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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's School of Fine Arts to present opera "Gianni Schicchi" online Jan. 31



By Madison Cresswell & Rachel Gaddis
January 26, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University's School of Fine Arts will release an adapted version of the opera *Gianni Schicchi* by Giacomo Puccini in an online, pre-recorded format beginning Sunday, Jan. 31, which can be viewed for free at obu.edu/opera2021.

While typically a fall production, Ouachita's opera had to be reimagined for both the cast and audiences due to COVID-19. Students and faculty began preparing in Spring 2020 and finished recording in late Fall 2020. Editing and post production then began and continued through January 2021.

"This process has pushed us beyond the norm and forced us to grow, and our students are going to be benefitted by that," said the opera's music director Dr. Joshua Brown, assistant professor of music and director of choral activities. "In terms of Ouachita, this has opened the possibilities to continue doing our productions in this way. Who knows what kind of creative abilities this may give us for the future, but we have certainly made the most of this season."

Ouachita's production of *Gianni Schicchi* entails the roughly one-hour opera, interviews with the cast and crew and a behind-the-scenes look at the rehearsal, staging and recording process. Due to Arkansas Department of Health guidelines, the cast rehearsed and later performed on stage for no more than 30-

minutes at a time and in small groups. The cast also pre-recorded the music and vocal performances, which later were edited together with their on-stage performances.

“At first, we recorded about half the scenes with the piano, organ and percussion without the singers,” Brown said. “Then the singers were able to listen and record themselves over the tracks of the instruments. The phases were tracks, tracks and live singers and finally singers performing over the piano and organ.”

“Once the recording process was done, we began staging and filming,” said John Alec Briggs, lecturer of music, who directed the production and serves as the director of Ouachita’s opera program. “Our students are accustomed to spending several weeks carefully working out staging, but they quickly adapted to what we fondly called ‘the soap opera method’ where we walked through blocking a few times and then immediately filmed, moving on section by section. It was a learning experience for us all.”

A comic opera, Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi* is inspired by a passage from “Dante’s Inferno” and first premiered at New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 1918. Ouachita’s production premieres a commissioned reduction of Puccini’s orchestra score, created by Jason Saugey. Saugey also was the organist for the recording.

Alongside Briggs, senior Kailee Morehart, a music and nursing double major from Alexander, Ark., served as the opera’s student director. Lexi Reimer, a senior choral music education major from Wylie, Texas, served as the assistant music director. Susan Monroe, staff accompanist for the School of Fine Arts, served as a music coach and rehearsal accompanist. Mark Garrett of Arkadelphia produced both the video and audio for the opera.

Karlee Sanders, a senior choral music education major from Caraway, Ark., served as a diction coach, and production assistants included Megan Schulz, a freshman vocal performance major from Houston, Texas, and Kyleigh Stevens, a sophomore vocal performance major from Hot Springs, Ark.

For more information, contact Dr. Joshua Brown at brownj@obu.edu or (870) 245-5143.

VIEW STORY & CAST LIST AT <https://obu.edu/stories/events/2021/01/school-of-fine-arts-presents-opera-gianni-schicchi-online-january-31.php>