

SPOTLIGHT

WELCOME TO THE



State Bank Amphitheatre at Chastain Park in Atlanta got a big renovation and a longer name.

E BOOMTOWN

BIG GROWTH IN GEORGIA AND THE CAROLINAS

BY ROBERT GRAY

THE SOUTHEASTERN MARKETS in the Carolinas and Georgia have been booming over the past year, much like the broader U.S. economy. While this next year may prove more challenging in the wake of Hurricane Florence's widespread destruction and tour disruptions, especially in eastern North Carolina, insiders say the outlook is still bullish for the region as a whole.

Cities throughout this part of the Eastern Seaboard are experiencing downtown renaissances from Atlanta to Charleston and Charlotte, not to mention many of the communities in between. This has not gone unnoticed by the entertainment industry, which is booking an ever-widening array of acts to stand out in what's become a very crowded and competitive market for venues.

CROWDED HOUSE

Many venue operators say the recent venue-building boom has made it more difficult to book tours and has created nontraditional competitors in the process. In fact, a number of the region's top venue operators said the buildout is one of the few obstacles in the marketplace right now.

"The heavy competition is the biggest issue. We can't all have the same content," says Kate

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IT'S NOT THE SAME OLD SONG & DANCE

Venues succeed by venturing into new territory

SOME OF THE MOST successful South-eastern venues are finding new opportunities outside of the usual tours and mainstream acts and reaping handsome rewards for taking the risks.

Spectrum Center in Charlotte scored Andrea Bocelli's first concert in the city. "It's pretty uncharted territory," said Kate Dordick, director of arena booking with Hornets Sports & Entertainment, which operates the city-owned venue.

"We worked with local partners to make sure we were tapping into all of our market since he'd never performed here before. We worked with the Performing Arts

"They are a great new product for our industry, they are growing in popularity and we've had some success," said Allan Vella, president and CEO of the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. "'My Favorite Murder' will sell out the Fox in November. It's interesting and fun to bring those podcasts live on stage."

The Peace Center Concert Hall in Greenville, S.C., is tapping into its Americana roots to strengthen ties with the community. The nonprofit venue's president and CEO, Megan Riegel, said, "I've been very committed to building a songwriters program and Edwin McCain is an artist-in-residence. People can take

songwriting classes from him or his songwriting partner, Maia Sharp."

McCain and other artists (Dave Wilcox and Jill Sobule are scheduled for later dates) share secrets of the trade with guests during four- to five-hour workshops at the venue. The workshops cost \$75 a person.

"The world around us is changing," said Riegel, adding, "People want great experiences more than stuff."

Nothing except perhaps live shows by the dead. No, not the Grateful Dead, although you have to imagine Jerry Garcia is vir-

tually warming up in the wings as hologram technology is now resurrecting rockers.

"We're going to have the Roy Orbison show," said Vella. "We are enthusiastic for how it's trending. It's the music of Roy Orbison, they use a hologram to create his image and members of his band and a local symphony to play his music."

Talk about the ultimate curtain call. But Vella says it's a fair price to pay for a show that includes the tech, intellectual property and symphony: "Apparently they had record-breaking sales in the U.K., and we think it'll do really well in Atlanta. ... I've never done a show like this before. It'll be a first for us in the Fox." — Robert Gray



Andrea Bocelli's first concert in Charlotte was a big success for Spectrum Center.

Center to target their audience as well," Dordick said.

Tickets sold from \$78.50 up to \$358.50 (the highest-priced ticket at the arena since Dordick came aboard four years ago). The result: "It was the highest-grossing show in venue history. For a first time sold-out play, a \$2.6 million sold-out gross, it was successful for everyone," said Dordick, adding, "We couldn't make up seats or inventory in the building. We sold out every seat."

Meanwhile, Broadway clearly remains one of the hottest types of tours, but a hot consumer technology trend is fast becoming a fan favorite: podcasts.

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Dordick, director of arena booking for Hornets Sports & Entertainment, which operates Charlotte's Spectrum Center. "We're now competing with football stadiums that have roofs (Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium). We don't always have the ability to just say, 'You can have air conditioning (in Spectrum Center), because now they can, too.'"

Indeed the competition is perhaps even more heated in Atlanta. Allan Vella, president and CEO of that city's Fox Theatre, reels off a number of venues they are competing with: "We have two full-fledged arenas, two legit theaters, we have multiple amphitheaters and a few small ones (and) the Tabernacle and the Roxy — a huge contingent of venues vying for the same acts, and that makes it tough on everybody."

Vella pointed out the city's civic center was mothballed in recent years, but says the market is still too crowded. He added, "I would prefer there weren't so many venues, as long as the Fox was still standing at the end. We have a lock on the Broadway market and have a unique and rich history. We're fortunate we have those attributes and no competitor head-to-head."

Live Nation Atlanta President Peter Conlon echoed these sentiments. Conlon works with more than half a dozen venues owned or operated by Live Nation in and around the Georgia capital. He said this year started slowly but is already tracking stronger than a successful prior 12 months.

Still, Conlon also brought up the plethora of stages as the biggest issue in the market. "The issue is content. It's getting competitive. I wonder how (some venues) will be sustainable in a lot of communities. Some of them don't understand the business; it's a 'build it and they will come' attitude. Just because you build it doesn't mean it will be successful."

The Fox's Vella summed up the situation, saying what many venue operators don't want to think about in boom times: "A major downturn would hurt us all."

THE BEST OF TIMES

There are, however, few signs of a slowdown on the horizon.

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COLONIAL LIFE ARENA A CAPITAL PLACE TO PLAY AND SOUTH CAROLINA'S TOP STOP



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Colonial Life Arena

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Dordick says Spectrum Center's entertainment business is in great fiscal shape: "We are trending to have the best year ever this year. Last year was a record year — we had 20 shows of 10,000-plus in attendance. We're hoping to beat that this year."

Meanwhile the Peace Center Concert Hall's president and CEO, Megan Riegel, said business is so healthy in their Upstate area of South Carolina that the facility may be a victim of its own success: "Our biggest challenge is having avails. I got a call about Leon Bridges. He's on my bucket list, but we don't have the avails" to book him.

In Atlanta, Live Nation's Conlon described the business as "very healthy and robust." He did see one possible chink in the armor, though, pointing out that the general consumer is still cautious despite overall economic growth, "I've noticed sensitivity to ticket pricing. People are buying more near the end, (and) we're seeing more buying right before the show."

Conlon adds it's a different story for the higher-end consumer: "Growth is more along the VIP range. They are more interested in the VIP experience (and) depending on the package, the ability to charge more is there."

UP ON THE ROOF

In keeping with the trend for enhanced fan experiences, Vella said the Fox has reaped nice returns on its recently added premium club: "We wanted to create a 'grand sense of occasion' and didn't feel like we had a premium space. You can't build suites and change the historic fabric of the building, but (reclaiming) the retail space

adjacent to the theater property gave us an opportunity to create a building within a building."

The theater allowed the lease on the adjacent retail space it owned to run out and then rebuilt it to create the Marquee Club. Vella said the five-year, \$10 million project is paying dividends. The Marquee Club offers dinner and hand-crafted cocktails and features a roof deck as well as an air-conditioned area.

"We reimaged that terrace and the space beneath it and created a private entrance. The experience we're offering rivals any of the facilities that we have in town," Vella said. "If you're coming to see Nine Inch Nails, Widespread Panic, 'The Nutcracker' or 'Hamilton,' it's a great way to have dinner, watch the sun go down, walk to your seats, come back at intermission, then see the rest of the show."

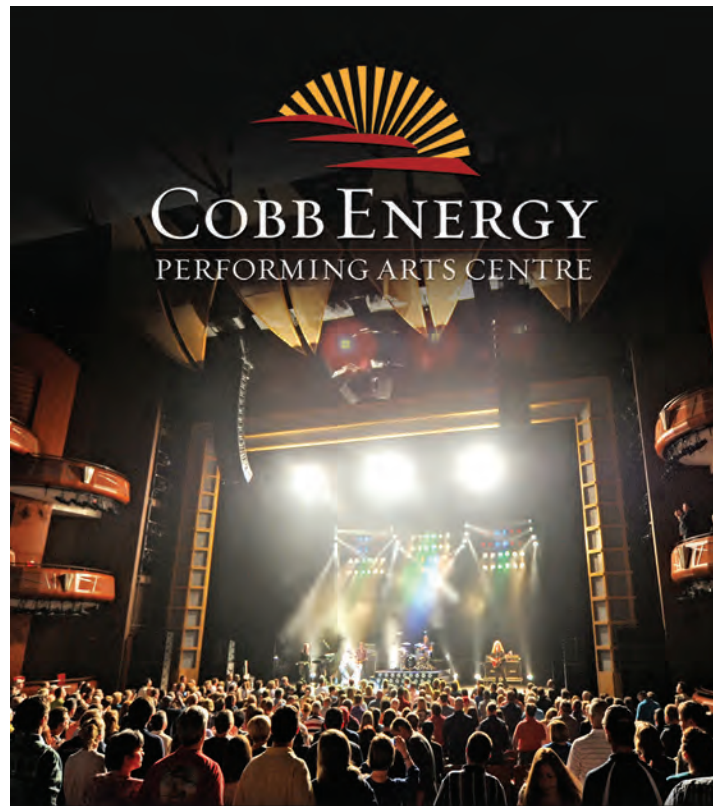
State Bank Amphitheatre at Chastain Park in Atlanta underwent a "massive renovation," Live Nation's Conlon said. The company produces the shows there.

"We raised the steel on the stage, put in new cushion club seats, razed the buildings on the hill, built new bathrooms, concessions, and a plaza. It made it a lot more convenient for the patrons and easier productionwise for rigging shows," he said. The \$6 million refresh included the venue's first naming-rights partner, State Bank, a relationship the Live Nation executive said is off to a good start.

THE ROOM WHERE IT (STILL) HAPPENS

The "Hamilton" juggernaut's record run has helped sell season tickets and sell out venues in the

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#1 TOP STOP



TOPSTOPS

THE CAROLINAS & GEORGIA 2018

Ranked by tickets sold. Based on data from concerts and events July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018, as reported to Pollstar. Data updated through Aug. 29.

RANK	VENUE	TICKETS SOLD	CAPACITY	GROSS	SHOWS
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MORE THAN 15,000 CAPACITY

1	Spectrum Center, Charlotte	278,398	17,421	\$22,400,676	31
2	State Farm Arena, Atlanta	272,042	17,700	\$23,856,451	25
3	Coastal Credit Union Music Park At Walnut Creek, Raleigh, N.C.	240,062	20,000	\$9,125,325	17
4	PNC Music Pavilion, Charlotte	218,862	18,812	\$8,947,258	18
5	Cellairis Amphitheatre At Lakewood, Atlanta	139,627	18,920	\$7,143,710	10

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

1	Infinite Energy Center, Duluth, Ga.	274,441	13,100	\$21,564,489	43
2	Verizon Amphitheatre, Alpharetta, Ga.	102,877	13,196	\$5,035,823	57
3	Bon Secours Wellness Arena, Greenville, S.C.	77,065	15,000	\$4,593,213	11
4	North Charleston (S.C.) Coliseum	73,912	13,000	\$5,106,107	18
5	Heritage Park Amphitheatre, Simpsonville, S.C.	15,567	14,000	\$587,502	2

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

1	Red Hat Amphitheater, Raleigh, N.C.	62,141	5,500	\$2,827,288	15
2	State Bank Amphitheatre At Chastain Park, Atlanta	51,435	6,900	\$2,696,605	16
3	ExploreAsheville.com Arena, Asheville, N.C.	45,145	7,200	\$1,626,577	10
4	Wolf Creek Amphitheater, Atlanta	38,299	5,420	\$2,079,636	11
5	James Brown Arena, Augusta, Ga.	28,234	8,409	\$836,021	12

2,001-5,000 CAPACITY

1	Fox Theatre, Atlanta	644,180	4,665	\$50,538,527	183
2	Durham (N.C.) Performing Arts Center	437,273	2,712	\$24,086,863	185
3	Belk Theater, Charlotte	164,143	2,118	\$11,937,176	91
4	Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, Atlanta	160,554	2,750	\$9,663,188	100
5	Peace Center Concert Hall, Greenville, S.C.	130,776	2,100	\$10,120,328	77

2,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

1	The Orange Peel, Asheville, N.C.	79,680	1,100	\$1,935,171	131
2	Variety Playhouse, Atlanta	67,526	1,100	\$1,924,061	90
3	Georgia Theatre, Athens, Ga.	63,842	1,028	\$1,537,998	104
4	Terminal West, Atlanta	53,661	625	\$1,100,273	130
5	Charleston (S.C.) Music Hall	29,057	965	\$1,291,831	38

Note: Capacity shown is legal capacity listed in Pollstar database. Compiled by teamboxoffice@pollstar.com.



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HOLLYWOOD LIGHTS UP THE DARK DAYS

VENUES IN THE SOUTHEAST are finding a somewhat unexpected windfall from the film and television industries, entertainment forms that are often competitors to live experiences.

That's because the area has attracted productions in the past few years thanks to a variety of factors: generous incentives, versatile locations, creation of new studios, and the lack of unions in the states.

In fact, Georgia overtook California as the leading state for feature film production in 2016 and kept the spot in 2017. TV and other smaller productions are proliferating as well. This work has translated into "found" revenue for some theaters.

"We can lease out dark days to the film industry and it's been very lucrative for us. It's generated some income that we've never been able to take advantage of before," said

Allan Vella, president and CEO of the historic Fox Theatre in Atlanta, which is actually a former cinema that was part of William Fox's nationwide chain of movie palaces.

Vella said it's been easy to work with productions to fill in gaps on the calendar: "Oftentimes they want to shoot in the building or the exterior and they frequently request dates within 30 days — and in a 30-day window we know exactly what we'll have available. It's a segment of the business that fits in well

with our schedule, and they're very respectful of the building and they pay their bills."

The Fox Theatre is not alone among Atlanta venues on screen. The 108-year-old Tabernacle in Olympic Park has also taken star turns in films, as has the Music Midtown festival.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

It's not just Hollywood and traditional small-screen productions. Digital content producers are booking venues in the area, including live shows. And they're looking outside the capitals for unique locations.

The highlight of the past year was taping the performance for the show "Steve Martin and Martin Short: An Evening You Will Forget for the Rest of Your Life" for Netflix, recalled Megan Riegel, president and CEO of the Peace Center Concert Hall in Greenville, S.C. "It was a weeklong effort. ('Saturday Night Live' creator) Lorne Michaels was in the building. It was remarkable, and now it's memorialized in the Netflix special."

This wasn't the Peace Center's debut, however, as it has hosted televised presidential debates for both parties, including the Republicans in 2016.

While the high-profile shoots are memorable, Riegel is not looking for the Peace Center to be featured more often in productions, but she wants to feature more films at the venue.

"We've got a bunch of real estate here to develop over the next 10 years. I'd like to (build) a theater to show films. We do the Oscar (nominated) shorts every year, and I'd love to be doing film festivals at some point when we get the right facilities."

Southeast this year, and theater operators are optimistic its effect will be long-lasting on their markets as touring Broadway has gone more mainstream in recent years, attracting a broader audience.

Vella said the Fox grossed more than \$15 million and sold 52,000 tickets to the show in a mere 2 1/2 hours, which he thinks is an unofficial record. He said the theater's season-ticket base doubled to 26,000 ahead of "Hamilton's" three-week run since it guaranteed a ticket to the show.

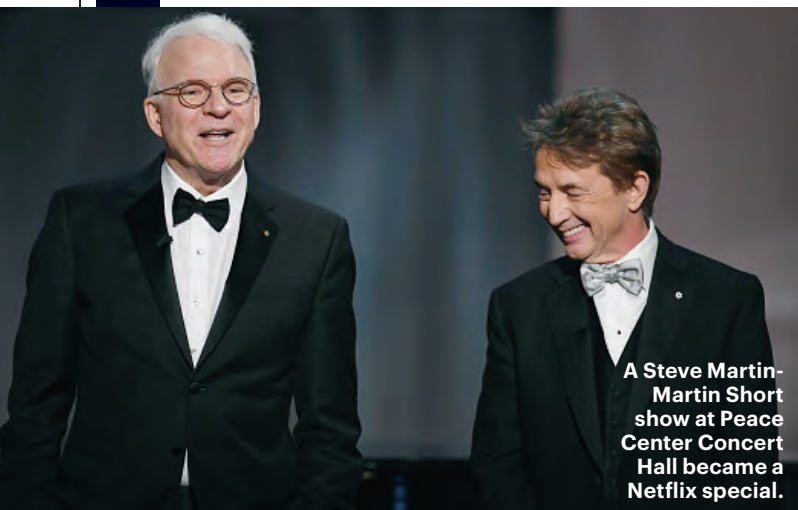
"We've hung onto a majority (more than 80 percent) of those new subscribers (for this season)," he said. "We have 'Aladdin,' 'Dear Evan Hansen,' 'Waitress' and other great, approachable contemporary programs this season, and I think that'll keep people coming."

It was a similar story for the Peace Center, said the nonprofit venue's president and CEO, Megan Riegel. Riegel said Broadway remains the venue's cash cow: "We had 50,000 people online waiting to buy 'Hamilton' tickets. The bread-and-butter demo for us is 45 to 65 years old. They've got discretionary income and some time, kids either in college or out. They're having date nights again."

But Riegel says they're not resting on their laurels coming off their best year ever. They've just hired the facility's first programming vice president, a key role since the Peace Center does not work with promoters and handles bookings soup to nuts. "I want to make sure we're always connecting with younger audiences, so we need to program for them," Riegel said, noting a need to keep expanding both their offerings and the fanbase.

The bottom line for both Carolinas and Georgia is that venue operators don't see the music stopping for the good times even in the face of unforeseen challenges such as Hurricane Florence. And it looks likely to remain a patron's and entertainer's market given the density of competition, variety in bookings, and unique tiers of service now being offered in most markets.

The Fox Theatre's Vella considered all of those factors in the outlook for the region's venues and said simply: "Everyone has to raise their game." ▣



A Steve Martin-Martin Short show at Peace Center Concert Hall became a Netflix special.

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