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TECHNOLOGY MEETS THE ARTS DURING HISTORY-MAKING DIGITAL ORGAN PERFORMANCE

Kravis Center is the first performing arts center in the world to feature permanent installation of a digital organ

(West Palm Beach, Fla. – March 9, 2016) Technology and the arts made beautiful music together recently when the Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts became the first performing arts center in the world to install a Marshall & Ogletree digital organ in its theaters.

The custom designed Marshall & Ogletree Opus 11 digital organ, a gift from Alex W. Dreyfoos, the Founding Chair of the Kravis Center was unveiled at the mainstage performance featuring virtuoso organist of international acclaim Cameron Carpenter with the Jacksonville Symphony. According to Carpenter, who was consulted in the design of the technologically advanced instrument, the Kravis Center’s organ is the ultimate evolution of organ building. It commands nearly 300 high-definition sounds sampled from 35 American pipe organs and has the biggest sound system of any instrument that Marshall & Ogletree has ever built. Unlike huge pipe organs of the past, the digital organ has no pipes and was created by high definition sampling of sounds that incorporate organ notes from some of the world’s top pipe organs.

At the Opus 11 Premiere reception prior to the performance by Cameron Carpenter, Judith Mitchell, Kravis Center CEO commented: “Tonight we celebrate and dedicate this magnificent concert instrument – specially designed and commissioned for the Kravis Center through a very generous gift by Alex Dreyfoos. Alex envisioned a world class performing arts center for this community – complete with an organ – and through his determination and leadership, the dream became a reality – minus the organ. Some 24 years later, however, here we are. Alex’s dedication and determination has paid off again, and tonight we are dedicating and celebrating the world premiere of a technologically-advanced version of his vision and dream for the Kravis Center. The digital organ will bring new opportunities in performance, repertoire, and educational events to our Center and to this community.”

Mr. Dreyfoos previously donated $5 million to the Center and requested that $1.5 million of the total gift be allocated to the custom-designed digital organ. The specially designed instrument includes five manuals, more than 200 stops and 96 audio channels, and was dedicated in memory of Mr. Dreyfoos’ late business partner and longtime friend, George W. Mergens. The evening of the organ’s performance debut also marked the official dedication of the organ now named the George W. Mergens Memorial Organ.

“Tonight is truly a special occasion for me,” began Mr. Dreyfoos while addressing the crowd at the reception. “To see, hear and share with you this gift, which honors a friendship that began 59 years ago
with my friend George Mergens, a man who was like a brother to me—my best friend, my business partner and teacher – is an honor.

“The original plans for the Kravis Center included a pipe organ. Though it did not materialize due to both budget constraints and the evolution to a multi-purpose hall, there was never a doubt in my mind that someday the center would have an organ. When I learned about the highly acclaimed installation of Marshall and Ogletree’s massively parallel processing digital organ at Trinity Wall Street Church, which replaced the famous pipe organ damaged by the smoke and ashes of the 9/11 attack, I was sold.”

Mr. Dreyfoos then introduced composer-performer Cameron Carpenter. A Juilliard graduate, Carpenter is known for pushing the boundaries within the classical community and has been making history for years through his immense talent and vocal support of bringing the organ into the 21st century. According to Carpenter, the digital organ represents the ultimate partnership of art and technology.

After the reception, Carpenter performed alongside the Jacksonville Symphony in a packed Dreyfoos Hall for the first half of the program. He then returned to the stage for a solo performance, speaking to the audience about the history of the organ and the digital organ’s place in our future, and dedicating much of his performance to Mr. Dreyfoos, whose love of the arts is equal to his love of technology. Carpenter also spotlighted the work of special guest organist Matthew Whitaker, a 14-year-old musical prodigy. The evening was hailed by many as exciting, impressive and thrilling.

Alex Dreyfoos is an 83-year-old award-winning inventor, who holds 10 U.S. and numerous foreign patents in the fields of electronics and photography. Mr. Dreyfoos’ company, which he owned with George Mergens, Photo Electronics Corporation, won an Academy Award for its innovative film technology in 1970. With an educational background from MIT and Harvard Business School, Mr. Dreyfoos’ love of technology is equal to his love of the arts.

“Alex has always had a passion for propelling the arts through technological advances and we are incredibly grateful for his foresight to recognize the significance of technology in the future of the performing arts,” concluded Mitchell during the reception. “We are most appreciative of his very generous gift.”

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.

For more information about the George W. Mergens Memorial Organ, and future performances, please visit kravis.org or call the Kravis Center Box Office at (561) 832-7469. For more information on special events, please call the Development Office at (561) 651-4320.

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