

MASS LIVE Silent film showing kicks off Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts 2011 season

By **Cori Urban | Special to The Republican** on October 12, 2011 at 2:43 PM, updated October 12, 2011 at 2:45 PM



"The Last Command" starring Emil Jannings will kick off the 2011 MIFA season.

A silent film night, site-specific installation art and Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight" will be part of the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts/Victory Theatre 2011 Fall Festival Season in Holyoke.

"We are focusing on the cultural legacy of Holyoke," said Donald T. Sanders, executive artistic director. "Holyoke has wonderful assets, and we are trying to have people realize what's there."

Each event features something special about the Paper City.

The 1928 silent classic "The Last Command" starring Emil Jannings and William Powell will have live accompaniment by Peter Krasinski on the Ernest M. Skinner organ at United Congregational Church on Saturday at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$10.

The organ is only one of about a half dozen still remaining in the United States, Sanders said, calling it a Cadillac of pipe organs that can reproduce the sounds of a 100-piece symphonic orchestra.

The company founded by Skinner, who died in 1960, built organs for America's most distinguished convention halls, universities, churches, cathedrals and residences.

"Before the Curtain Call: Art at Victory Theatre," site specific installation art by Holyoke artists Chris Nelson, Amy Johnquest, Christopher Willingham and Taiga

Ermansons, takes place from Oct. 21 to Nov. 20, with an artist opening reception Oct. 21 from 5 to 7p.m. and open house hours on Oct. 22, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (This is part of Discover Holyoke Day and requires a \$1 wristband for admission which can be purchased at the Victory door.) Other exhibit hours are by appointment only by calling (413) 297-0786.

The Holyoke asset these events feature is the Victory Theater, the last Broadway-sized theater of its kind in the Connecticut River Valley. Built as a "live house" not a movie theater, it did become a movie theater before closing.

"If the Victory Theater and the Skinner organ are assets from the past, (the four featured artists) I consider current and future assets," Sanders said.

In the third event, Hal Holbrook will bring his one-man show "Mark Twain Tonight" to the festival for one performance only Saturday, Nov. 19, at 8 p.m. at Sears Auditorium at Holyoke High School. Tickets for a VIP gala are \$125, with preferred seating at \$60 and general seating at \$35.

Early in his career, he performed with the Valley Players at Mountain Park Casino at Mountain Park in Holyoke. Then, in 1957 he performed his legendary Mark Twain show in the city. "He will celebrate Holyoke's illustrious theatrical past and exciting theatrical future," Sanders said: The Victory is scheduled to open in 2013 for live performances.

The three events – film, visual arts and live theater – are part of what Sanders called "superior, rare examples of cultural importance."

The Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts/Victory Theatre brings to the area examples of opera, theatre, dance, music, film, visual arts and literature as seen in recent presentations in Holyoke such as Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in "Love's Labour's Lost," contemporary Irish dance in "Irish Cream," Eddie Palmieri in concert, a series of French dance, Enchanted Circle Theatre in "Sojourner's Truth" and Mikhail Baryshnikov's 2004 world tour.

Throughout the past 17 years, festival programming has presented 146 events with 1,295 artists from 45 international and national companies including 28 company debuts in America and 12 world premieres.

Tickets for the upcoming events may be purchased on line at www.mifafestival.org or by contacting The Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts at info@mifafestival.org or (413) 540-0200. Groups of 12 or more receive a 10 percent discount.