FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Media Contact:
Evan Calbi
calbi@thornton.usc.edu
(213) 740-3229

USC THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA PROGRAM TO STAGE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF THE ENGLISH CAT

USC Thornton’s production of the rarely staged 1983 work by composer Hans Werner Henze will be Nov. 19, 21 and 23 at USC’s Bing Theatre.

LOS ANGELES (November 5, 2014) – This November, the USC Thornton School of Music will unveil the West Coast premiere of The English Cat — a 1983 opera by famed 20th-century composer Hans Werner Henze that features a libretto by controversial British playwright Edward Bond.

Performances of the rarely staged work will be Nov. 19, 21 and 23 on the University of Southern California campus. The performance on Nov. 21 includes a pre-performance discussion sponsored by Visions & Voices, USC’s Arts and Humanities initiative, that will explore Bond’s socially conscious work, which was inspired by a short story written by Honoré de Balzac.

“The English Cat has only been performed in this country at the Manhattan School of Music, at the Santa Fe Opera and now USC,” said USC Thornton Opera music director Brent McMunn. “I’m hoping we can get the word out to the L.A. audience that this is a chance to hear significant music.”

In 1986, when USC Thornton faculty Tim Page reviewed the New York premiere, he wrote: “Mr. Henze is a spectacular craftsman.” Page described Henze’s music as “imbued with luminous clarity.”

“We have done quite a few premieres here,” said Ken Cazan, USC Thornton Opera resident stage director and Vocal Arts and Opera Chair. “Many years ago, I was called in at the very last minute to work as the assistant director for the premiere in Santa Fe, and I always thought it would be a great opera for students to do. It’s very important for them to do these kind of pieces here because our goal is to create the next generation of professional singing actors.”
Based on a Balzac story from *Scenes of the Public and Private Lives of Animals*, *The English Cat* explores class division through the eyes of a group of bourgeois cats who form the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Rats.

“It gets us all a little out of our box,” said McMunn of the opera. “I wanted to stretch myself and all of us and find something in my mind I was calling ‘high modernism’ — something from the second half of the 20th century, not one of the safe pieces.”

“The big challenge is the female lead,” explained Cazan. “It’s a huge role and a huge range — almost stratospheric. We just happened to have Emma Gimsley, a first-year master’s student, who could do it this year. She is very relaxed and comfortable onstage, even while wearing the enormous cat heads that are a part of the costumes.”

For more information and a video of music director Brent McMunn talking about *The English Cat*, please visit: http://music.usc.edu/the-english-cat/

**THE ENGLISH CAT**

Nov. 19 - 8:00 pm  
Nov. 21 - 8:00 pm  
Nov. 23 - 2:00 pm  
Bing Theatre, USC University Park Campus

General public, $18  
Seniors, alumni and non-USC students, $12  
Free for current students, staff and faculty with valid ID when picked up in person from the USC Ticket Office or the theatre box office.

###

**ABOUT THE USC THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

For more than 125 years, the USC Thornton School of Music has prepared students to excel as performers, composers, industry leaders, and educators on stages and in studios around the world. Founded in 1884 and today the oldest continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles, USC Thornton is internationally recognized as one of the finest conservatories and music schools in the U.S.

By blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of a leading research university, USC Thornton offers a curriculum designed to prepare students for successful careers in the 21st century.

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 center. Every week, students engage with leading professionals in all aspects of the music, recording, and entertainment industries, and collaborate with such pillar organizations as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, LA Opera, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Los Angeles
Chamber Orchestra, Grammy Foundation and The Recording Academy. Thornton students are also a constant presence in local classrooms, helping to shape the next generation of musicians.