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USC Thornton Opera Program Presents an Evening of Families in Crisis: Puccini’s Gianni Schicchi and Jake Heggie’s Three Decembers

Wednesday, November 17, 8:00 p.m.
Friday, November 19, 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 21, 2:00 p.m.
Bing Theatre, USC University Park Campus

LOS ANGELES (November 16, 2010) — What’s the holiday season without a little, or a lot, of family drama? Beginning on Wednesday, November 16, the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music Opera Program and the USC Thornton Chamber Orchestra present a double bill of one-acts that includes Puccini’s messy and hilarious family debacle, Gianni Schicchi, and the Los Angeles premiere of Jake Heggie’s Three Decembers.

USC Thornton Opera stage director Ken Cazan and music director Brent McMunn have stripped both dramas to a two-hour performance proving that opera doesn’t have to be grand. It can be quite small, actually, and still pack a wallop.

“We wanted to get back to our simpler productions,” said Cazan. “We could have done a show with a chorus, we just didn’t want to. Puccini is a lush symphonic sweep, while Heggie is all simplicity and elegance. But different as they are, the pieces seemed to come together effortlessly.”

Using a single set, Cazan has updated Puccini’s comedy from the Renaissance to the 1980s, which is the opening decade for Heggie’s piece. Gianni Schicchi is a feisty comedy adapted from a throwaway line in Dante’s Inferno. When the Donati family patriarch leaves everything to a monastery, the greedy relatives look to a clever fixer to posthumously rewrite his will. A part of the thematically unrelated Il Trittico (the triptych) trio, the 55-minute Schicchi is considered the finest of the three and is often billed with works by other composers such as Leoncavallo’s Pagliacci.
Jake Heggie’s *Three Decembers* is based on *Some Christmas Letters*, an unpublished work by playwright Terrence McNally. Set over three decades of Christmases, *Three Decembers* sketches the strained relationship between Mandy Mitchell, aging Broadway diva, and her two adult children, Charlie, who is gay, and Bea, an unhappily married alcoholic. The alternately funny and devastating story deals directly with the AIDS crisis, extra-marital relationships, and forgiveness.

The USC Thornton Opera will give three performances of Gianni Schicchi and *Three Decembers* on Thursday and Saturday, November 17 and 19, at 8:00 p.m. and on Sunday, November 21, at 2:00 p.m., in the Bing Theatre. Seats are free for USC students, faculty and staff; $12 for senior citizens and alumni; and $18 for the general public. Advanced tickets can be purchased through the USC Ticket Office at [www.usc.edu/tickets](http://www.usc.edu/tickets) or by calling (213) 740-4672.

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Editors, Please Note:

Calendar Listing

WHAT:  
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WHEN:  
Wednesday, November 17, 8:00 p.m.  
Friday, November 19, 8:00 p.m.  
Sunday, November 21, 2:00 p.m

WHERE:  
3500 Watt Way  
Los Angeles, CA 90089  
(located on the USC campus in downtown L.A.; ample parking is available)

TICKET PRICES:  
$18 – General admission  
$12 – Seniors, non-USC students and USC alumni  
(USC students, staff and faculty with valid ID are free)

TICKETS & INFO:  
USC Ticket Office

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About the USC Thornton Shool of Music

Led by Dean Robert Cutietta, the USC Thornton School of Music brings together a stellar faculty, chosen from a broad spectrum of the music profession, and musically 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 top one percent of the nation's music schools and conservatories. Graduates of the school attain positions with major orchestras, ensembles, recording studios and music industry firms and perform on stages and in studios around the world.

Blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of studying at a leading research university, the Thornton School offers students a thorough music education in a real-world context. Located at the center of Los Angeles, the school is the collegiate partner of choice for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Opera, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the GRAMMY Foundation and The Recording Academy, to name a few.

In addition to their work with these ensembles, Thornton students are a constant presence in local classrooms, reaching out to the next generation of musicians through music education and appreciation courses. With its faculty, its students, its events and its work, the Thornton School is one of the most important cultural resources in Los Angeles.

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