

USC Thornton

Opera Program  
Policies

2021-22 Academic Year

## **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.

### **THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC VOCAL ARTS FACULTY & STAFF**

#### **Faculty:**

Lisa Sylvester, department chair  
Thomas Michael Allen, voice teacher  
Ken Cazan, resident stage director  
Jeremy Frank, vocal arts coach  
Palmer Fuller, musical theater  
Rod Gilfry, voice teacher  
Lynn Holding, vocal pedagogy and voice teacher  
Elizabeth Hynes, voice teacher  
Brent McMunn, music director and conductor of opera  
Karen Parks, musical theater voice teacher

#### **Staff:**

Kyle Shafiee, Classical Division Staff Manager and Department Coordinator  
Damien Elwood, Opera Program Manager  
Geovanna Nichols-Julien, Opera Program Coordinator  
Claudia Giugni, Opera Program Office Assistant  
Inès Gandal, Opera Program Graphic Design Assistant

## PROGRAM PROFILE

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 one of the top operatic training programs in the nation 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 singer-actors available to the opera profession through high quality instruction, coaching, preparation, and performance opportunities.

The global pandemic that started in late 2019 and continues to impact the United States, Los Angeles, USC, and the Thornton School, has required we make adjustments to the way we will accomplish our mission. Throughout the '21-'22 academic year the Opera Program will adhere to University and Thornton requirements for aerosol producing musical activities. This will include presentation of a daily Trojan Check pass, weekly Covid-19 testing, masked indoor ensemble rehearsals, use of outdoor locations, and coaching in separate rooms connected by live sound and video. Visit the USC Covid-19 Resource website for detailed information and resources: <https://coronavirus.usc.edu/>.

## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

**Our basic principles are to pursue excellence while exploring the human spirit and taking artistic risk within a safe, secure, and transparent environment for open communication and collaboration. To discover, develop and refine artistic values through imagination, questioning accepted wisdom, and confronting discriminatory policy and tradition.**

The principles above should guide an opera singer's lifelong pursuit of their 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. 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 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.

### **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, School of Cinematic Arts and Kaufman School of Dance.
- 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.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

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

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

### **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.

### **Technological Policies, Proficiency and Required Hardware/Software**

Some of the 2021-22 Opera Program activities will be conducted via internet video conferencing applications. These sessions may be recorded for later use by both the students and faculty. Faculty may require students adhere to proper etiquette when joining a video conference session that may include:

- The use of full English when typing comments. Emoticons are allowed but may be restricted should they be found confusing or offensive.
- Participants should mute their microphones when not speaking.
- Participants should enable their video when joining online Opera Program activities. If a participant does not wish to activate their camera they may be asked to provide a justification to the faculty member. Faculty reserve the right to require participants activate their camera for activities that must be completed with video.
- The use of a participant's first and last name for identification of their video conference window.
- Participants should indicate they have questions in the text based chat.
- The student must conduct online video conferencing activities in a physical space that will allow for full participation in the session's activities.

Opera Program students will be required to access meetings, classes, coachings and forums via internet based video conferencing sites and applications. We recommend a laptop or desktop computer with an external camera and microphone for these activities. A pad computing device may also be adequate. If students do not have these resources the University and Thornton School may be able to help to acquire them. Please reach out to the Vocal Arts Department Coordinator, Kyle Shafiee ([shafiee@usc.edu](mailto:shafiee@usc.edu)), for questions about help with the technology required to complete your opera courses. In addition, the University has provided the following technology support links:

- [Blackboard help for students](http://studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu) (studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu)
- [Software available to USC Campus](http://software.usc.edu) (software.usc.edu)

## Expectations of Opera Workshop Participants

The expectations of a singer in the USC Opera Program and obligations to their colleague 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 in-person work 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.
- For remote instruction having a proper space identified, having required files of scores and scripts open and ready, remote video conferencing links identified and ready, and any required pre-session communications completed. Should a student encounter obstacles to any of this preparation they should reach out to the Opera Program Office beforehand.
- Students are expected to help facilitate the setup and running of rehearsals and will occasionally be assigned specific tasks. In particular, all cast members can be asked to record themselves for inclusion in streamed productions. For in-person shows cast members may 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 in post-production and 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 and equipment assigned to the Opera Program. It is up to all of us to keep them neat, clean and in proper functioning condition.
- **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, meeting, recording session 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 in-person 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 Manager as soon as possible.

- Each student must provide the Opera Office with their 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](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 their lesson.
- A student may not leave an in-person class or rehearsal without permission from the instructor other than to use the restroom. If a student needs to leave a video conference session a reason why must be sent to the instructor or session co-host via session chat. **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 an in-person 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 in-person 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 or video conference 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 the class or video conference pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

## CASTING

The Opera Program faculty makes decisions regarding casting for program productions. Casting decisions are made to meet the needs of the opera workshop and to facilitate the instruction and growth of its participants. Participants are generally selected from 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 professionals, alumni, faculty, and non-program students. 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, they 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 their student advisor to ensure the course most appropriate for their 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 USC Thornton Opera online sites. 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 auditionee 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 principal 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 obtain 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 online on the **Opera Program Office web page** – [music.usc.edu/opera/office/](http://music.usc.edu/opera/office/) and on the Opera Call Board outside of our main ensemble rehearsal room, MUS 105. In addition, weekly schedules will be distributed via text message to all Opera Workshop participants.

It is expected that students in the Opera Program will attend all classes, meetings, coachings, rehearsals, recording sessions, 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](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 a fall full opera production are shaded red, calls for individual scenes and the Opera Shorts are shaded green, and calls for the spring full opera production 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 noted on revisions to the weekly schedule. **If a faculty member is delayed for a rehearsal/video conference and no communication has been provided students should call the Opera Office online number (213) 320-6772 and send a message to the USC Opera Slack workspace (usc-opera.slack.com).** 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, meetings, recording sessions, lessons and tech sessions 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, meetings, recording sessions, lessons and tech sessions 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 pre-approved circumstances, no outside singing engagements, auditions or competitions may be taken at the expense of the student's schedule 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, video conferences, coachings, and rehearsals and to participate actively in them. Program rehearsals, video conferences, 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 can 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 faculty both Opera and non-opera.

## FACILITIES & RESOURCES

The Opera Program has access to many of the facilities and resources at the Thornton School of Music. These are shared with other Thornton School departments and USC organizations and are in constant demand. Scheduling of facilities is handled through the Thornton Operations Office, in cooperation with the Opera Program Office. The Program endeavors to make the use of all USC facilities and resources appropriate and respectful of 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

### Health

Opera Program participants are expected to take their health seriously, caring 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.

During the novel coronavirus pandemic students are expected to take additional precautions to preserve good health. Social distancing should be practiced, appropriate PPE including face masks should be worn, and hands should be washed frequently throughout the day. If visiting the campus students will be required to register with TrojanCheck ([trojancheck.usc.edu](http://trojancheck.usc.edu)) and observe rules for behavior on campus. Complete guidance for USC students can be found on the University's Health and Safety website - <https://coronavirus.usc.edu/>.

If you are near the University Park campus make use of the USC Engemann Student Health center ([engemannshc.usc.edu/](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/)), which is located 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, and COVID-19 testing. 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.

### Support Systems

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX - (213) 740-5086*

<https://eotix.usc.edu/>

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*

<https://osas.usc.edu/>

Support and accommodations for differently abled students. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Non-Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

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The USC Thornton Opera Program Policies were originated in the spring of 2007. Latest major revision done fall semester 2018.

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](http://music.usc.edu/opera).