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Herman & Huffman Celebrate Music of the Movies

TULSA, Oklahoma – The nonprofit Will Rogers Stage Foundation will present two world class theatre organists, Mark Herman and Mike Huffman, in a duo concert on the Allen theatre organ and 1939 Baldwin grand piano, to “Celebrate Music of the Movies.” There will be one performance only, on Sunday, November 16, at 2:30 p.m., in the historic 1,400-seat Will Rogers High School Auditorium, at 3909 East 5th Place in Tulsa.

Herman is one of America’s busiest theatre organists, performing over 30 concerts and silent film presentations each year across the US and abroad. In 2012, he was named the American Theatre Organ Society’s Organist of the Year and was the youngest person ever to receive the prestigious honor. He gave the inaugural concert at Will Rogers three years ago when the 3-manual, 42-rank instrument replaced a 1955 organ that had been unrepairable and dormant for 37 years. The replacement was funded by private donations, including many alumni who had attended Will Rogers High School as early as the ‘50s and had fond memories of the first organ being played during assemblies.

Mark has been featured on several episodes of American Public Media’s “Pipedreams” program and has performed for countless conventions of the American Theatre Organ Society, American Guild of Organists, and Organ Historical Society. On the international stage, he has toured in Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Additionally, his compositions, arrangements, and performances have been heard both on television and in motion pictures. In 2019, he was honored to be featured alongside the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a rare organ solo cameo.

As a film accompanist and scorer, Mark has developed a reputation for dramatic period-authentic film scores with historically informed presentations that not only

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resonate with but captivate modern audiences. During his 2022 visit to Will Rogers, he composed extemporaneously a soundtrack for the 1922 silent film classic, *Ropin' Fool*, starring and directed by Will Rogers.

In 2019, he was commissioned to compose and record two new scores for The Criterion Collection's latest Harold Lloyd Blu-ray release.

"I'm very much looking forward to returning to Will Rogers for the show with Mike," Herman says. "In playing piano-organ duets with him, there's a wonderful chemistry that I've seldom encountered working with other pianists, so I'm really excited about it."

Huffman was a singer and pianist on the New York City hotel circuit, a theatre pit pianist, and a touring keyboardist and musical director for 12 years with the Tony award-winning shows *Cats*, *Sugar Babies*, *Showboat* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, in 150-plus cities nationally and abroad.

He is artist-in-residence for Will Rogers College Middle and High School, sponsored by the Will Rogers Stage Foundation, performing for student groups and public functions held in the school's beautiful 1,400-seat art deco auditorium. The school is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The duo will perform memorable songs from classic movies, including *ET*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Hollywood Hotel*, *Shall We Dance*, *South Pacific*, *The Great Ziegfeld*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mission Impossible*, *Star Trek*, *Back to the Future*, and *Mary Poppins Returns*.

The theatre organ is a uniquely American musical instrument. It was developed in the early 1900s to replace expensive live orchestras that accompanied silent films. Playable by only one person, the theatre organ is called a "unit orchestra" because it contains many ranks of pipes that imitate a full range of orchestral instruments and sound effects used for silent films. By a digital recording technique, the instrument at Will Rogers exactly replicates the sounds of a 21-rank theatre organ. Additionally, it produces the tones of a 21-rank classical (liturgical) organ plus many other musical instruments including a range of percussions.

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The two types of organs are also played differently. The classical pipe organ was developed down through the ages to play classical and liturgical music. A classically trained organist either reads the exact music or plays the exact music from memory. The theatre organ is an improvisational instrument. When first applied to silent films, the artists were forced to invent their own melodies to match the mood of each movie scene.

The Baldwin grand piano that will be used in the duets for the Herman & Huffman concert was delivered to the school in 1939 when it first opened. Over the years, the piano had suffered abuse and was restored by the Will Rogers High School Community Foundation at a cost of \$25,000.

The restored piano was dedicated to the career of Will Rogers alumnus Leon Russell, who as a student in the late '50s, transformed his classical training skills on that piano into the new wave of music called Rock & Roll, while serenading his schoolmates. Sixteen musicians, most of whom had either performed or recorded with Russell, paid homage to the late idol in 2019 at a sold-out concert at Will Rogers. As a singer, songwriter and first-call session musician as a member of the legendary "Wrecking Crew" in Los Angeles, he earned his place in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

All seats are reserved. Prices begin at just \$5.00 plus fees. Tickets are purchased online at *WillRogersStage.com*, or at the door on the day of the concert.