New Space for Songwriters to Be Dedicated March 24 at the USC Thornton School of Music

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The USC Thornton School of Music has created its first-ever venue designed especially for songwriters. The Songwriter’s Theater, which will be inaugurated on March 24, involved an extensive renovation of a space in the lower level of The Music Complex on campus.

The opening will begin with a reception at 6 p.m., followed by a performance at 7 p.m. featuring current students and alumni from USC Thornton’s Popular Music program, including singer Rozzi Crane.

[If members of the media would like to attend the dedication, please contact Evan Calbi or Allison Engel, at the contact information above.]

The 981-square-foot space now boasts high-tech acoustics, LED lighting, stage lighting that allows for curtain and wall highlights, and red Austrian style curtains with deep vertical shirring. Custom-made wall sconces add to the retro, “speakeasy” feel of the design. The venue includes a grand piano, drum set, amps and other musical instruments, including guitars donated by Taylor Guitars, to convey the idea that people can “walk in and start performing,” said Chris Sampson, vice dean of the Division of Contemporary Music and founding director of the Popular Music program.

Sampson teaches songwriting, which has expanded in recent years from an obscure elective that attracted 13 students into the nationally known Popular Music program.

“Sound was our first priority and we put in a state-of-the-art system,” Sampson said. “This is, without question, our finest technical audio set-up in the entire Thornton School.”

The theater is designed to be the physical embodiment of the idea that all elements of the contemporary music business start with the single critical action of writing a song.
“For me, this room symbolizes the way that songwriting has become accepted within an educational environment,” said Sampson, “We value the importance of the song as the place where it all starts. Without a great song, there’s nothing to record. There’s nothing to share with an audience.”

The 50-seat venue, which was built in the early 1980s as a sound mixing stage for the USC School of Cinematic Arts, will host solo performances and small ensembles. It made its debut as a lecture hall this semester, and its future may include streaming of original online content.

[Image of the new Songwriter's Theater in the USC Thornton School's Music Center. Photo by Daniel Andersen.]

ABOUT THE USC THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC

For more than 130 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.