MEDIA ADVISORY
Contact: Evan Calbi at (213) 740-3229 or calbi@thornton.usc.edu

USC THORNTON OPERA PRESENTS “ALCINA”

This Thursday through Sunday, the venerable USC Thornton Opera program will present four performances of Handel's exquisite “Alcina” in a new production at USC's Bing Theatre.

Love, indeed, conquers all who step onto the island of the sorceress Alcina - but in George Frideric Handel’s exquisite opera seria of the same title, love takes on an almost frightening magic. This Thursday through Sunday, the celebrated USC Thornton Opera program will present Handel’s Alcina in four performances at USC’s Bing Theatre.

Ken Cazan, chair of Thornton’s Vocal Arts & Opera department, directs the production, showcasing the 18th century masterwork, originally based on the epic poem Orlando Furioso, in all of its splendid and surreal beauty. “Handel understood the human psyche pretty well and in this, his final opera, he pulled out all of the stops,” said Cazan.

“Alcina is a brilliant woman at the peak of her powers who, for the first time, has fallen truly in love. She is frightened of it and of the control it’s taking of her. From the moment she acknowledges her deep love for the hero, Ruggiero, everything goes wrong.”

With compelling—and often confounding—relationships at the heart of Alcina, Cazan had his work cut out for him. “This piece is rife with complicated characters,” he said. “I’m thrilled to get to explore and develop them with our young artists and my favorite working partner, our musical director and principal conductor, Brent McMunn.”

Sharing the role of the sorceress Alcina, sopranos Graycen Gardner (MM ’17) and Stephanie Jones (MM ’16) will lead rotating casts of Vocal Arts students in the opera’s featured roles. Both graduate students of professor Elizabeth Hynes, the duo also shared the role of Margarita Xirgu in the USC Thornton Opera’s 2016 production of Osvaldo Golijov’s Ainadamar.
“We’re very excited,” said conductor McMunn. “It’s been several years since we’ve tackled a Baroque piece – it is such a challenge for our young singers and players in the pit. Stylistically, it requires such great focus and stamina. And they’ve met that challenge head on.”

“Alcina also has some stunningly beautiful da capo arias.”

In the orchestra pit, McMunn and the USC Thornton Symphony will be joined by principal cellist Coleman Itzkoff, harpsichordist Alex Lansburgh, and classical guitarist/theorist Ines Thomé, all Thornton graduate students, who will underscore the drama with a traditional Baroque basso continuo.

But like most USC Thornton Opera productions, tradition only counts for so much. Cazan sought an award-winning team of set, costume, and lighting designers to give the production a decidedly contemporary edge, right down to its wildly-tattooed protagonists and surrealistic set.

“The set design for Alcina is both ethereal and solid, grounded and floating in the air,” said Cazan. “I’m ecstatic to be working with internationally-active scenic designer Takeshi Kata, who is on the faculty of the USC School of Dramatic Arts.”

This production marks just the first in a series of collaborations with the School of Dramatic Arts. Next March, USC Thornton and the USC Kaufman School of dance will team with the school to present a new production of West Side Story, which Cazan will direct.

“We’ve been waiting for this opportunity for so long — 14 years, in fact,” Opera Program manager Damien Elwood said of the collaboration. “This is really the beginning of an exciting relationship, both on stage and for our students.”

USC Thornton Opera Program presents “Alcina”

- Thursday, November 16 at 8PM
- Friday, November 17 at 8PM
- Saturday, November 18 at 8PM
- Sunday, November 19 at 2PM (Pre-performance Lecture at 1PM)

A pre-performance discussion on Nov. 19 between maestro Brent McMunn and resident stage director Ken Cazan will consider Handel’s operatic setting of Ludovico Ariosto’s 16th Century epic poem.

Tickets: Free for USC students, faculty, and staff with valid ID. General public, $18. Seniors, alumni, and non-USC students, $12. For tickets, call (213) 740-4672 or click here.
About the USC Thornton School of Music

For more than 125 years, the University of Southern California 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. For more information, go to music.usc.edu.