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FLORIDA THEATRE ANOUNCES CONCERTS AT THE RITZ THEATRE

THE HISTORIC FLORIDA THEATRE IS EXPANDING ITS IMPACT ON DOWNTOWN BY UTILIZING ANOTHER HISTORIC THEATRE

For Immediate Release

Jacksonville, Fla. - Since first opening almost 90 years ago, and especially since re-opening as a nonprofit performing arts center in 1983, the historic Florida Theatre has anchored its corner of downtown Jacksonville. Over the last four years the nonprofit corporation that manages and programs the theatre has aggressively expanded its activity, and last year was the 3rd best attended year ever in the history of the institution. It made the theatre the 50th most attended theatre venue in the nation according to *Pollstar*, a trade magazine for the concert industry.

This December, in an effort to increase this positive impact on downtown Jacksonville, the Florida Theatre will begin offering programs at The Ritz Theatre across downtown. Conveniently located at 829 North Davis Street, where I-95, State, Union and Beaver Streets all intersect, the Ritz is a 400 seat theatre constructed in 1999 on the site of the historic 1929 Ritz Theatre movie house.

First up is smooth jazz saxophonist Peter White's Christmas Tour, featuring Rick Braun and Euge Groove, on December 11. Rhythm and blues artists Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes appear on February 19, jazz saxophonist Mindi Abair is on February 23, and pianist Jim Brickman, known for hits like "Valentine" and "Angel Eyes," is on March 31. Tickets to these performances are available from the Ritz box office, 904-807-2010, the Florida Theatre box office, 904-355-ARTS, and Ticketmaster.

Noting that nonprofit performing arts presenters are often associated with a specific building, Numa Saisselin, President of the Florida Theatre, explains: "The Florida Theatre Performing Arts Center, Inc. is the nonprofit corporation founded in 1987 to manage and program the historic Florida Theatre in a public/private partnership with the City of Jacksonville, which owns the building. That will always remain our number one priority. However, every week we see opportunities to book wonderful performing artists who would not be financially viable in a 2,000 seat venue like the Florida Theatre. They wind up passing Jacksonville by, because there's

not a viable alternative. That seemed like a shame, so we spoke to SMG, who manage the Ritz on behalf of the City of Jacksonville, who also own that building too, and we worked out an arrangement for the Florida Theatre to bring great artists there.”

Kevin Stone, the Florida Theatre’s Program Director, who books the shows and oversees their promotion and production, says that he is excited to be able to work with a more diverse array of performers. “Having a 400 seater at our disposal is another tool to work with.”

As compared to the Florida Theatre’s 2,000 seat capacity, the Ritz seats just 400, but Stone sees this as an advantage. “In some cases we will offer artists we already know at the Florida Theatre, but we’ll charge a little bit more at the Ritz, and it will be worth it for the more intimate and exclusive experience. For example, we were going to lose the Peter White show this year because it conflicted with ‘Nutcracker.’ By playing it at the Ritz we keep it in Jacksonville.”

A smaller venue helps the Florida Theatre develop new talent, too. Says Stone, “In some cases, we’ll offer artists we are only just starting to know. We hope this starts a long relationship that takes them from the Ritz to the Florida Theatre and beyond, but keeps it all in Jacksonville.”

Numa Saisselin sees this all as a win-win for the theatres, the performers and the city. “The economic impact of the Florida Theatre’s activity was almost \$12 million last year. Imagine what we can do working in more than one theatre!”

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