

- [Home](#)
- [About Classical Voice North America](#)
- [Are you a music critic? Join the MCANA](#)
- [Contact the Editors](#)
- [Around the U.S.](#)
- [Support us](#)
- [Around Canada](#)
- [International](#)
- [Digital](#)
- [Issues in the Arts](#)
- [RSS FEED](#)
- [Member Blogs](#)
- [Members on the Web](#)

Navigate to

## Font Of Lyricism Flows Again In New Floyd Opera

[Share / Save](#) [f](#) [t](#) [r](#)



Composer Carlisle Floyd, 89, has written his fifth opus for Houston Grand Opera. (Production photos by Lynn Lane)

By William Albright

HOUSTON — [Carlisle Floyd](#) turns 90 on June 11, but [Houston Grand Opera](#) started celebrating his birthday early. For the fifth time, the company commissioned a new opera from him. And it gave the resulting work — *Prince of Players*, a two-hour chamber opera in two acts — a popularly priced but handsomely staged three-performance, world-premiere run in Wortham Theater Center's [Cullen Theater](#). But the icing on the cake came on March 5, when the opening-night audience erupted in loud, prolonged appreciation as the composer joined the cast, conductor, and production team for onstage bows.



Carlisle Floyd was 29 when he introduced 'Susannah.'

[Giuseppe Verdi](#) astonished the world with his still-vibrant creativity at ages 73 and 79 with *Otello* and *Falstaff*, respectively. *Prince of Players* is no

*Falstaff* (what is?), but the work, HGO's 59th world premiere since 1973, is a remarkable achievement by a composer who burst onto the operatic scene in 1955 with *Susannah* and hasn't written a new opera since *Cold Sassy Tree* was launched here 16 years ago. Floyd's 14th music drama is dappled with the lyricism that has been a hallmark of his proudly accessible style from the beginning. It is ingeniously orchestrated. It offers singers rewarding musical and dramatic challenges. And the composer's libretto (he always writes his own) touchingly proclaims the value of artistic commitment and truth.

*Prince of Players* is based on American playwright Jeffrey Hatcher's 1999 *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, the inspiration for Sir Richard Eyre's 2004 film *Stage Beauty*. The title character is Edward Kynaston (c. 1640–1712), one of the last Restoration "boy players" or actors who performed women's roles. Homeless as a child, he was taught the acting craft of his day by a thespian rendered jobless when the Puritans closed the theaters.



Peg (Mane Galoyan) and Kynaston (Ben Edquist) learn new way to play 'Othello.'

Kynaston suffers the same career loss in the opera. After the playhouses were allowed to reopen, King Charles II ended the ban on women onstage in 1661 and royally decreed that "No He shall ere again upon an English stage play She." Begged to switch to male roles, Kynaston refuses to abandon his female impersonations. There is no art or skill involved, he insists, when a woman plays a woman. (In truth, the historical Kynaston always played both male and female characters.) Reduced to singing bawdy songs in drag as Lusty Louise in low taverns, he is rescued from poverty and disgrace by his former dresser, Margaret "Peg" Hughes, who loves him and becomes one of London's first actresses. Now both costars and a couple, they abandon the artificial, gesture-based style of acting he had laboriously perfected and pioneer a more natural theatricality. Encapsulating the dramatic arc of the story, *Prince of Players* opens with Kynaston and a colleague enacting the final scene of Shakespeare's *Othello* in the old, bloodless way and closes with Kynaston and Peg playing the scene with far more passion and impact.



Kynaston (Edquist) teaches Peg (Galoyan) how to be Desdemona.

The bulk of the story is told in recitative over a purling orchestra that is an encyclopedia of colors and textures. But there are many pages of Floyd's trademark lyricism. Perhaps because a love interest calls for such writing, Peg is a major beneficiary of this particular musical style. Her confessions of love for Kynaston, both in a first-act soliloquy and later to his face when he's down and out, are moving. He in his turn becomes expansive when telling her about his childhood and explaining his dedication to art as he has always known it. Actor-manager Thomas Betterton also waxes eloquent when pleading with his stubborn former prima donna to take a new career path. And Floyd gently hints at 17th-century musical styles with a few little embellishments and humorously evokes period ballads in the Lusty Louise scene.

Floyd has enjoyed a decades-long connection to Houston and Houston Grand Opera. He taught at the University of Houston for 20 years. HGO previously commissioned *Bilby's Doll* (1976), *Willie Stark* (1981), the revised version of *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* (1991), and *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000). He and long-time general director David Gockley created the *Houston Grand Opera Studio* in 1977, and two Wortham Theater Center rehearsal rooms are named in their honor. Thus, it was perhaps fitting that most of the *Prince of Players* singers were current or former Studio members and provided evidence of the program's effectiveness.



Kynaston (Edquist) enacting Desdemona in Michael Gieleta's lavish production.

[Michael Gieleta](#) was once apprenticed to *Stage Beauty* director Sir Richard Eyre, and his fluid *Prince of Players* staging was more than a museum of Restoration-era acting and movement. Further, his production was top-drawer. With candle-lit stages and nighttime strolls in the park expertly conjured by lighting designer [Renée Brode](#), the centerpiece of [Shoko Kambara's](#) set was a platform that included drawers for quickly needed props and could double as a theater stage and Kynaston's room. But the most spectacular visual contribution was [Gregory Gale's](#) sumptuous costumery of gowns, robes, and cascading wigs.

HGO artistic and music director [Patrick Summers](#) staked a claim on *Prince of Players* when Floyd mentioned in April 2012 that he was working on a new opera. Summers' conducting coaxed out the work's meticulous scoring and moments of lushness, and his 19-member cast gave solid vocal and dramatic performances. As Kynaston in *Stage Beauty*, Billy Crudup elevated his voice's natural pitch when playing Desdemona, but [Ben Edquist](#) mercifully didn't color his sturdy baritone with falsetto here. Floyd's score is peppered with high notes and, as Peg, [Mane Galoyan](#) tapered her ripe soprano for two limpid pianissimo examples. [Federico De Michelis](#) poured out resonant bass-clef sound as Thomas Betterton, and tenor [Chad Shelton](#) was a ringing King Charles II. Other tenors providing strong support were [Joseph Evans](#) as Kynaston nemesis Sir Charles Sedley and [Scott Quinn](#) as the Duke of Buckingham, Kynaston's pre-Peg love interest. Royal mistress and future actress Nell Gwyn was perkily played by [Sofia Selowsky](#), and fellow mezzo-soprano [Megan Mikailovna Samarin](#) and soprano [Pureum Jo](#) twittered brightly as Kynaston groupies Lady Meresvale and Miss Frayne, respectively.

*William Albright is a freelance writer in Houston who has contributed to The Los Angeles Times, The Christian Science Monitor, American Record Guide, Opera, The Opera Quarterly, and other publications.*

Date posted: March 10, 2016

## Add your comment

**XHTML** : You may use these tags : `<a href="" title="">` `<abbr title="">` `<acronym title="">` `<b>` `<blockquote cite="">` `<cite>` `<code>` `<del datetime="">` `<em>` `<i>` `<q cite="">` `<s>` `<strike>` `<strong>`

This is a Gravatar-enabled website. To get your own globally-recognized avatar, please register at [Gravatar.com](#)

Your comment

Name

Email

Website

## Comments

-  [Rodney Punt](#)

I have admired Carlisle Floyd, a genuinely American musical force, since I met him at a San Francisco conference several decades ago. Over a whisky we had a lively discussion about art and life that went into the wee hours. His is a brilliant mind and a unique sensibility shaped in part, like that of Tennessee Williams, by the cultural climate of America's South. Bravo this review and an opera of such reported creativity from a

nonagenarian.

March 12, 2016 at 7:58 pm — Reply

« [Apollo's Fire Set To Tour Gripping \*St. John Passion\*](#)  
[Singer Ailyn Pérez Skyrocketing And Loving The Ride](#) »

Search this site

 [Get Classical Voice North America via RSS](#)

[+](#) [Share / Save](#) [f](#) [t](#) [i](#)

Help Us Grow



Support quality coverage of the performing arts.

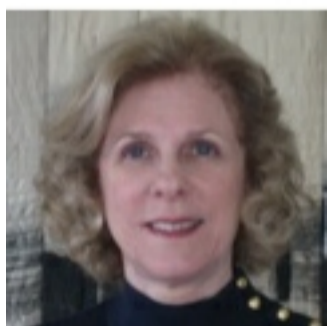
[Click here](#) to help Classical Voice North America resound!

Now available from BRIDGE RECORDS...



[Click on ad for more information](#)

CLASSICAL VOICE NORTH AMERICA – LOOK AROUND!



Barbara Jepson  
MCANA President

Welcome to *Classical Voice North America (CVNA)*, an online journal of classical music criticism and commentary written by the expert members of the [Music Critics Association of North America \(MCANA\)](#), with occasional guest contributors. We aim to convey the richness of musical life in the U.S. and Canada at a time when traditional print media is shrinking, and to bring classical music to life via digital images, audio samples, video and more. [Full Story](#) →

Are you a music writer? [Join us](#). CVNA is writer-run, writer-written, and writer-friendly.

If you like what you see, [become one of our sponsors](#). No contribution is too small!

We want to hear from you. Questions? Suggestions? Tell us at [CVNA.editor@gmail.com](mailto:CVNA.editor@gmail.com).

Visit These Classical Music Websites



>> [Bay area events, previews, reviews and news.](#)



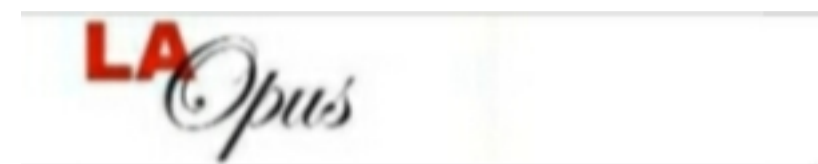
>> [North Carolina's statewide arts journal](#)



>> [Windy City music and theater, classic and new](#)



>> [Promoting classical music in Northeast Ohio](#)



>> [Reporting on music and the lively arts](#)



>> [News Roundup | Industry News | Special Reports](#)

### Classical Voice North America is on Twitter

Tweets by [@Classical\\_Voice](#)

Classical Voice Retweeted

 **Anthony Tommasini**   
[@TommasiniNYT](#)

The incomparable Kelli O'Hara is radiant & affecting as Dido in the MasterVoices production of "Dido & Aeneas." [nyti.ms/1O2OCu8](https://nyti.ms/1O2OCu8)



**Review: Kelli O'Hara's Operatic Turn in 'Dido and Aeneas'**  
Ms. O'Hara, fresh from "The King and I," assumed a throne herself at City Center, playin...  
[nytimes.com](https://nytimes.com)

  30 Apr

Classical Voice Retweeted

 **Anthony Tommasini**   
[@TommasiniNYT](#)

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

### Stories We Like: Recommended by Members

[MTT Revisits Das Lied Von Der Erde – This Time With A Mezzo](#) -- By Richard S. Ginell at [From Out of the West](#)

[Can a critic fairly review a friend's work?](#) -- By Philip Kennicott at the [Washington Post](#)

[The Met's curious history of failing to fire lackluster directors](#) -- By James Jorden at the [Observer](#)

[Music Hall rehab: More questions than answers](#) -- By Janelle Gelfand for [Cincinnati.com](#)

[Vienna Phil in Naples, Fla: Historic institution pays a visit to an ambitious newcomer](#) -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[The bad, the ugly and \(yes!\) the good](#) -- By Colin Eatock at [3 Quarks Daily](#)

[Operatic Royalty \(Sondra Radvanovsky\)](#) -- By Jennifer Melick at [Opera News](#)

[Pink Floyd's "The Wall" to be staged by Montreal Opera](#) -- By [CBC News](#)

[Give me a break: classical musicians who step away](#) -- By Anne Midgette at the [Washington Post](#)

[Michigan Opera Theatre tackles "The Tender Land"](#) -- By Mark Stryker at the [Detroit Free Press](#)

[Ten female composers you should know](#) -- By Elinor Cooper at [BBC Music](#)

[Jack Quartet plunges listeners into darkness](#) -- By Joshua Kosman at the [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

[Verbier Festival's Kim Gaynor to take over Vancouver Opera](#) -- By Janet Smith at the [Georgia Straight](#)

[A Tale of Three Cities](#) -- By Frank J. Oteri at [NewMusicBox](#)

[Charles Dutoit returns to Montreal 14 years after bitter split](#) -- By Robert Everett-Green at the [Globe and Mail](#)

[And the classical Grammy winners are ...](#) -- By Brian Wise at [WQXR](#)

[How unlikely Steven Stucky proved indispensable to the LA Philharmonic's rise](#) -- By Mark Swed at the [Los Angeles Times](#)

[Every Recording Of Satie's Gymnopedie One Played At Once](#) -- By Coffee Break at [MusicalToronto.Org](#)

[Playing it forward: Norman Johns has inspired young minority musicians for decades](#) -- By Janelle Gelfand at [Cincinnati.com](#)

[A Stunning Verdi Requiem by the L.A. Master Chorale](#) -- By Rodney Punt at [Huffington Post](#)

[Overwhelmingly male slate mars Winnipeg New Music Festival](#) -- By Holly Harris at the [Winnipeg Free Press](#)

[Adjusting Medication May Prolong Levine's Tenure at the Met](#) -- By Michael Cooper at the [New York Times](#)

[New York Philharmonic picks Dallas Symphony Orchestra's Jaap van Zweden as music director](#) -- By Scott Cantrell at the [Dallas Morning News](#)

[New Director, New Direction? Meet Jaap van Zweden](#) -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[Jaap Van Zweden and the future of the New York Philharmonic](#) -- By Anthony Tommasini at the [New York Times](#)

[Last Man Standing: Eugene Onegin, Courtesy of NC Opera](#) -- By John Lambert at [CVNC](#)

[Classical music statistics for 2015](#) -- By Mark Pullinger at [Bachtrack](#)

[Kronos Quartet to revisit horrors of Vietnam with 'My Lai'](#) -- By Hannah Edgar at [Chicago Classical Review](#)

[Piano teacher Eleanor Sokoloff, 101, feted at Barnes Foundation](#) -- By Peter Dobrin at the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

[Violons du Roy founder Bernard Labadie prepares for emotional homecoming](#) -- By Arthur Kaptainis at the [Montreal Gazette](#)

[Prototype Festival shows opera houses one path to new work](#) -- By Anne Midgette at the [Washington Post](#)

[Happy Ending To Bernard Labadie's TSO Comeback](#) -- By Arthur Kaptainis at [Musical Toronto](#)

[Igor Levit and Evgeny Kissin revise the recital format](#) -- By Alex Ross at the [New Yorker](#)

[Librettist Royce Vavrek: So Many Juicy, Amazing Words](#) -- By Frank J. Oteri at [New Music Box](#)

[Pierre Boulez, French Composer, Dies at 90](#) -- By Paul Griffiths at the [New York Times](#)

['Mozart in the Jungle': Where Classical Music Meets Soap Opera](#) -- By Zachary Wolfe at the [New York Times](#)

[ENO's woes: opera company begins new year in offstage turmoil](#) -- By Mark Brown at the [Guardian](#)

[Claude Gingras: Canada's Longest Running Music Critic Retires](#) -- By Michael Vincent at [Musical Toronto](#)

[Kurt Masur \(1927-2015\): A Life in Music](#) -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[The Third Annual Excellence in Opera \(a. k. a. Freddie\) Awards](#) -- By Fred Plotkin at [WQXR](#)

[Kurt Masur Dies at 88; Conductor Transformed New York Philharmonic](#) -- By Margalit Fox at the [New York Times](#)

[PBS chooses Lyric Opera premiere 'Bel Canto' for Great Performances television broadcast](#) -- By Nancy Malitz at [Chicago On the Aisle](#)

[Taylor Swift donates \\$50,000 to the Seattle Symphony](#) -- By Hannis Brown at [WQXR](#)

[The Best Classical Music of 2015](#) -- By Anthony Tommasini at the [New York Times](#)

[The 10 best Canadian classical CDs of 2015](#) -- By Matthew Parsons and Robert Rowat at [CBC Music](#)

[Violinist Ray Chen gives classical music a new-media twist](#) -- By Xavier Flory at the [New York Times](#)

[How to make a virtuoso violinist](#) -- By Malcolm Harris at the [New Republic](#)

['Bridge to Beethoven' Review: Where Old Meets New](#) -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[Rival visions to reboot the New York City Opera detailed](#) -- By Jennifer Smith at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music receives \\$20 million gift](#) -- By Ade Adeniji at [Inside Philanthropy](#)

[Calgary's Hohnens Piano Competition is kinder, gentler](#) -- By Michael Morreale at [Maclean's](#)

**Member Recommended Websites**

- [Parterre Box](#)
- [Opera Today](#)
- [La Scena Musicale](#)
- [The Rest is Noise](#)
- [Opera Chic](#)
- [Chicago On the Aisle](#)
- [Musical America](#)
- [Notes on Notes](#)
- [Musical Toronto](#)
- [San Francisco Classical Voice](#)
- [The Wholenote](#)
- [New Music Box](#)
- [CVNC Arts Journal](#)
- [Arts Journal](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [NPR Music](#)
- [Miami Clásica](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [Opera News](#)

Navigate to