



## **Encore Park shifts away from classical; Orchestra will play supporting role in summer concerts.**

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With **Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre at Encore Park** now in its third season, the **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's** summer home in Alpharetta is charting its path for the future.

Operated by the ASO and owned by its parent organization, the Woodruff Arts Center, the amphitheater was a major new venue (12,000 seats) situated in an area where the nearby audience was a huge question mark.

With affluent, educated and mobile residents, Atlanta's northern suburbs are potentially a significant area of growth for ASO classical concerts. But could the orchestra lure that demographic to hear what it does best: performing old and new classical music?

By design, the amphitheater's first two seasons held a strong balance of rock concerts (the Eagles, the Dave Matthews Band), community events (such as high school graduations) and the ASO. The orchestra offered a mix of classical performances (all-Mozart or Puccini's "La Boheme") with pops-style shows such as a Rodgers and Hammerstein night or an evening of orchestral movie music (think "Star Wars").

But for the 2010 season, the ASO faced the reality that all-classical concerts at the venue simply have not generated enough ticket sales.

Over its first two seasons, the ASO at Encore Park averaged no more than 2,500 people per concert. That's better than the orchestra ever could have done for a one-performance summer classical concert at Symphony Hall in Midtown (capacity: 1,750), but far short of the ambitions for a 12,000-seat venue.

And the sour economy, which started to tank in the early fall of 2008, isn't the culprit: Ticket sales were about the same for 2008 and 2009.

All along, said ASO vice president for marketing Charlie Wade, "Verizon Wireless was never meant to be one thing or another. We're continuing to learn the audience's tastes, finding what works best."

With the ASO as concert promoter, the amphitheater's primary mission and source of income has been rock shows. These sometimes sell out. Still, a key goal of the venue, Wade said, "is to feature the orchestra, get more people to hear and enjoy the orchestra. We're not ruling out classical concerts for the future, but for now we're reaching for a broader audience."

Thus, the 2010 Encore Park season includes no all-classical concerts.

The ASO will appear five times in the 2010 amphitheater season, usually in a supporting role. (This is more or less the same profile the orchestra has for Classic Chastain concerts, where it will accompany veteran chanteuse Liza Minnelli and back a show called "The Music of Queen: a Rock and Symphonic Spectacular.")

Here's what's coming up:

July 1: The ASO holds its traditional All-American Celebration show three days before the Independence Day holiday this year, with guest conductor Bridget Reischl and the U.S. Army Field Band Chorus. Patriotic sing-alongs and fireworks are included. (The actual Fourth of July slot goes to jam-band Phish.)

July 16: "Planet Earth," an acclaimed BBC documentary celebrating life in all its awesome majesty, will be screened in a 90-minute show created specially for orchestras. The Emmy award-winning music is by George Fenton, who will conduct the ASO.

July 23: "Broadway Rocks" includes a quartet of Broadway singers belting hits from "The Phantom of the Opera," "Mamma Mia" and other recent blockbusters.

Aug. 7: "Disney in Concert: Magical Music from the Movies" is a family event with songs from "The Little Mermaid" and "Beauty and the Beast" and clips from the films on the amphitheater's big screens.

Aug. 14: The 1939 film "The Wizard of Oz" is a classic Hollywood musical, with songs and lyrics by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg and a rich score assembled by a team of orchestrators led by Herbert Stothart. The movie will be screened with the original voices, including Judy Garland as Dorothy singing "Over the Rainbow," and the ASO playing live orchestral accompaniment.

Concert season

The **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's** summer season opens July 1 with a patriotic spectacle and runs through Aug. 14 at. [www.vzwamp.com](http://www.vzwamp.com), 1-800-745-3000