Opera Program

Handbook

Last Updated September 5, 2017
This handbook was originally created in Spring 2007 with the latest major revision in September of 2015. It is effective for all USC Opera Program participants for Fall 2017 - Spring 2018 year.

It is the student’s responsibility to read and become familiar with all policies, requirements and deadlines of the Opera Program, the Vocal Arts department and the USC Thornton School of Music (see Vocal Arts handbook for more information). Refer to Music Student Services for course curriculum information.

For more information on the USC Opera Program, please visit our website music.usc.edu/opera.
INTRODUCTION & CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTANCE

This handbook sets forth the expectations of the Thornton School for participation in the Opera Program. A working knowledge of the policies, rules, customs and practices of the program is required of all participants. Acceptance and strict adherence to them is a condition of acceptance into and continuing participation in the program.

Please note that this document may repeat but is not entirely inclusive of all the policies and procedures in place at USC that govern faculty, staff, and student behavior. Please refer to the various faculty, staff, and student handbooks available from USC and the Thornton School of Music.

USC OPERA FACULTY & STAFF

Faculty:
Ken Cazan, Resident Stage Director
Brent McMunn, Music Director/Conductor

Coaches/Pianists:
Alex Lansburgh, Thornton Opera Collaborative Keyboard Arts TA
Rakefet Hak, Coach
Mark Robson, Coach
Douglas Sumi, Coach

Staff:
Damien Elwood, Opera Program Manager
Allen Pearcy Galeana, Office Asst.
Swasti Sharma, Accounting Asst.
Nicole Toto, Office Asst.
Geovanna Nichols-Julien, Production Asst.
Lucie Shelley, Graphic Designer

THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC VOCAL ARTS FACULTY & STAFF

Faculty:
Ken Cazan, department chair
Thomas Michael Allen, voice teacher
Angela Blasi, voice teacher
Palmer Fuller, musical theater
Rod Gilfry, voice teacher
Rakefet Hak, Italian diction
Lynn Helding, vocal pedagogy and voice teacher
Elizabeth Hynes, voice teacher
Lisa Sylvester, coach

Staff:
Kyle Shafiee, Department Coordinator
THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC STAFF

Administration:
Robert Cutietta, Dean
Susan Lopez, Associate Dean for Administration
Phillip Placenti, Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Admission
Sharon Vang, Senior Business Officer
Marianne Salzer, Human Resources Home Dept. Coordinator

Student Services
Viet Bui, Academic Advisor
Job Springer, Doctoral Advisor
Antonio Bartolome, Senior Academic Advisor

Admissions and Financial Aid:
Kit Bellamy, Associate Director of Admissions
Ligaya Dozier, Manager Administrative Support

Operations, Facilities, and Production:
Jeff de Caen, Assistant Dean for Operations
Michelle Maestas Simonsen, Director of Operations
Rory Lynch, Scheduling Manager
Jennifer Barczykowski, Office Manager
Heather Hall, Production Manager
Tori Nagle, Production Coordinator

IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS
USC Opera Office 213 740-6451 MUS 212
Vocal Arts Office 213 740-7704 RHM 112
Ken Cazan Studio 213 740-1350 MUS 207
Brent McMunn Studio 213 740-6451 MUS 205
USC Ticket Office 213 740-7111 Old Student Union Building
The USC Opera Program prepares both undergraduate and graduate participants for careers in opera. It is part of the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music, a professional school dedicated to educating and training students in all aspects of music within the context of an excellent liberal arts education. The USC Opera Program is considered one of the top operatic training programs in the nation. This reputation has developed because of the excellence of its faculty, alumni, and students both at USC and as professionals in the opera field. It is the intention of the Opera Program faculty and staff to continue to strive for excellence and build upon this reputation.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our goal is to produce the best singing-actors available to the opera profession through high quality instruction, coaching, preparation, and performance opportunities.

In order to accomplish our mission, the Opera Program presents a minimum of three live operatic events each year providing performance opportunities for program participants. In addition the Opera Program and the Vocal Arts department encourage student projects and organizations, such as the Chamber Opera of USC, to further performance and directorial opportunities.

PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

- Developing vocal skill through coaching, pedagogy, diction, and instruction.
- Developing performance skill through courses in acting, movement, improvisation, repertoire and scene study, direction, and performance practice.
- Developing the habits necessary to succeed as a professional singer.
- Preparing participants for the conditions and demands they will face as professional performers.
- Creating opportunities to study with national and international artists, designers, and leaders within the opera industry.
- Collaborating with a diverse and multi-talented faculty and staff to support the creative, educational, professional, research, and service mission of USC.
- Establishing and maintaining collaborations with professional arts institutions, other academic institutions and music schools, and USC departments/schools such as the USC School of Theater and the School of Cinematic Arts.
- Continuing to develop a broad base of donor and patron support for student scholarships, awards, endowed faculty chairs, guest artist residencies and special programming.
- Being involved in Thornton and USC outreach programs in the USC neighborhood.
- Commissioning and developing newly composed works, giving singers the opportunity to have contact and work with contemporary composers and librettists.
STATEMENT OF VALUES

Introduction

This section further clarifies the Mission Statement and Goals of the USC Opera Program. It is presented as a practical guide to the values and practices that underlie all the teaching and production activities of the Opera Program.

Principals

Our basic principles are to develop imagination, explore the human spirit, refine artistic values, pursue excellence, question accepted wisdom, and to take artistic risk within the context of open collaboration.

The principles above are basic, yet deeply profound, concepts that should guide an artist’s lifelong pursuit of her/his craft. For the purpose of this document we will focus on two principles we feel are of primary importance to the Opera Program.

Artistic risk can be defined as the taking of an action (in the development and presentation of the character or a scene) that has a possibility of failure. Interpretations which are safe can be dull, often stultifying and cliché ridden. Unless there is some risk, both the singer and the audience can enter a state of tolerant acceptance. Lack of risk in a performance can indicate artists who are afraid to pursue creative paths to test the boundaries of their craft and imagination. Risk also gives singers an opportunity to explore values that they may agree or disagree with.

Often professional opera companies fall prey to market pressures that can lead to timidity of spirit and to artists being discouraged from challenging the aesthetic and personal values of their audiences. A noble failure involving risk-taking is often much more valuable to artists and audiences, than a more conventional “success.” As a university based opera training program, the USC Thornton Opera has the opportunity to take risks; to question clichés and move beyond them. The performer is given, and should have, the right to fail. Artistic risk is critical to opera theatre and thus to the creative health of artists and their education. However, productive experimentation should be guided by discipline and a seriousness of purpose.

Fully produced Opera is a complex process requiring the diverse talents and skills of a large group of people. The key to the artistic success in complex opera production is open collaboration. Open collaboration is a willingness to bring the full force of one’s talents, beliefs, and convictions into a process that is mutually respectful of the talents, beliefs, and convictions of colleagues.

- Open collaboration among performers creates opportunities for artistic risk and develops ensemble.
- Open collaboration among directors and performers creates a deepening of artistic understanding.
- Open collaboration among artists and production staff creates mutual respect and the conditions necessary for the successful presentation of the art form.

As a participant of the USC Opera Program, our principles will serve to create a robust environment for you and your colleagues to grow as artists. They will also form a solid foundation on which to build your career as an opera professional.
RESPONSIBILITIES

Opera is produced by a community of artists, technicians, and craft professionals in which each member of that community is dependant on the others.

Consideration for colleagues is absolutely essential. The rules and guidelines of the Opera Program are based on simple courtesy and discipline.

Faculty and Staff Obligations and Conduct

The faculty and staff demonstrate and demand professional standards at all times, while having compassion for the students’ process of learning, maturing and often limited practical experience. Since students must develop a professional and cooperative attitude as artists contributing to their society, they learn this most effectively from models provided by faculty. The program also recognizes that teaching includes a mentoring relationship between faculty and student that does not always occur in the traditional classroom environment.

Student confidentiality will be maintained regarding files and records, and in conversations of a personal nature, unless there is concern for the safety of a student or any member of the USC community.

Opera Program faculty and staff are committed to maintaining an environment free from harassment of any sort while respecting the nature of open artistic exchange and expression.

The collective nature of theatre work demands professionals who maintain their personal standards while, at the same time, interacting respectfully with colleagues in a compassionate and supportive manner. Students should expect to see and will be expected to participate in this style of interaction as they work side by side with faculty and staff in lessons, rehearsals, and production activities.

A singer’s performance in the program is monitored and supervised by the Resident Stage Director and Music Director. In a situation where it is clear that students’ performance (either on stage or off) is adversely affecting the potential quality of the production or classes, it is the responsibility of the opera faculty, in consultation with voice faculty (if appropriate), to address these problems and offer guidance to the student. The opera faculty will make the final decision on what action will be taken.

By studying with faculty and staff who are actively working in the profession, program participants benefit from knowledge of current projects outside of the Thornton School and insights into collaboration, preparation, process, and personal growth. Because of the high quality of our faculty and staff their professional lives occasionally may conflict with their commitments to work in lessons and the program; whenever that happens all classes should be covered either before or after their absence or an appropriate substitute will be provided for the particular course of study.
Student Obligations and Conduct

While some of these statements may seem they can be taken for granted, they are listed here because experience has shown that sometimes even the most self-evident ideas and notions can be forgotten.

The first obligation of a singer entering the USC Opera Program is to the program and her/his colleagues. The expectations are:

- Being prepared for classes, coachings, and rehearsals, which means knowing the assignment, be it an aria, scene, or complete role.
- Being warmed up and dressed in appropriate attire (having any costume pieces, such as rehearsal skirts or shoes, on) and being ready to begin at the appointed hour so that rehearsals or class can begin promptly at the appointed time.
- Giving full concentration to every exercise, class or rehearsal.
- For work in class, being responsible for providing copies of the music to both accompanist and instructor and, if necessary, to colleagues in the class. Online files of the assigned opera scenes will be available via the Opera Program website.
- Students are expected help facilitate the setup and running of rehearsals and will occasionally be assigned specific tasks. In particular, all cast members can be called to help with a show’s final strike. Strike assignments are posted before a show opens. Helping with production is an opportunity to see some of the workings backstage in order to develop an understanding of the whole production process. Collegiality with technicians and crafts persons is a very important part of the opera process.
- We are responsible for facilities assigned to the Opera Program. It is up to all of us to keep them neat and clean.
- Resolving scheduling conflicts is the responsibility of the participant. Requests for excused absences may be placed through a link to an online form on the Opera Office website. The opera program faculty will decide on a case-by-case basis whether to grant an excused absence. Unexcused absences will negatively impact the participant’s grades and continued participation in the Opera Program.
- If an emergency should occur and a student is unable to attend a scheduled program activity (coaching, rehearsal, or performance) for any reason, it is the student’s responsibility to notify the instructor and the Opera Manager as soon as possible.
- If a student fails to attend a scheduled rehearsal/coaching and has no valid excuse, the absence will be considered unexcused and the faculty member and/or program is not obligated to make up the instruction.
- Program participants must reschedule and/or stop all outside work, entering competitions and auditions for a minimum of three weeks leading up to and through all performances of program productions. Failure to do so can result in a negative impact on grades and a forfeiture of the role.
- If a student’s schedule changes it is the responsibility of the student to inform the Opera Manger as soon as possible.
- Each student must provide the Opera Office with her/his full class schedule and keep it current via the online Weekly Availability form which can be found here: http://fd2.formdesk.com/uscopera/weekly_availability_form. This link is also on the Opera Office webpage. Submission of this schedule information does not indicate
that conflicts with opera calls are automatically approved as excused absences. It is
up to the participant to secure excused absences.

- If a scheduled Opera Program event prevents a student from attending a voice lesson, the
  student must contact the instructor immediately to reschedule his/her lesson.
- A student may not leave a class or rehearsal without permission from the instructor other
  than to use the restroom. **All cell phones and laptops must be turned off before the
  start of a class, rehearsal, or coaching.** If a cell phone goes off during class, the
  instructor has full authority to confiscate the device until the end of class. If a student is
  using a laptop to record the rehearsal or take notes the student must sit in the front of the
  room where laptop use can be monitored by the instructor.
- Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered
  disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits
  other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible
  for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution
  of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for
  disciplinary action.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You
are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity -
http://equity.usc.edu/* or to the *Department of Public Safety - http://dps.usc.edu/*. This is
important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university
community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate
the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women
and Men - http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/* provides 24/7 confidential support. In case
of a counseling emergency after-hours or during weekends, call (213) 740-4900, and
press “0” to speak with an on-call counselor.

**CASTING**

The Opera Program faculty makes decisions regarding casting for program productions. Casting
decisions are made to meet the needs of the opera program and to facilitate the instruction and
growth of its participants. Participants are generally selected from the singers in the Thornton
School Vocal Arts department. However, if other singers for roles are needed, the Directors have
the prerogative to go outside the program and use alumni, faculty, non-program students and
other professionals. The directors must ensure that the highest standards of production are
maintained. The following general policies apply to auditioning for the Opera Program.

- Generally the students best suited for and prepared to perform in a given production will be given
  first consideration in all casting decisions.
- All students must play as cast. In the event any student does not accept a role, she/he may be
  excused from the Opera Program.
- Chorus roles are of equal importance to the program as principal roles even if this is not true for
  the singer. Refusal to participate in a chorus assignment can result in dismissal from the program.
- Students cast in opera program productions are expected to register for the appropriate Thornton
course. The student should consult with her student adviser to ensure the course most appropriate
for her academic progress is selected. Exceptions may be requested of the opera program. These
requests should be made via email to the Opera Manager and Chair of the Vocal Arts
Department.
Audition Procedures

When auditions for productions are held they are attended by the Opera Faculty and, when appropriate, specific production/artistic staff and outside professionals. Auditions schedule and information is posted on the Opera Call Board and on the USC Thornton Opera web site. Students who are not in good academic standing or who were dismissed from the Opera Program may not be eligible to audition. Failure to appear at the designated audition time may result in the auditioned being ineligible for casting.

Covers/Understudies

Cover/understudy roles may be assigned. Singers cast as covers are not guaranteed a performance, but cover roles should be taken seriously, not only because of the possibility of illness of the singer in the role but because it offers students an opportunity to add another role to their repertoire. If an entire role is covered but not performed, and the signer wishes to list it as a fully learned role for resume purposes the student must attain approval from the Resident Stage Director or Music Director.

Covers must be fully prepared to perform the role at any performance or rehearsal. They must inform the Opera Manager and the Stage Manager of their whereabouts and how they can be reached at least 12 hours before the beginning of the opera performance or rehearsal.

SCHEDULING

The Opera Program schedule is posted in three places: the Opera Program Call Board (located on the first floor of RAMO HALL), the board outside the opera office (located on the second floor of MUS next to MUS 212), and online on the Opera Program Office web page – music.usc.edu/opera/office/ Login is required:

Password: _____________________

It is expected that all students in the Opera Program will attend all classes, coachings, rehearsals, costume fittings and tech meetings to which they are called. Requests for absences must be submitted via the Excused Absence Request online form at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the absence. The requests are reviewed by the Opera Program manager and faculty. More information may be required for a decision to be rendered. If so you will receive an email asking for clarification. Decisions will be made by either the faculty or Program Manager and will be communicated via email. Use this link to access the online form: http://fd2.formdesk.com/uscopera/excused_absence_form or visit the Opera Office webpage and follow the link for the online form. Note, the form is locked from noon on Wednesday to 5pm on Thursday during the semester.
The schedules are color coded based on what show the calls are for. Calls for the fall opera are shaded red. Calls for the winter scenes performance are shaded green. And calls for the spring opera are shaded blue. Calls that have been cancelled are bold faced in red. And calls that have been changed are highlighted in yellow.

Please assume that all classes and rehearsals will meet as announced unless notice to the contrary is posted on the **Opera Program Call Board**. If a faculty member is delayed for a rehearsal and no notice is posted, students should call (213) 740-6451 or go to the appropriate room to see if a sign has been posted. If, however, class work can be practiced or rehearsed without the faculty person present, the students should do so for the duration of the scheduled time.

With the signing of this agreement, you commit yourself to mandatory participation for all rehearsals, performances and events to which you are called. The criteria for mandatory participation are:

- **Participating in any and all classes, rehearsals, lessons and fittings to which you are called.** More than 2 unexcused absences in a semester may result in the loss of an assignment and can constitute poor participation thereby negatively impacting your grade. Continued unexcused absences can result in exclusion from the Opera Program.
- **Promptly arriving to all classes, rehearsals, lessons and fittings to which you are called.** Being late more than 3 times in a semester may result in the loss of an assignment and can constitute poor participation thereby negatively impacting your grade. Continued tardiness can result in exclusion from the Opera Program.
- **Placing your obligations to the USC Thornton Opera Program first.** Except for special, pre-approved circumstances, no outside singing engagements, auditions or competitions may be taken at the expense of the student’s obligations to the opera program. Any exception requests for outside engagements must be made in writing to the Opera Manager and the Opera Faculty no later than two weeks prior to the event. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld as long as it does not interfere with activities required to ensure the success of the Opera Program.

The Opera Program expects students to prepare for classes, coachings, and rehearsals and to participate actively in them. Program rehearsals, coachings, and responsibilities to other opera program colleagues are a first priority.

**USC Class Conflicts**

Every effort will be made by the Opera Program to work with scheduling conflicts resulting from other required USC classes. However, **it is the participant’s responsibility to communicate the conflicts to both the Opera Program and the affected non-opera faculty.** The Opera Manager is willing to write a memo to impacted non-opera faculty in support of a participant’s requests for tardiness or absences. But the participant must take personal responsibility for communicating with their entire faculty.
PRIORITIES

Scheduling conflicts are the nature of a diverse, ambitious environment such as the USC Thornton School of Music. **Remember, your schedule is YOUR schedule. It is the student’s responsibility to discuss and resolve conflicts with the Opera Program faculty and staff and inform other affected students and faculty.** As an opera program participant, here is a guideline for schedule priorities:

- USC Opera Program production rehearsals and performance calls
- Coachings and USC classes
- Productions, recitals or concerts in the Thornton School of Music other than Opera Program productions
- Non-USC commitments

FACILITIES

The Opera Program has access to all the facilities and equipment at the Thornton School of Music. These resources are shared with other Thornton School departments and USC organizations and are in constant demand. Scheduling of these resources is handled through the Thornton Operations Office, in cooperation with the Opera Program Office. The Program endeavors to make our use of all USC resources appropriate and respectful of the facilities and the other students, staff, and faculty who use them. Opera Program participants are expected to behave accordingly.

LIFE AS A USC THORNTON OPERA PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Safety

The main campus of the University of Southern California is located in a vibrant, urban neighborhood just south of downtown Los Angeles. This affords many advantages but also presents many challenges like transportation, parking and safety. Fortunately the University provides many resources to mitigate these challenges especially when it comes to the safety of the USC community.

Campus Cruiser

Campus Cruiser ([http://transnet.usc.edu/index.php/campus-cruiser-program/](http://transnet.usc.edu/index.php/campus-cruiser-program/)). This department provides access to services such as Uber for escorting you to campus and nearby destinations from 6:00pm – 2:45am. To schedule a Campus Cruiser escort call 213-740-4911.

USC-Lyft

For the Fall 2017 semester, USC has extended its program with Lyft as part of the Campus Cruiser program in the University Park neighborhood nightly, from 7 PM until 2 AM, **whenever wait periods for a Campus Cruiser exceed 15 minutes.** This is designed to supplement the popular Campus Cruiser service and help reduce wait times for transportation during these peak periods. Students will receive an email from Lyft inviting you to activate your Lyft for Work account on the Lyft app. Rides within the campus cruiser boundaries from 7PM-2AM will be paid for automatically by USC.
Another safety measure taken by the University is to officially close the campus at 9:00 pm each night. This will require anyone entering the campus after that time to present a USC ID or be accompanied by someone who can.

Finally, the best way to ensure safety is to make choices with your safety and that of others in mind. Walk in groups when possible. Offer to walk each other to off campus locations and don’t be afraid to ask someone to walk with you. And enter the USC Department of Public Safety emergency number in your phone – 213-740-4321.

HEALTH

Health is always a first priority for anyone, but especially for singing-actors. Opera Program participants are expected to take this seriously and care for their physical well being. This can be difficult when the student body around you does not engage in healthy practices. A healthy diet, exercise, and especially adequate sleep are all essential to your ability to perform at a high level.

Make use of the USC Engemann Student Health center (http://engemannshc.usc.edu/), which is located by Parking Structure B next to Fluor Tower on Jefferson Blvd. The Engemann Student Health Center offers a full range of medical services in primary and specialty care, counseling services, health promotion and disease prevention. Structured for students currently registered for classes, the focus is to help students maintain an optimum level of physical and mental health and to guide them in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Finally, talk to your faculty and fellow singers for referrals to good ENT (Ears, Nose, and Throat) specialists. Tell your ENT you are a singer and insist they help you keep your instrument healthy.
I ________________________________________________________ have read

[Name]

and understand the policies and guidelines as prescribed in the 2017 USC Thornton

Opera Program Handbook and agree to uphold all my responsibilities described

therein. I agree to respect both my colleagues and the program by working with

them conscientiously using the handbook guidelines and the precepts of common

courtesy.

___________________________
Signature

___________________________
Print Name

___________________________
Date