

## USC opera opens 1997 season with humor, romance

AMY SHANNON Staff Writer

On a windy Tuesday night, hidden inside a small room in the bottom of the USC School of Music building, four awe-inspiring voices weave themselves around skillful piano accompaniment during a rehearsal of the high-theatered opera, "The Old Maid and the Thief."

In complete contradiction to the familiar stereotypes a person hears about opera, (such as, "It's long, boring, stuffy, and no one can understand it") this short one-act opera is a comedy replete with humor and sexual innuendoes.

Even better, the musical lyrics are all sung in English.

"Opera is meant to be entertaining," said Donald Gray, USC music professor and director of "The Old Maid and the Thief." Gray also directs the Palmetto Master Singers and the music program at Eastminster Presbyterian Church.

To catch this year's debut of Opera at USC, act fast since the production starts tonight and ends Sunday afternoon.

The show, entitled Two by Menotti, will be held in the USC School of Music recital hall. It begins at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and at 3 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets cost \$5 for students and \$10 for general admission.

In addition to "The Old Maid and the Thief," the performance includes

a second one-act opera, "The Telephone."

Also a comedy, "The Telephone" tells the funny story of two lovers who find themselves constantly interrupted by a ringing telephone. The continuous and bothersome summoning of the telephone manages to keep the lovers apart and the audience in laughs.

This opera will be directed by Cameron Aiken, a graduate music student. Tonight and Sunday, Elizabeth Hill and Reginald Jennings will lead the cast. Tomorrow night, their roles will be played by Kathryn Seppamaki and Andrew Rye.

The other half of the evening features "The Old Maid and the Thief." This opera recounts the

humorous tale of two well-intentioned women who decide to open their house up to a handsome beggar from the street. They choose to take the poor man into their home because they want to be "good Christians," and quite desperately, they feel in need of a man.

Unable to refuse his seductive smile, they offer him food and a bed. As it turns out, the beggar is really an escaped convict. When the women find out, the situation they have created for themselves and the beggar becomes even more comic, and their fate proceeds from there.

The cast of "The Old Maid and the Thief" stars Jennifer Evans, Christie Inman, Andrew Rye, Qundra Battle, and Liana Valente.

"They're hard workers. They had to do a lot of memorizing over Christmas break to be prepared for rehearsals when they came back," Gray said.

Tuesday night's rehearsal, like the opera itself, remained light-spirited even though certain scenes required several run-throughs. At times the repetition seemed tedious, but the cast joked and laughed at the sexual references.

Only after their voices achieved perfect timing with the music did they progress to the next scene. While they worked on refining minor subtleties, the four dynamic voices spanned an impressive range of sound.

Their dramatic countenances and

exaggerated gestures further enlivened the rehearsal.

Both "The Telephone" and "The Old Maid and the Thief" were composed by Gian Carlo Menotti. At the age of 13, he had already written two operas.

Menotti started his musical studies in Milan, Italy, and later trained in Philadelphia, Penn. Throughout his career, he received critical acclaim and composed the first opera created for television.

"Two one-act operas by the same composer make a nice evening, and they're on the lighter side, humorous," Gray said.

The USC School of Music can be reached at 777-4280 for more information.

## WUSC spices up Tuesdays with taste of traditional Celtic

So you say you've been longing for a taste of Irish culture, but so far the only things you've been able to find are *Cheers* re-runs and commercials for Irish Springs soap?

Well, turn off that television, and tune-in, baby, because WUSC-FM 90.5 has just what you're need.

Each Tuesday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., WUSC offers a healthy dose of traditional Celtic music on the Amplified Folk show, and, as a bonus, there's no canned laughter. The show offers a range of Celtic music, with a focus on Irish and Scottish music.

Amplified Folk is hosted by Wilson, a USC English senior. He's done the show for a year, but this is the first semester featuring an all-Celtic format. Before, it featured all types of folk music with an emphasis on Celtic music.

"It's amazing how many people

have picked up on the show," Wilson said. "There's already a lot of people who are dedicated to it. I'm getting a lot of calls, and people seem interested."

He said there's been a renewed interest in the Celtic music in the last few years.

"It's become really popular because of *Braveheart* and because of *Rob Roy*," he said. "It used to be classified as new age music, which isn't accurate. But now it's become more popular and more recognized."

"It's incredible, beautiful music," he said. "It's so epic sounding. It sounds like there's a battle in the music. Half of the songs tell about the stories of different battles. It's about battles between the English and the Scottish and the Irish. There's a lot of history in the music."

The term "Celtic" leaves a certain

mystique about the music. The Celts are no longer a discernible people, and very little is known about them.

But the traditional music of the Celts lives because strong pockets of Celtic tradition exist in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany (in France) and Galicia (in Spain). And a less concentrated strain of Celtic ancestry exists in Canada and America.

Wilson said his interest in Celtic music was more than an interest in his personal ancestry.

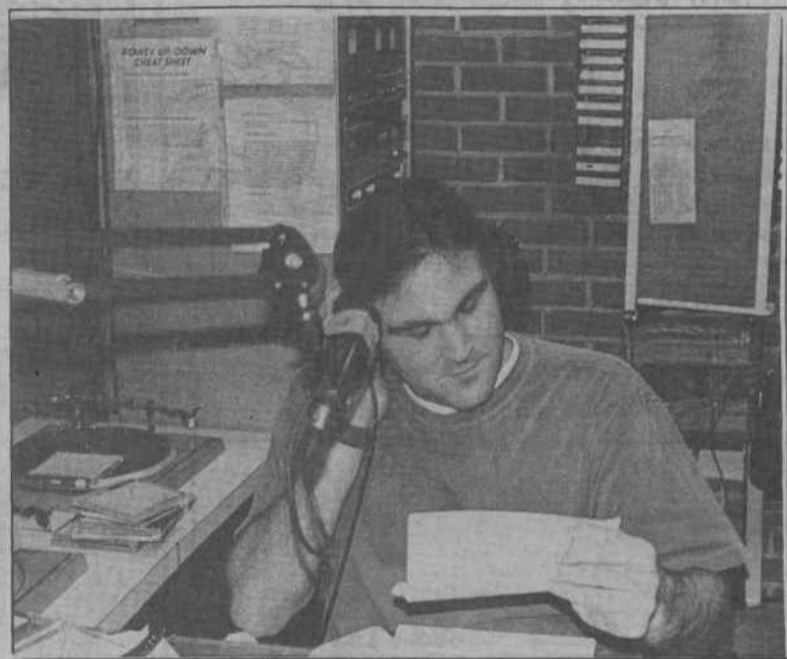
"At first, my interest came from the fact that I always kind of dug the bagpipe sound," he said. "I have a friend from Scotland and he got me into it from that point. I got started really slowly. I started by listening to Enya and the Chieftans, but I always thought there had to be more to the music than that."

"It's just the beauty of the music

that draws people in," he said. "It's not an easy thing to sit down and play. The bagpipe, for example, takes years and years to learn to play. But I do think the music rises above a mere cultural appeal. There's something interesting about the music."

"Most of the songs tell stories about the Celts and their suffering," Wilson said. "It's not just about suffering though. It's just their tales, their stories. There's a lot of humorous stories. Stories of their great heroes and other folklore. The music is the way a lot of their stories have been passed down."

On Amplified Folk, Wilson pulls together music from the different countries with Celtic influences. The show is sponsored by the Publick House, a Columbia pub that hosts live Celtic music on Sundays nights.



NIKKI THORPE The Gamecock

Wilson checks his levels while on air at WUSC-FM 90.5. His show, Amplified Folk, features all types of traditional Celtic music.

## The Gamecock

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