

Being New Helps

PERFORMING ARTS CENTERS BUSINESS A MIXED BAG

BY LINDA DECKARD

The Charles W. Eisemann Center for the Performing Arts and Corporate Presentations, Richardson, has hosted 140 performances in its first 90 days of operation, according to Bruce MacPherson, manager. And 2003-2004 is way ahead for the same period, he said of future bookings, while 2004-2005 is starting to fill up. Being new has its privileges. Eisemann cost \$53 million. The main hall has 1,550 seats.

The challenge when constructing the building was to build vertically, without individual lobbies and still control the sound. "Activities can happen virtually on top of each other. Sound isolation was critical and this building works," he said. "That's the biggest thing we had to do."

The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, Houston, drew an attendance of 235,426 in its first nine months of operation, meaning the facility is well on its way to the goal of 500,000 attendance for the year, said Michael Taormina, general manager. They have hosted 228 performances to date.

But the performing arts can be a struggle in these economic times. In all honesty, Paul Beard, manager of Bass Performance Hall, Ft. Worth, called business bad. "It's been tough. It's not nearly as good as last year. We're finding ticket sales are slower pretty much across the board."

To combat the trend, the venue is putting a lot more effort into promoting and marketing. "We look for audiences that have an affinity," Beard said. He is also discounting tickets "to an extent we haven't before because the market seems more price sensitive than in the past."

"Last September we did 'Disney's Lion King' and we did that at \$97 face value price top ticket. ...If we were trying to do the same thing in September of 2003, I'm not sure it would work. Right now the market is giving us very little comfort." vt

TOP STOPS IN TEXAS, 2002

Based on concert and event grosses January-December 2002, as reported to *Venues Today*.

Venue, Location	No. of Seats	Total Gross	Total Attendance	Shows
15,001 or More Seats				
1. American Airlines Center Dallas	20,000	\$19,142,845	570,621	51
2. Reunion Arena Dallas	19,206	\$9,067,070	199,570	14
3. Compaq Center Houston	17,064	\$5,346,738	80,615	7
4. Verizon Wireless Amph. Selma	19,993	\$4,990,946	167,744	18
5. United Spirit Arena Lubbock	15,020	\$4,055,520	75,679	8
10,001-15,000 Seats				
1. UTEP Don Haskins Center El Paso	12,601	\$2,746,752	43,012	6
2. Frank Erwin Center Austin	8,000	\$1,288,781	28,811	3
3. Reed Arena College Station	12,500	\$675,298	92,244	18
4. Freeman Coliseum Arena San Antonio	12,000	\$292,335	9,294	1
5. Reliant Ctr. Convention Hall Houston	N/A	\$250,613	11,228	1
5,001-10,000 Seats				
1. Laredo Entertainment Ctr. Laredo	10,000	\$797,255	13,025	2
2. Freeman Coliseum San Antonio	5,000	\$617,567	14,901	2
3. NextStage at Grand Prairie Grand Prairie	6,350	\$343,673	8,741	2
4. Reliant Arena Houston	8,000	\$207,831	6,158	1
5. West Texas A&M Event Ctr. Canyon	6,000	\$128,403	4,628	1
5,000 and Fewer Seats				
1. Verizon Wireless Theater Houston	2,495	\$2,845,555	106,143	58
2. The Backyard Austin	4,300	\$2,293,313	88,282	21
3. Austin Music Hall Austin	3,000	\$645,281	27,005	13
4. Bronco Bowl Theatre Dallas	3,120	\$519,922	22,750	7
5. Majestic Theatre San Antonio	2,105	\$450,189	11,743	7