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KRAVIS CENTER TO MAKE WORLD HISTORY ON MARCH 9

Installation of a custom-designed digital organ is first ever in a performing arts center worldwide

(WEST PALM BEACH, FLA.) The Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts will be making history on March 9 when it becomes the first performing arts center in the world to install and feature a technologically advanced digital organ in its future productions. The custom-designed instrument is a gift from philanthropist Alex W. Dreyfoos, founding Chair of the Kravis Center. It is being financed by part of a $5 million gift from Mr. Dreyfoos who requested that $1.5 million of the total gift be allocated to a custom-designed Marshall & Ogletree Opus 11 Digital Organ, to be dedicated as The George W. Mergens Memorial Organ. The instrument will be dedicated in honor of Mr. Dreyfoos' late business partner and longtime friend, George W. Mergens.

The new organ – with an impressive ability to intensify sound to new heights -- will be premiered at a special concert featuring Cameron Carpenter, an internationally-acclaimed performer who has been referred to as “genius, bold and controversial.” A graduate of The Juilliard School, the 34-year-old Grammy-award nominee frequently sports a mohawk, studs and sequins while performing. He will take center stage along with the Jacksonville Symphony and guest performer Matthew Whitaker.

According to Carpenter, the digital organ represents the ultimate partnership of art and technology, which makes the premiering performer perfect for its debut. The first organist ever nominated for a Grammy for a solo album, Carpenter has been making history for years through his immense talent and his vocal support of bringing the organ into the 21st century. Recently, Carpenter became the first artist to perform in the Sydney Opera House on his own Marshall & Ogletree “Digital Touring Organ,” for which he developed the specifications.

While some may see Carpenter’s support of digital organs as “controversial,” his talent is unquestioned, with critics around the world hailing his mastery: “It’s certainly no exaggeration to call his command of six keyboards (five for hands, one for feet) ‘genius’. Purely in cognitive and physical terms, his ability is mind-boggling” - Sydney Morning Herald. “Carpenter is one of the rare musicians who changes the game of his instrument” - The Los Angeles Times. “The Maverick Organist ... he is a player with extraordinarily glib fingers and Astaire-like footwork ... a first-rate talent” - The New York Times. “To say that Cameron Carpenter is a virtuoso is to say nothing. He is an exorbitant virtuoso, the Vladimir Horowitz of the organ.” – KOMMERSANT (St. Petersburg, Russia).

“We are incredibly grateful to Alex Dreyfoos, our founding Chair, who has the foresight to recognize the significance of technology in the future of the performing arts,” said Judith Mitchell, CEO of the Kravis Center. “As an Academy-award winning inventor, Alex has always had a passion for propelling the arts
through technological advances. It is an honor to fulfill his original wish for the Center by installing an organ, and an even bigger honor to be installing a digital organ, which marks a significant milestone for performing arts centers worldwide. We look forward to maximizing the technological capacity of Opus 11 for performances, but also within our community.”

The Marshall & Ogletree Opus 11 digital organ will include five manuals, more than 200 stops and 96 audio channels. An organ had been intended for the original design of the Kravis Center concert hall, but was value engineered out late in the planning phase. The new digital organ will be used for performances in the Alexander W. Dreyfoos, Jr. Concert Hall, as well as the Marshall E. Rinker, Sr. Playhouse. It will also be available for use by students and professionals.

“My vision is to keep the best of the classical organ – its emotional magnitude, its sonic range, its coloristic drama – but to liberate these from the pipe organ’s immobility, its moving parts, its cost, its institutionality,” Carpenter said. “I want the ‘American Classic’ cathedral organ to combine with its counterpart, the cinema organ, in a single instrument. It has to have the cathedral organ’s expansiveness, and the Wurlitzer’s clarity, rapidity and audacity. It will be ethereal and rhythmless at times – and at other times more rhythmically intense than any pipe organ in the world.”

Coincidentally, his concert at the Kravis Center on March 9th falls one year later to the day that he officially debuted his digital “sister” organ at a day-long festival at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall.

Performing with Carpenter on March 9th is the Jacksonville Symphony, which has a celebrated performance history featuring such renowned artists as Isaac Stern, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Marilyn Horne, Luciano Pavarotti and Itzhak Perlman. The concert program includes the Poulenc Organ Concerto in G minor (1938) and Saint-Saëns “Organ” Symphony (No. 3): Finale. The evening also features a guest appearance by Matthew Whitaker.

A true child prodigy, at 9 years old Matthew Whitaker began to teach himself how to play the Hammond B3 organ and by age 13 he became the youngest artist in 81 years to be endorsed by Hammond Organ. Matthew attends the Lighthouse Music School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in New York City where he studies classical piano and drums. He also attends The Harlem School of the Arts.

Carpenter and the Jacksonville Symphony with special guest Matthew Whitaker bring the groundbreaking, electrifying performance to the Kravis Center as a part of the PEAK Series on March 9 at 8 pm. The series is made possible by a grant from the MLDauray Arts Initiative in honor of Leonard and Sophie Davis, and is funded in part by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs.

Centrally located in West Palm Beach, the Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts is one of the premier performing arts centers in the Southeast with a growing national and international reputation. The Center is a leading force in the social fabric of the community, providing outreach programs as broad and varied as the community itself.

The Opus 11 World Premiere Reception celebrating the dedication and premiere performance of the George W. Mergens Memorial Organ takes place on March 9 at 6:30 pm in the Kravis Center’s Gimelstob
Ballroom and is sponsored by Alex and Renate Dreyfoos. Tickets are $100 and include prime reserved seating for the performance.

For more information about the Cameron Carpenter Concert and the Opus 11 World Premiere Reception or to purchase tickets visit kravis.org/carpenter or call the Kravis Center Box Office at 561-832-7469.

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