other composers are reliant on musical quotations and overt references to the Southern musical genre, Floyd crafts a distinct setting within the rural Deep South with carefully constructed vocal lines that mimic subtle aspects of the dialect.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMER AND SMOKE

Background

Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* is a coming-of-age tragedy that focuses on the themes of lost innocence, spiritual/sexual awakening, and unrequited love. It revolves around the leading characters Alma and John and is set in the fictitious town of Glorious Hill, Mississippi in the years between 1900 and 1916. The first version of Williams' play begins with a brief childhood prologue set around the turn of the century, which establishes the tender and innocent nature of their relationship. Williams omitted this scene in later versions, but Lee Hoiby brought it back in the opera setting.

Hoiby commissioned award-winning playwright Lanford Wilson to write the libretto. The plot revolves around the burgeoning, but ultimately doomed romance between Alma and John. John's lack of spirituality and Alma's sexual naïveté create an irreconcilable barrier. Though John becomes more spiritually enlightened toward the end of the opera and Alma experiences a sexual awakening, the realization of these qualities develops too late to support the relationship.

Overt Southern Musical Elements

Lee Hoiby, like Floyd, is not entirely obvious in his attempts to musicalize Southern drama. Recreations of established musical forms, including an art song setting

of William Blake's "Never Seek to Tell Thy Love" and a Sousa-like recorded march in Act II, do not really capture a specific regional essence. However, the mariachi music that accompanies Act I, Scene 5 and returns in the first scene of Act II does pay homage to Southern music's early Latino influence, which was rooted in South Texas and merged stylistically with French, German, and Czech musical traditions.¹ Both entrances of the mariachi theme indicate Mexican parties: the first at the Moon Lake Casino, and the second thrown by John's Mexican girlfriend Rosa. This theme makes a short appearance at the end of the opera as well, again referencing the Moon Lake Casino. It is characterized by even sets of eight bar phrases in 3/4 time, where the melodies are largely homophonic and driven by thirds, and the simple folk harmonies follow a traditional tonic-dominant format (Figure 6).

¹ (Malone and Stricklin 2003, 59-60)



Figure 6. *Summer and Smoke*, musical bridge between Act I, Scene 4 and Scene 5

Lee Hoiby SUMMER AND SMOKE Opera in two acts, Op. 27a

Libretto by Lanford Wilson after the play "Summer and Smoke" by Tennessee Williams

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The brief inclusion of Spanish flamenco guitar, accompanying Papa Gonzales' brief appearance in Act II, further demonstrates Mexican-American musical culture within the larger regional setting.

Implicit Southern Musical Elements

Though Southern musical quotations and styles are infrequent, Hoiby does insert other clues throughout the score that suggest geography and culture. Often these compositional choices are present in initial character entrances and scene changes.

The prologue, with its string- and reeds-dominated orchestration and chromatic harmonic relationships, creates a murky texture that hints at a hot, humid, and somewhat mysterious locale. The initial rhythmic cello lines contrast with the lyrical melody in the upper strings, creating a rift between the two voices. This rift expands with the entrance of characters Alma and Johnny, age ten; the bass line is a rising chromatic ostinato in 6/4 time while the upper strings play juxtaposing thirds in 2/2. This two-measure motive is repeated several times. The bass line suggests the key of F major, while the treble suggests the key of E major, establishing a sense of unrelated key structure (Figure 7).



Figure 7. *Summer and Smoke*, Prologue

Lee Hoiby *SUMMER AND SMOKE* Opera in two acts, Op. 27a

Libretto by Lanford Wilson after the play "Summer and Smoke" by Tennessee Williams

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This motive portrays two characters that come together, yet are fated to be forever out of step – essentially, they are musically and emotionally “stuck.” The bass line chromaticism foreshadows the dark, sultry, sexual nature of John, while the repetitive stress-unstress motive in the treble line suggests a light, ethereal simplicity and spirituality indicative of Alma. There is a subtle jazz/blues influence within these

harmonies as well. The first measure of the two-measure bass motive suggests an F major triad, while the dominant notes in the second measure indicate an E \flat major triad. Superimposing these chord structures on top of one another creates a dominant 13th chord, standard within jazz repertoire of the forties and later.² Alma’s treble motive, with a lowered fifth blue note in the downbeat of each two-bar phrase, further supports a jazz/blues texture. This theme is recurrent throughout the opera, cuing the listener back to these harmonic relationships.

In John’s Act I, Scene 4 arioso “Yes, yes Miss Alma,” blue notes including the lowered fifth and seventh are heavily utilized (in the key of A \flat minor these are D \natural and G \flat /F \sharp respectively); this regional flavor is appropriate as John describes the anticipated seasons and corresponding temperatures (Figure 8).

Figure 8. “Yes, yes Miss Alma”

Lee Hoiby SUMMER AND SMOKE Opera in two acts, Op. 27a

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² (Porter and Ullman 1993, 172)

The same theme returns, this time sung by Alma in the key of C (blue notes B \flat and G \flat), in the final scene of Act I.

Act II, Scene 8 also contains blues elements. The 9/8 andante rhythm conveys a hard swing, and the repeating single note cello motive suggests a “riff” with scale degrees of 4, 5, and \flat 7 in C \sharp minor.³ Though ambiguous at first, C \sharp minor is confirmed at measure 86, with an open fifth in the bass and melody based upon the blues scale. The melodic line also includes flat fifth blue notes⁴ (Figure 9).

The image shows a musical score for three parts: voice, cello, and bass. The time signature is 9/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line (John) has the lyrics: "so it goes on feel-ing hun - gry. Do you fol - low me?". The cello part has a repeating single-note motive. The bass part has an open fifth chord. Dynamics include sf and p.

Figure 9. “Anatomy Lesson”

Lee Hoiby SUMMER AND SMOKE Opera in two acts, Op. 27a
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³ Guy Capuzzo, “A Pedagogical Approach to Minor Pentatonic Riffs in Rock Music,” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 23 (2009): 39-55.

⁴ Based upon the minor pentatonic scale, the traditional blues scale contains scale degrees 1, \flat 3, 4, \flat 5, and \flat 7.

Text Setting

Hoiby cleverly sets the prologue's first dialogue to spoken, rather than sung, text. The instructions within the score indicate that "The written rhythms are meant to be a guide to speech, and should not be taken literally."⁵ This gives an immediate opportunity for the nuances of the regional dialect to be explicitly displayed by the two young characters. The dominance of the clarinet in the melody, an important instrument in the Southern jazz tradition,⁶ also helps to guide the listener's ear to a Southern musical idiom.

The beginning of Scene 1, though not exclusively Southern, evokes Americana with its Sousa-esque trumpet fanfare and march rhythms. Again, Hoiby sets Mrs. Winemiller's text to a spoken, not sung, line. Some of her distinctive lines create optimal vowel placement conditions for evoking a Southern accent, such as her line "Where is the ice cream man?" The rhythmic setting of these words creates an elongation of the words "ice cream man," which allows for a representation of drawl. An adept singer will drop the latter part of the diphthong in "ice" (/as/) and expand the word "man" into a triphthong with a vocal glide (/mɛ:jən/) (Figure 10).

⁵ Lee Hoiby, *Summer and Smoke* (New York: Rock Valley Music Co., 1971), 2.

⁶ (Porter and Ullman 1993, 46-47)

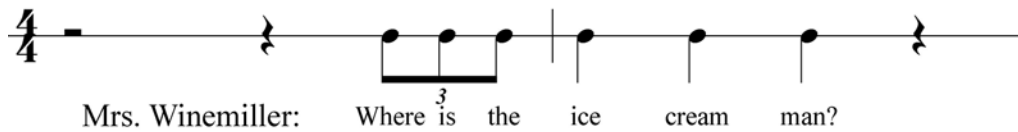


Figure 10. *Summer and Smoke*, Act I, Scene One

Lee Hoiby SUMMER AND SMOKE Opera in two acts, Op. 27a

Libretto by Lanford Wilson after the play "Summer and Smoke" by Tennessee Williams

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John's first entrance is met with an orchestral *meno mosso*, a reed-dominant line with gentle syncopation. The serene legato, languid tempo, and graceful lilt of the syncopation subtly mimics Southern speech characteristics. Alma's vocal range increases in her conversation with John, displaying the characteristic wide pitch range of upper class Southern women with their most gracious Southern charm.

As the duet unfolds, and the two characters become more flirtatious and coy, Hoiby incorporates more of the triplet-dominant rhythms outlined by Scarce.⁷ This transition occurs immediately after John's teasing about Alma's "irritated doppelganger." The triplets begin in the voice parts, against a duple-dominant orchestra; the orchestra then echoes the triplet nature of the voices in the following *piú mosso*. This interplay between singers and orchestra continues until the 6/8 *piú mosso, con grazia* at marker 54, where all forces concede to the triplet texture.

This duple versus triple pattern is also demonstrated in Act I Scene 4, where John, who has narrowly escaped from a fight, encounters Alma at his doorstep. The early scene is syncopated and chromatic. The melodic pitches and duple rhythms are

⁷ See page 13.

angular in nature, symbolizing the underlying tension. As romance develops between Alma and John, the rhythms gradually become triple in nature (around marker 145, *meno mosso*) and the angular character of the vocal line gives way to a more rounded, nuanced vocal line. This pattern is revisited frequently in the opera; examples include the Act II, Scene 10 flirtation between John and Nell (triple-dominant) and the first half of Act II, Scene 12 (duple), which illustrates the increasing distance in Alma and John's relationship.

Unlike *Cold Sassy Tree*, *Summer and Smoke* incorporates less syncopated rhythm and more of an even cadence; this is likely due to the delineation of class systems between the two operas. *Cold Sassy Tree* is more rural in nature, while *Summer and Smoke* suggests a locale that is a bit more elegant and refined. Similar to Carlisle Floyd, though, Lee Hoiby creates a regional setting that is largely dependent on rhythms and melodies in the vocal line that imitate Southern dialect. His utilization of triplet-dominant textures, languid tempi, and blue notes all contribute to a Southern sound.

CHAPTER V

REGINA

Background

Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* is based on Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes*. The plot concerns members of the greedy Hubbard family, who resort to threats, theft, and even murder to gain one-upmanship over each other for their own personal interests. The action is set in "a small town in the deep South, the Spring of 1900."¹ Blitzstein preserved some of Hellman's original text, but many elements within his libretto were not a part of the original play, especially scenes with the servant characters and the Act II party. His fusion of Southern musical styles and attention to text-setting elements allows for a highly expressive musical language; Aaron Copland commented that Blitzstein was "the first American composer to invent a vernacular musical idiom."² Many edited versions of Blitzstein's score exist, including a popular post-mortem restoration by Tommy Krasker and John Mauceri.

Overt References to Blues, Ragtime, and Gospel

Unlike *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Summer and Smoke*, *Regina* is abundant with obvious references to the Southern musical genre. The prologue's initial *maestoso* section,

¹ Lillian Hellman, *The Little Foxes* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), 1. Hellman, an Alabama native, references geography in *The Little Foxes* that implies an Alabama setting, and Blitzstein makes explicit reference to "sleepy Alabama" in Act I No. 3.

² Patrick O' Connor, liner notes to Marc Blitzstein's *Regina*, (Scottish Opera Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by John Mauceri, London Records 433 812-2, CD, 1992), 13.


articulated largely in the strings and brass, sets a grand and tragic tone. This theme quickly gives way to an a capella gospel hymn, “Stand Where the Angels Stand, sung by the black servants Addie and Cal. Orchestra provides minimal, spacious chordal accompaniment. The hymn transforms into a ragtime interpretation led by the character Jazz. Traditional Southern ragtime instruments are utilized in the onstage “Angel Band,” including clarinet, trumpet, trombone, banjo, and washboard/percussion. Addie objects to this “sinful music” and insists on her hymn setting, to which Jazz replies “That’s the same song, we just raggin’ it.”¹ This prologue is important for a variety of reasons. First, it introduces three contrasting Southern genres: grand plantation music in the European symphonic tradition, gospel hymn, and ragtime. Second, it quickly establishes social class systems and racial elements, a theme that was much more acutely explored in Blitzstein’s version (to Hellman’s objection).² The faux grandeur of the Hubbards stands in stark contrast to the heavily jazz-influenced music of the servants. Finally, it utilizes traditional Southern jazz instruments, providing a relatively accurate musicological snapshot of the setting.

When the Hubbards are not putting on public airs and feigning gentility, they frequently sing in historically black musical styles. Numbers 3 and 4 (“Small Talk” and “Goodbyes”) feature the seemingly genteel Greek chorus nature of the Hubbard family against Leo’s jazzy outbursts. While Ben comments on the “well favored” nature of Southern women, young Leo interjects about the women from Mobile in a syncopated Dixieland jazz rhythm (Figure 11).

¹ This line is not included in all versions of *Regina*. It can be found in the 1991 Mauceri edition.

² (Foradori 1994, 27)

Allegro grazioso



Leo: But go to Mobile ___ for the la-dies, ___ very el-e-gant wordly la-dies ___ sir.

Figure 11. Leo
REGINA by Marc Blitzstein
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This serves as a musical double-entendre, as the roots of jazz partially lie in Southern red-light districts of hedonistic bar and bordello legend.³ Leo continues to invoke jazz elements in Act II. In Scene 1, No. 2, he enters on a *scherzando* scat, singing about his love of a party and implying that he awaits a debaucherous evening (Figure 12).

Allegretto (*scherz.*)



Leo: Dee -dle doo-dle, dee-dle dee -dle doo-dle, Love a par-ty, I love a par-ty.

Figure 12. “Deedle doodle”
REGINA by Marc Blitzstein
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His syncopated vocal line is built upon a major/minor E ♭ dominant seventh, indicating a high degree of jazz influence and once again setting up the double meaning of Leo’s jazz associations. The jazz influence continues with Oscar and Leo’s Act II No. 3 “Box” duet, with a heavily swung 12/8 meter. Ben’s Act III “Greedy Girl” arioso is in a ragtime format with highly syncopated rhythms and a stride-like bass on beats one and three in

³ (Malone and Stricklin 2003, 53)

the orchestra. This also indicates a lessening of class structure, as ragtime was commonly associated with African-American culture and lower socioeconomic populations. He continues to sing in this style through the final scene.

The servants are given many different traditional musical styles in Act II. Scene 2, No. 4's "Chinky-pin" is written in a minstrel style, evocative of turn-of-the-century minstrel acts such as Ernest Hogan. It begins with bawdy New Orleans brass band elements, with initial march rhythms and overt glissandos in the trombone and clarinet. The character Jazz sings in an improvisatory style, relatively free of rhythm and meter and punctuated with outbursts from the orchestra. The nonsensical verse is accompanied by the Angel Band, which is again typical of early Dixieland jazz combos.⁴ Jazz then sings in a swung *allegro* with prolific use of blue notes. He demeans himself and at the same time lampoons the "stuck up" guests. The lyrics reference typical minstrel themes, such as sexual excesses and the ignorantly gleeful nature of black servants.

In Addie's Act II, Scene 2, No. 5 "Blues," Blitzstein pays tribute to the twelve-bar blues style but adapts it to his own musical purposes. The traditional blues format follows the I-IV-I-I/IV-IV-I-I/V-IV-I-I chord progression, or a direct variant, setting up three four-bar phrases before the "turnaround." Blitzstein more or less follows the harmonic structure, but instead creates three six-bar phrases, extending the second chord of each traditionally four-bar phrase: I-IV-IV-IV-I-I/, etc. The lyrics appropriately lament the "woes that making [sic] folks so blue tonight," as Addie urges Birdie to let go of her troubles and sleep. Addie's a capella Act III, No. 8 vocalise, mourning Horace's death, is

⁴ (Porter and Ullman 1993, 21)

sung in a slow, lamenting spiritual style, similar to traditional spirituals such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” and “Deep River.”

The folk-like Act III, No. 1 Rain Quartet transforms into a somewhat hymn-like setting, with a cadenza sung in the top line by soprano Alexandra. The scene then evolves into Blitzstein’s interpretation of the spiritual “Certainly Lord,” a gospel call and response with Jazz and the Angel Band. African-Americans popularized this spiritual in the early 1900s, historically accurate to the setting of the opera.⁵ It is repeated at the end of the opera, indicative of the religious optimism of the servants and contradicting the downfall of the greedy Hubbard family. Thus the opera ends as it began, with traditional Southern black musical themes against the tragic *maestoso* orchestration of the fallen plantation.

European Elements

In the early twentieth century, European operas and symphonies were patronized and celebrated by elite Southern circles.⁶ The Hubbards likely would have gravitated toward classical European compositions to demonstrate their high society values and associations. Many references to the European classical genre are interspersed throughout the opera.

Act I, No. 1 (“Introduction”) features a melody evocative of “Tara’s Theme” from the movie *Gone with the Wind*, with majestic, sweeping stepwise melodies and expansive

⁵ Bluegrass Messengers. <http://www.bluegrassmessengers.com/certainly-lord--spiritual.aspx> (accessed 22 May, 2012).

⁶ Gavin James Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 11-13.

harmonies. These two themes share a very similar scoring, tempo, meter, and melodic/harmonic language (large initial intervallic leaps, strong beats dominated by fourths and fifths, trade-off between treble and lower voices). Marked *allegro comodo* (*poco pomposo*), it invokes a prideful voice similarly aristocratic to the prologue theme, but without the underscoring tragic elements. Punctuated with chimes, which signal the end of the workday in the fields or the Sunday morning congregational gathering, the score paints an expansive, nostalgic, somewhat mythological picture of the antebellum Southern plantation. This theme represents the character Birdie, the symbol of “faded aristocracy,”⁷ and develops into Birdie’s first aria.

In Act II, Regina displays her pedigree by ordering “society” musicians from Mobile to accompany her dinner party. Act II, Scene 1, No. 8 functions as a scene change. Featuring an onstage chamber trio of violin, cello, and piano, it is indicated *Andante Rubato* (*in the style of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*). The initial piano entrance looks like a Chopin étude, with arching single-note lines crossing the staves in a wide range. Strings first punctuate beats 2 and 4, then the melody transforms into a dotted, somewhat folk-like melody. The sound falls somewhere between Chopin, Johann Strauss II, and Stephen Foster, a very apt representation of Gottschalk.

Scene 2 commences in European fashion with a gentle polka, interrupted by quasi-opera “gossip” sections, which highlight the latent nature of the Hubbards’ guests. The drinking section pays homage to the popularity of Johann Strauss II, specifically the second act of *Die Fledermaus*; Blitzstein’s lyrics “So drink it down and

⁷ (O’ Connor 1992, 16)

drown your sorrow” directly reflect the gaiety and escapism of Strauss’s invocation, “happy is he who forgets that which can’t be changed.”⁸ As Strauss looks backward on a nostalgic bygone era, *Regina’s* party scene blindly dismisses all underlying conflicts in postbellum Southern society.

Act II, Scene 2, No. 6 is a vague European waltz. The stress on the second beat of each three-bar measure again suggests Viennese influence, perhaps another nod to Strauss. Scene 2, No. 7 introduces a French Gallop.⁹ The Gallop was a “quick, lively dance in 2/4 time... one of the most popular dances of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰ It was often utilized as the dramatic final dance of a ball, and was noted for its frenzied pace. Once again, Blitzstein fuses together Old World and New World in a musical description of the genteel South.

Text Setting

Blitzstein’s approach to dialect is another solid indicator of region. Hellman wrote in her stage directions that “there has been no attempt to write in a Southern dialect. It is to be understood that the accents are Southern.”¹¹ Blitzstein added a bit more regional dialect in his libretto, especially with the servant characters, but most overt dialect traits are indicated within the musical setting.

⁸ Johann Strauss, *Die Fledermaus* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1951). From the translation by Ruth and Thomas Martin.

⁹ Usually spelled *Galop*, or *Galopp* in German.

¹⁰ Andrew Lamb, “Galop,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10589> (accessed May 8, 2012).

¹¹ (Hellman 1939, introduction)

Birdie’s Act I entrance displays the same elements of female Southern dialect that are found in *Cold Sassy Tree* and *Summer and Smoke*. In expressing her enthusiasm (soon to be stifled by husband Oscar) about a conversation with Northern business partner William Marshall, Birdie’s pitch range is exaggerated, skipping large intervals and alternating between sung and spoken lines: (Figure 13).

scherz.

Birdie: My, Addie! What a good sup-per! Just as good as good ___ can be! ___

Figure 13. Birdie
 REGINA by Marc Blitzstein
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Her character is further defined by the *allegretto* “Music, music, music,” a gentle arioso built around an E ♭ major seventh chord, which creates a graceful melodic lilt that mimics speech. Throughout this scene Birdie’s character is treated stereotypically to the region. In describing the speech of Southern women, Allan Metcalf relates a passage from an 1876 Civil War story about an Alabama belle: “Her voice was charmingly rich and sweet, and all her words seemed to wear trailing skirts of velvet, they came so slowly from her careless lips, and lingered so softly on the air.”¹² Birdie displays these characteristics throughout, as does Regina (except in scenes where her underlying ugliness is exposed). Birdie’s aria is gently propelled forward with a repeated dotted-eighth/sixteenth note motive in the bass instruments. Birdie’s initial theme returns after

¹² (Metcalf 2000, 4)

her arioso, but this time with violent staccato instrumental jabs representing Oscar's displeasure at Birdie "chattering to Marshall like a magpie."

The nouveau-riche Regina enters with characteristic languid tempo and excessive range, doing her best to impersonate the picture of Southern grace and charm. This choice was made clear by Blizstein, who said:

Regina herself, perhaps one of the most ruthless characters in show business, sings melodies of enormous gentility and suaveness precisely at the moments when she is being the most unscrupulous and heartless. There is a kind of urbanity involved in the musical treatment of this character which results in a theatrical coup. How obvious it would have been to set her greedy, vindictive, dirty-hearted lines to insidious or bombastic music! I might say that this is the underlying technique of the whole piece: coating the wormwood with sugar, and scenting with magnolia blossoms the cursed house in which these evils transpire.¹³

The transition between Regina's public grace and private scheming reveals her true character. A mere four measures after Marshall's Act I exit, Regina's character takes a sharp turn. Marked *con fuoco*, Regina devilishly exclaims "And there, Birdie, goes the man / Who has opened the door to our future." Regina's music is instantly angular, losing all qualities of lilt and grace. Regina regains her syrupy sweet *troppo dolce*, legato, rangy Southern charm in the next scene (No. 6 "I Don't Know"), doing her best to manipulate the situation to her financial favor.

Act II opens much the same as Act I, with a *maestoso* fanfare based around open fourths that signals the false opulence, and true emptiness, of the Hubbard family. The orchestra quickly shifts into a 3/4 *allegro molto* built upon a B ♭ dominant seventh.

¹³ (Foradori 1994, 35-36)


Regina now barks orders to Addie and Cal on one note, a B ♭ , and even eighth notes. This vocal line, occasionally marked with a Sprechstimme indication, allows Regina to bend and inflect the text to more closely replicate a lower-class Southern dialect. Gone completely is any pretense of Southern elegance and dialect nuance; in its place is a coarse list of belted demands that is pushy, even rude, and completely lacking in Southern charm.

In contrast, Horace's 3/4, staccato entrance typifies the stereotypical Old South – unhurried, stately, and refined. The frenetic entrance of the family in the following scenes contrasts with Horace's metered interjections. After the rest of the family leaves, Regina once again puts on her intervallic-driven Southern charm. Though she briefly gives in to a Sprechstimme quarrel, she resumes her mock civility and attempts to make up. These two Reginas are evident throughout the scene – the genteel, submissive wife, with lush vocal lines and wide vocal range, and the biting, jealous, dominant matriarch who delivers her lines in a limited range, even rhythm, and largely Sprechstimme style.

Birdie's Act III aria again captures the essence of her Southern fading aristocracy: slow and deliberate delivery of text, exaggerated vocal range, gentle legato phrasing, and intervallic leaps of around a fourth or fifth on stressed syllables, allowing her to achieve a subtle lilt to color important words. These qualities fade through the aria, as Birdie undergoes a transformation from graceful doting wife and mother to oppressed victim. A *meno mosso* (*furioso*) measure signals this change, in which she sings "Oh, if we could all go back!" She briefly regains her nostalgic elegance as she waxes about the memory of Lionnet, but the transformation is cemented in the *Allegro* section, where she finally

admits her disdain for Leo and Oscar. The melodic line is then characterized by repeated notes and alternating intervals (Figure 14), losing the arching vocal lines and lilt quality.

Allegro (*poco giocoso*)



Le-o is-n't kind. Le-o is-n't kind. You all want to know something? Le-o is-n't kind.

The musical notation is a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo/mood is marked 'Allegro (poco giocoso)'. The melody consists of repeated notes and alternating intervals. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' below it. The lyrics are: 'Le-o is-n't kind. Le-o is-n't kind. You all want to know something? Le-o is-n't kind.'

Figure. 14. “Leo isn’t kind”

REGINA by Marc Blitzstein
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Though she attempts to regain her old qualities in the final vocalise, the melody is now angular and bland, signaling the completion of her transformation and loss of all aristocratic qualities.

While Blitzstein utilizes many of the same text-setting elements as Floyd and Hoiby, *Regina*’s “Southern-ness” lies primarily in its references to Southern musical traditions. Class systems and racial characteristics are clearly defined in accompanying musical genres. Elite European musical traditions, which were embraced by the “New South,” ultimately serve to reveal the shallowness and materialism of the Hubbard family.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Many factors contribute to the regional nature of Southern operas. The three operas compared here all share commonalities in extensive use of blues and folk styles, recreations of Southern musical forms, and text setting that mimics characteristics of the Southern accent. Blitzstein is obvious in his use of Southern musical references, while Hoiby and Floyd are more reliant on text setting and allusions to jazz/blues/folk traits. All three utilize wide vocal range, languid tempo, and rounded vocal lines in their characterization of female Southern charm.

Depictions of race and class also influence compositional choices. Rural and lower class characters are often assigned folk styles, while upper class characters are more often represented with European musical traits. Scene action and character emotion can override Southern compositional choices; in these instances it is difficult to distinguish Southern characteristics within the musical setting.

Further questions remain about the Southern opera genre. Some of these are sociological in nature. For example, how do Southern operas contribute to audience perception of the South? Do they reinforce stereotypes and thus create an inaccurate “mythology?” How does the composer’s perspective influence these choices? Are race, class, and social qualities depicted fairly? Also problematic is the fact that Southern music does not exist in a bubble, and therefore it is nearly impossible to label any musical

style as explicitly Southern. Furthermore, Southern culture varies widely from state to state and in different social systems, and the variety of musical styles within the region reflects these cultural differences. The identification of Southern music within an opera can be complicated due to the difficulties in defining Southern music as a larger genre.

As this investigation concentrated only on the three operas presented, one might wonder whether the qualities that the operas share in common are consistent with other operas and composers within this genre. A more extensive study of Southern operas may reveal other salient traits that were not explored here. The catalogue of Southern operas continues to grow, and further research on this genre and its characteristics is warranted.

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