

USC Thornton

School of Music

“At Thornton, passion is shaped into the art, business, and technology of music.”

– Rob Cutietta, Dean, USC Thornton School of Music



About The School:

The University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, founded in 1884, has long been an innovative force shaping the art, business, and technology of the global music industry. Led by Dean Robert A. Cutietta, it is one of the oldest music schools in the nation and is the oldest continuously operating cultural institution in Southern California. The school, noted for its broad spectrum of outstanding programs, stellar faculty, and top-tier students, currently enrolls more than 1,000 students from 40 countries.

USC Thornton consistently ranks among the top one percent of the nation's music schools and conservatories, with a unique combination of innovative programs such as popular music performance, recording science, and scoring for motion pictures and television, as well as a long and illustrious tradition of classical music performance studies in all major instruments. Featuring a student/teacher ratio of 6:1 and blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of studying at a leading research university, Thornton offers students an unparalleled music education in a real-world context. Graduates consistently attain prominent positions with a multitude of major ensembles, recording studios and businesses in the music industry.

In 1999, philanthropist Flora L. Thornton became the school's benefactor with a naming gift of \$25 million, at the time the largest such contribution to an American school of music. Located at the heart of Los Angeles, the school is the collegiate partner of choice for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Opera, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, to name a few. The founding cornerstone of culture in Los Angeles remains a vital cultural resource in the city and beyond.

Thornton Facts

- **Oldest** continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles
- Presenter of over **500 concerts** annually
- The only music school with a weekly radio broadcast, **Thornton Center Stage**, heard regularly in a major media market
- **Number of students:** 1008
- Number of **undergraduate** students: 562
- Number of **graduate** students: 446
 - Master's degree program: 153
 - Doctoral degree program: 218
 - Graduate certificate and artist diploma: 75
- **Geographic representation:** over 40 countries
- **Student/faculty ratio:** 6:1
- **Programs** of study:
 - 16 undergraduate majors
 - 5 minors
 - 18 master's degrees
 - 2 certificate programs
 - 6 doctor of musical arts programs
 - 1 doctor of philosophy program
- More than **20% of the members of the L.A. Philharmonic** are Thornton alumni and/or faculty members, including principal chairs for cello, violin, bass, viola, flute and harp
- Approximately **20% of the members of the L.A. Chamber Orchestra** are also associated with USC Thornton
- The **Music Library** directly supports the research and performance needs of the Flora L. Thornton School of Music's academic, instrumental and ensemble programs. Part of the Arts & Humanities and Graduate Research Interdisciplinary Center, the Music Library is located on the ground floor of the Doheny Memorial Library. The Music Library contains approximately **20,000 books** and serials on music; **60,000 music scores**, including collected works of individual composers, critical editions, and historical collections; **20,000 sound recordings** in compact disc and LP format; numerous electronic books, journals and databases; and hundreds of videos in DVD, video cassette and laser-disc format. The Music Library also maintains materials in other USC libraries, and curates an **archival collection** in an off-site facility.

Celebrated Alumni

- **Herb Albert** trumpet/producer/benefactor
- **Alan Baer** principal tuba, New York Philharmonic
- **Grant Gershon** conductor
- **Rod Gilfry** baritone
- **Jerry Goldsmith** film composer
- **Donald Green** principal trumpet, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- **Lionel Hampton** jazz musician
- **Ben Hong** assistant principal cello, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- **Marilyn Horne** mezzo-soprano
- **James Horner** film composer
- **James Newton** Howard film composer
- **Michelle Kim** assistant concertmaster, New York Philharmonic
- **Morten Lauridsen** Medal of the Arts recipient
- **Owen Lee** principal bass, Cincinnati Symphony
- **Michael Ke Ma** assistant principal bassoon, Detroit Symphony.
- **Bear McCreary** video game composer
- **Erica Miller** soprano
- **Christopher Parkening** classical guitarist
- **Norm Pearson** principal tuba, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- **Cynthia Phelps** principal viola, New York Philharmonic
- **Gene Pokorny** principal tuba, Chicago Symphony
- **Lee Ritenour** jazz guitarist
- **Jessica Rivera** soprano
- **Daniel Rothmuller** associate principal cello, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- **Elizabeth Rowe** principal flute, Boston Symphony
- **Patrice Rushen** jazz vocalist
- **Tom Scott** jazz saxophonist
- **Dale Hikawa** Silverman associate principal viola, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- **Cheryl Staples** associate concertmaster, New York Philharmonic
- **Michael Tilson Thomas** conductor

Thornton History

In 1884, the newly founded University of Southern California opened the Department of Music, the first professional school at the four year-old college. The first students could choose to study either voice or piano, a far cry from the 16 degree-granting programs now in existence.

As Los Angeles grew, the School of Music grew with it. The school's close association with the fledgling Los Angeles Philharmonic helped enhance its reputation, eventually drawing nationally and internationally-renowned artists to the faculty, including:

- Harpsichord virtuoso Alice Ehlers
- Atonal pioneer Arnold Schoenberg
- Swiss composer Ingolf Dahl (whose collection resides in the USC Archives)
- Cellist Gregor Piatigorsky
- Violinist Jascha Heifetz

In 1999, philanthropist Flora L. Thornton became the school's benefactor with a naming gift of \$25 million, at the time the largest such contribution to an American school of music. Today, the USC Flora L. Thornton School of Music boasts a stellar faculty, a highly accomplished student body, strong ties with local music industry and entertainment firms and alumni that perform in concert halls around the world. What started as a one-room department in a tiny backwater called Los Angeles has grown into one of the foremost schools of music in the country.



1880

More than 500 people gathered in a crowd to watch the laying of the corner stone of University Building on September 14, 1880, the University's very first structure. Later to be called Widney Hall, this small wooden building would house the School of Music for almost half of its history.



1914

Throughout the 1910s, many of the professors teaching at the College of Music were musicians in the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In addition to individual instruction, their students, such as those pictured here in the USC Concert Orchestra, 1914, benefited from hearing their professors in concert. Every year the College purchased a section of seats for the Philharmonic's Friday afternoon concert series, and mandated the attendance of the entire student body.



1923

Professor of organ and dean of the College of Music for 36 years, Walter F. Skeele is pictured here teaching a

piano lesson in his studio. In a bizarre series of events, Mary Skeele, wife of the dean, was kidnapped in 1923 and held for \$10,000 ransom. The dean himself deposited the cash ransom in a buried cracker tin in the appointed lonely spot in the Pasadena hills, and Mrs. Skeele was promptly returned, blindfolded and weary, to her family and home. A police investigation and court trial later found a former student, expelled from the school for hysterical behavior, guilty of the crime.



1940s

Recordings and radio broadcasts have long been a tradition of the Thornton School, even

before the founding of KUSC. Seated at the piano for this live broadcast is John Crown, professor of piano for many years. During WWII, when the university was downsizing its course offerings and faculty, Crown taught mathematics, and continued to give numerous chamber music concerts on campus as a member of the Hancock Trio.

1934

In the fall of 1934, Arnold Schoenberg moved with his family to Hollywood and attempted to attract students among the local film composers.



In Mudd

Philosophy Hall he taught a composition class which discussed only the most conventional and traditional harmony. During the intermission Mr. Schoenberg would smoke a cigarette or two, defying the “no smoking” rule of the building. After every class session ended the class would move to the tennis courts, where the students waited their turn to play with him. Mrs. Schoenberg often sat on the sidelines and admonished the players, “Keep him near the net. He must not run much.”



1953

Marilyn Horne, as a young student at USC, where she studied voice with William Vennard and Gwendolyn Koldofsky, and participated in Lotte Lehman’s master classes.

Before her career as a diva began, she first came into the public spotlight in 1954 as the dubbed voice of Dorothy Dandridge in the motion picture Carmen Jones.

1960s

William Primrose, Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky teaching a chamber music master class at



USC, date unknown. Throughout the 1960s Heifetz and Piatigorsky taught master classes of extremely talented students at the School of Music.



1970

Conductor and composer Michael Tilson Thomas (BM '67, MM '76), pictured here as a student with Ingolf Dahl, began his formal studies at the University of Southern California where he studied piano with John Crown and conducting and composition with Dahl.



1983

The Kronos Quartet was in residency at USC in the 1983-84 season. The six-concert season was built around the Bartok Quartets, one per concert in reverse order. In their final concert of the residency, beginning 35 minutes after the starting time given to everyone but the performers, the group performed Frederick Lesemann's (MM '61, DMA '71) "Strokes", Morton Subotnick's "The Fluttering of Wings", Ben Johnston's Fourth Quartet, and Bartok's First Quartet.



2001

The late virtuoso violinist Isaac Stern thanks members of the USC Thornton Symphony after a rehearsal. Maestro Stern appeared with the Symphony in one of his last public performances before his death.

2004

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma works with a Thornton student during a master class at Bovard Auditorium. Mr. Ma also appeared with the USC Thornton Chamber Orchestra in November 2004.





2009

The Thornton School celebrated its 125th Anniversary with an extensive semester long celebration that garnered international media attention.



2009

USC Thornton launches the highly acclaimed Popular Music Program, the first-ever program of its kind at a major university.



2012

USC Thornton produces the inaugural festival with the LA Phil and in partnership with The Colburn School and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, showcasing masters of the cello and students from around the world.



2012

The USC Thornton Symphony and USC Thornton Concert Choir perform Porgy and Bess at Walt Disney Concert Hall with special guests Angela Brown, soprano, and Kevin Deas, baritone.

2013

USC Thornton produces a moving music festival with bands and musicians performing throughout Route 66, from Chicago to Santa Monica, California.



Quotes

“The Thornton School has been a cultural shaping force long before a film industry was conceived. It has stood for the finest in musical education, in artistic development, and cutting edge new and diverse repertoires over three centuries. It’s no surprise that the persistence of the School matters to so many and is so important to our field.”

— *Gwyn Richards*
Dean, Jacobs School of Music

“The school’s track record is indeed impressive....We truly appreciate everything the Thornton School does to enhance...our rich music culture.”

— *Neil Portnow*
President/CEO, The Recording Academy

“The school represents one of our country’s most cherished cultural institutions and it is a great pleasure to congratulate you, Dean Cutietta, and all of the faculty, students and staff, past and present, for their dedication, service and continuing contribution to music.”

— *John Williams*
Composer

“Today’s LA Philharmonic would not be the same orchestra without our USC Thornton School Graduates. We are proud to be connected through your distinguished alumni and happily join in the celebration of Thornton School’s contribution to the international music world.”

—*Deborah Borda*
President, Los Angeles Philharmonic

Quotes

“Since its inception the school has been integral to the advancement of USC as a premier university, to the stature of L.A. as a creative powerhouse, and to this nation’s vibrancy as a powerful contributor to the arts and music education.”

—*Steven B. Sample*
Former President, USC

“By harnessing innovation—the trademark of Trojans and Californians—you have shaped the artistic landscape of Los Angeles and beyond, and you continue to serve as an extraordinary cultural hub in our great state.”

—*Arnold Schwarzenegger*
Former governor of the state of California

“Long regarded as one of America’s premier institutions of higher learning in music, USC Thornton continues to assume a remarkable profile via exceptional faculty, alumni, and students.”

—*Douglas Lowry*
Dean, Eastman School of Music

“The work that the Thornton School has realized in Southern California, the United States, and around the world is exemplary and certainly represents the highest levels of the profession.”

—*Joseph W. Polisi*
President, The Julliard School

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