FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Cristian Grases Debuts with the USC Thornton Concert Choir

Venezuelan conductor is the new assistant professor of choral music at the USC Thornton School of Music.

Friday, October 22, 2010, 8:00 p.m. at Alfred Newman Recital Hall at USC

LOS ANGELES (October 21, 2010) – Venezuela is a fertile if unexpected ground for classical music. The emergence of Gustavo Dudamel at the helm of the Los Angeles Philharmonic has brought worldwide attention to the country’s superb music education programs. From the celebrated El Sistema network of youth orchestras to university-level education, Venezuela is becoming an improbable hothouse of musical talent.

On Friday, October 22, the USC Thornton Concert Choir presents its first concert under the direction of Venezuelan native Cristian Grases, new assistant professor of choral music at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music. An accomplished conductor, composer, and scholar, Grases specializes in multicultural music, particularly Latin American choral music.

“Having Dudamel here in the city has brought a lot of attention to the education system in Venezuela,” Grases said. “There is a long line of great musicians, especially conductors. We have so many talented kids right now that the competitive level is very high.”

Grases started his musical studies in Caracas at age 11. After graduating from Simón Bolívar University in Venezuela, he earned his Doctorate from the University of Miami. He has taught choral conducting and methods, music history, world music, and general music at Simon Bolivar University, Central Washington University, University of Miami, and California State University in Los Angeles.

“In comparison with the orchestral system, we have a smaller choral movement in Venezuela that has needs and characteristics that are a little different from the orchestral world,” Grases said. While leading a choral ensemble in Venezuela, he couldn’t find enough music for his choir. “It was difficult to find suitable music for the choir,” he said.

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“The normal repertoire didn’t fit the characteristics of the singers I had in front of me, so I had to create a lot of new repertoire for them and arrange a lot of music.”

In Miami, Grases formed a new choir, the Amazonia Vocal Ensemble, to continue to showcase the music of Latin America. Now that he is settled in Los Angeles, he sees his project growing into a partnership between the two cities. “With the Latin American population in Los Angeles, there is no Latin American choir,” Grases said. “If we have a sister ensemble in Miami, the other Latin American focal point, then we can start creating something interesting. So, I’d like to create an organization that would embrace these two ensembles.”

In addition to the new choir, Grases hopes to open the first center for Latin American choral music. His exciting vision to turn Los Angeles into a center for Latin American choral music suits the ambitious agenda of the Thornton School’s choral program. Under the new leadership of Jo-Michael Scheibe, chair of the choral music program at the Thornton School and national president elect of the American Choral Directors’ Association, the Thornton School recently launched the first Bachelor of Arts program in choral music in the United States.

“Cristian Grases brings renewed energy to the Thornton School of Music,” said Scheibe. “As a teacher, he is demanding, passionate and a fine scholar. He brings all of these attributes into his rehearsals and classroom.”

With so many projects already in the works, how has his first semester been so far? “Well, I’m alive,” Grases laughed. “It has been an interesting first semester and we are all quite exhausted, but we’re getting things done.”

Friday’s concert is a double bill featuring the Thornton Concert Choir and Thornton Chamber Singers. Under the direction of Grases, the Thornton Concert Choir will present choral masterworks from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Venezuela and Argentina. The Thornton Chamber Singers, led by Scheibe, will present music of water and light, including works by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd.

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Editors, Please Note:

Calendar Listing

WHAT:
Cristian Grases Debuts with the USC Thornton Concert Choir

Venezuelan conductor is the new assistant professor of choral music at the USC Thornton School of Music.
WHEN:
Friday, October 22, 2010, 8:00 p.m.

WHERE:
Alfred Newman Recital Hall
3616 Trousdale Parkway
Los Angeles, CA 90089

TICKET PRICES:
Free

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**About the Thornton School’s Choral Program**

Established by Charles C. Hirt in 1946, the choral music program has long been an innovator and leader in the development of graduate degree programs specifically designed for the choral conductor and the church musician. Graduates conduct choral groups of national prominence and hold positions as conductors and teachers throughout the world. The current faculty consists of specialists who lead regional choral and church ensembles and serve as clinicians and guest conductors in the United States and abroad. Departmental ensembles have achieved local, national and international recognition through frequent performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, appearances at Divisional and National Conventions of the American Choral Directors Association and recognitions-including two Grand Prizes-in international choral competitions in Bulgaria, Spain and France.

**About the USC Thornton School of Music**

The USC Thornton School of Music brings together a stellar faculty chosen from a broad spectrum of the music profession and gifted students from around the globe. Founded in 1884 and today the oldest continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles, the Thornton School consistently ranks among the nation’s top music schools and conservatories.

By blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of a leading research university, USC Thornton offers an impressive range of performance opportunities and a curriculum designed to prepare students for successful careers in the 21st century. The Thornton School presents more than 500 concerts each year and is the only music school with a weekly radio broadcast in a major media market featuring student performances.

Located in the heart of Los Angeles, USC Thornton offers students every advantage of studying, performing, and networking in the world’s most vibrant music industry hub.

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Every week, our students engage with leading professionals in all aspects of the music, recording, and entertainment industries, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, LA Opera, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Grammy Foundation®, and The Recording Academy®. Our students also are a constant presence in local classrooms, reaching out to the next generation of musicians. More at www.usc.edu/music, or call (213) 740-3233.