

HGO Studio Members and Alum Remember Carlisle Floyd

Carlisle was both the perfect old-style Southern gentleman and also a totally modern demanding artistic force. His regular visits to the Studio in my time were personal and professional highlights - the strength of his handshake and the warmth of his smile were just as valued as his insight with generations of young singers and his guidance about the development of their training. I was proud to call him a friend and mentor, and will always fondly remember his quizzical laugh, huge hands and piercing insight. The Studio has lost a much loved Grandpapa, but our memories and his music will always keep him close.

- *Laura Canning, Director of the HGO Studio, 2008-2015*

Carlisle is such a major part of me being at HGO. He heard my audition for the Studio in a hotel ballroom in New York City and shortly afterwards, I was invited to join the Studio. My fondest memory was conducting his opera *Susannah* at HGO in 1996. The originally scheduled conductor canceled shortly before rehearsals were to begin. Carlisle suggested to David Gockley that he give me the assignment. I was very nervous, but Carlisle helped me through every step of the way. He attended every rehearsal and sat next to me, gently encouraging me and offering wonderful advice throughout the entire process. We also spent many hours around his kitchen table working through the piece. I treasure the time with this wise and compassionate man.

- *Richard Bado, Music Director of the HGO Studio, 1992-2005*

Carlisle Floyd's vision for the importance of American opera, and the vital role opera companies can play in identifying, nurturing, and launching incredible young talent, was the foundation from which our beloved art form has blossomed these past several decades. As we look at the ever-increasing catalog of new works in this country, and the many American-trained artists who have apprenticed in a training program, we owe much gratitude to Carlisle and his success at Houston Grand Opera—which set the bar for why opera is an important, vibrant part of any cultural landscape.

- *Michael Heaston, Music Director of the HGO Studio, 2018-20*

During my time at HGO, I've been lucky to work with many artists whom I've long admired, but the day I met Carlisle Floyd stands out. We were rehearsing for his final opera, *Prince of Players*, which featured almost the entire roster of HGO Studio artists. Carlisle gifted the artists, myself, and every person at HGO with kindness, gentleness, and a deep love for the art of singing. Just being in his presence meant the world to each of us, and I cherish the memories of that time. The care with which Carlisle founded the Studio was a trademark of his entire life, and he will be greatly missed.

- *Brian Speck, Director of the HGO Studio, 2015-Present*

I had the great honor and privilege of working for and with Carlisle Floyd when he and David Gockley entrusted me in 1977 with administering the launch and first seven years of what was then known as

the Houston Opera Studio, which David and Carlisle Co-Directed. At that time, the Studio was a collaboration between the Houston Grand Opera and the University of Houston, taking advantage of what both institutions could uniquely offer singers and coaches with potential for major careers in opera. Although I held various positions over the course of my twelve years at HGO, my association with Carlisle continued throughout, and I have remained a stalwart admirer of his astounding talents and cherished personal virtues.

Both a born opera composer and brilliant crafter of libretti, Carlisle possessed a distinct gift for melody and for lush orchestrations, as well as a keen sense of dramatic shape and pacing. A natural wordsmith, he also was a master of Southern dialect, bringing to life the character and soul of a region he knew so well.

Born in South Carolina as the son of a Methodist minister, Carlisle epitomized the genteel manner and comportment of a true Southern Gentleman. His ready smile and sense of humor laced his countenance, but he was also a stimulating, deep, and original thinker whose intellect shown through in his daily conversation and work.

Carlisle's musical idiom is accessible to a broad spectrum of opera lovers, and *Susannah* and *Of Mice and Men* have remained in the international repertoire in countless production, recital, and audition contexts. I was so pleased to see Carlisle again at HGO's *Prince of Players* on the occasion of his 90th and at a dinner for David Gockley when the latter retired from heading the San Francisco Opera. Those two titans – to whom I owe so much and dearly love – cultivated a most special and lasting bond, which was a joy to witness.

I will be forever blessed to have known Carlisle and to have experienced firsthand his core attributes. He has spawned a remarkable body of work and graced many a life, both professionally and personally. He shall, of course, remain with us as we embrace his voice on the stage, in the ear, and in the heart. Thank you, Carlisle.

- *Anne Tomford Munitz, Managing Director of the Studio, 1977-1985*

Carlisle, you were to me, the truest of gentlemen. Your dignity, compassion and love of life was not only exhibited in the glorious music you wrote but also in your commitment to singers, especially the nurturing of young singers. You will forever hold a special place in so many of our hearts and I thank you for all that you have done to foster good will and love through your being and your music. Rest In Peace.

- *Diane Zola, Director of the HGO Studio, 2000-2006*