How did the housecat come to be invited into our homes? Sacramento State’s Opera Theatre company will relate that story in song and puppetry with The Cat That Walked by Himself, a children’s musical fantasy for the entire family.

Written by John and Dorothy Duke and based on the popular tale by Rudyard Kipling, The Cat That Walked by Himself will be presented for free at 6:30 p.m. Friday, March 13, and 11 a.m. Saturday, March 14, at the University’s Music Recital Hall, 6000 J St.

The Opera Theatre players also will take the show on the road, doing performances at selected elementary schools in the region following its Sac State run.

The operetta, containing music and dialogue, tells how humans became friends with various animals — such as the dog and horse — but had to be tricked into welcoming the cat.

The 10 cast members will use various puppets to portray characters during the 25-minute operetta.

Opera Theatre Director Omari Tau was looking for something his students could jump into quickly, and fellow Sac State professor and soprano Robin Fisher, who is a John Duke scholar, mentioned the little-known operetta.

"The music is light and charming," says Tau. "It is easy to comprehend and even sing and dance along to."

The puppets vary in style, from masks to pole and rod puppets to a type of bunraku in which the audience sees both the puppet and puppeteer. The animal creations are very colorful. The cat has a bright orange face with blue and yellow spots, and a body of blue, yellow and green horizontal stripes. "Pig" is a shocking pink.

They were designed and constructed by Claire W. Hurni from Sacramento’s Puppets and Motion. Tau recently worked with Hurni on a project at the Crocker Art Museum and was impressed with her creations.

"She jumped at the opportunity to work with our talented students, and it’s been an amazing delight to see what she’s come up with," Tau says.

John Duke, a well-known composer of classical art songs, wrote The Cat That Walked by Himself in 1964, but only a portion of the score still exists. So Tau is completing the music himself with hopes it will take its place alongside Duke’s other works.
Performing off campus is another component for bringing this and other operatic music to a wider audience. “Getting into the community is crucial, not only for opera as an art form in Sacramento, but it’s also important for Sac State Opera Theatre,” Tau says.

For more information, visit the Sac State Music Department at www.csus.edu/music or call (916) 278-5191. For media assistance, call the University’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho