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Mark Russell

Center for Performing Arts

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THE CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS

Governors State University

Presents

Mark Russell



September 29, 2001
8:00 p.m.

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Mark Russell

Whenever comedian Mark Russell is down in the dumps, he just opens up the newspaper and immediately cheers up. Practically everything he sees strikes him funny. Russell says that some days, his jokes jump off the pages and write themselves.

TV Guide has called Mark Russell "the funniest man on television," but he disagrees. "No, the funniest guys are always on C-Span." This is his eighteenth season on PBS. Mark Russell works live, fresh and dangerously topical, performing standup comedy even when accompanying himself on his star-studded piano. The ratings have consistently been in the top share on that network.

A native of Buffalo, New York, Mark Russell's first heroes were entertainers. People like Fred Allen and Jack Benny were writing parody and satire about smugness and pomposity. With characters like Senator Klagborn and Dr. Quackenbush, Charlie Chaplin as Hitler and Bugs Bunny as Toscanini, comedic anarchy ensued and Mark Russell was inspired. He went out and earned the reputation of class clown beginning in the fourth grade and Russell held on to that title right through high school. His parents were tearing their hair out.

Like a lot of guys in those days, he dodged the Draft. He did it by joining The Marine Corps. The Few, the Proud, the Funny. After serving his full hitch, Mark Russell found himself starting his career in the smoke-filled bars of Washington, D. C., singing his funny songs to sailors on leave and salesmen on the make. When Russell got a job in a Capitol Hill joint where Congressmen go to drink, the first thing he thought was "I've started at the bottom, but I've managed to work my way down."

Mark Russell knew nothing about politics, but was an immediate hit because he could find humor in anything. If he had stayed in Buffalo, he'd have them rolling in the aisles with "The Laughter And Song of Bowling." Around the time that the New Frontier was invading Washington, Mark Russell invaded the glamorous, mainstream, Shoreham Hotel for a risky two-week gig. It lasted for twenty years. The Marquee Lounge became the place where every night, politicians would come to hear Mark Russell joke about the things they had done that very day.

Today, his syndicated column is enjoyed all over America, as are his CDs, tapes and videos. Mark Russell is on the road most of the year, cheering up people who can't find any humor in the news.

Unearthing the incongruous in official Washington — which may not seem too demanding a task — is Mark Russell's job, and he does it with unmatched verve. With the rousing background of his star spangled grand piano, Russell pokes fun at official pomposity and pinpoints the utterly outrageous with a wit as deft as a surgeon's scalpel. He writes a syndicated column, and has recorded CDs, tapes and videos, but is best known for his live specials on PBS, where the material changes right up to air time as headlines announce themselves from near and far. His presentation, "The Laughter and the Song of Politics," gets standing ovations from both political parties.



SPEECH TOPICS: "The Laughter and Song of Politics"

Russell's answer to the frequently asked question, "Do you have any writers?" is "Oh yes. I have 535 writers. 100 in the Senate . . . and 435 in the House of Representatives." Just like his PBS specials, which have been so popular for more than two decades, Russell's live presentations parody the biggest political stories in the news right now. The piano-playing satirist blends hilarious one-liners and music - brilliantly funny lyrics set to familiar tunes - and provides one of the most entertaining experiences in America. Spend some time with Russell and he'll prove to you that fact is indeed funnier than fiction.