

Rejuvenated Forum making a huge impact on SoCal concert scene



By **Randy Lewis . Contact Reporter**

SHARE THIS

The Forum was SoCal's top arena-level venue for concerts in Southern California

DECEMBER 29, 2014, 4:00 AM

The first year back in operation for the rejuvenated Forum arena in Inglewood shows how far a little imagination — and \$100 million — will go these days.

The Forum has hosted 50 paid concerts this year, almost twice as many as the Southern California area's second-place finisher, the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater in Irvine, and doubling the number at its crosstown competitor, downtown L.A.'s Staples Center.

FOR THE RECORD

Article continues below ↓

The Forum: An article in the Dec. 29 Calendar section about the first year of operation for the renovated Forum arena in Inglewood identified Dana DuFine as vice president of West Coast operations for Madison Square Garden Co. She is MSG's senior vice president of West Coast operations.

As the first West Coast venture for the Madison Square Garden Co., the revitalized Forum began the year with half a dozen concerts by the Eagles and subsequently staged performances by Imagine Dragons, Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, Armin van Buuren, Luis Miguel, 5 Seconds of

Summer, the Wu-Tang Clan and more than three dozen other acts.

"The Forum is a home run — it's a winner," said Gary Bongiovanni, editor of the concert industry tracking magazine Pollstar. "I have not heard anybody say anything negative.... They definitely scored with that."

Article continues below ↓

Irving Azoff, the veteran talent manager and music industry mogul who partnered with MSG Executive Chairman James L. Dolan to resuscitate the 47-year-old Forum, told The Times: "We are very, very, very happy. The numbers speak for themselves, and the industry response as well as the fan response has been overwhelming."

The Forum's 50 shows make up 32% of the year's 154 arena-level concerts across the L.A. area. This was followed by Verizon with 28 shows (18%), Staples with 25 (16%), Anaheim's Honda Center with 23 (15%), the Hollywood Bowl's 21 (14%) and seven at the L.A. Memorial Sports Arena (5%).

That's had a significant effect on the local concert scene.

"In an already-crowded marketplace, any time another venue of similar capacity renovates itself and becomes more active it will have an impact," Staples Center President Lee Zeidman told The Times. "This, coupled with more acts playing stadium shows — as well as more festivals popping up — has an impact on the number of shows playing arenas, which concerns those of us who manage arenas."

The Forum's calendar for 2015 looks even more packed: "I think we'll be looking at 80 [shows], and it could be close to 90 next year," said Dana DuFine, MSG's new vice president of West Coast operations, who oversees bookings at the Forum. "Seriously, it's December, and we already have 45 shows booked next year."

In addition, next year will be the final year of concert activity at Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre, which opened in 1981 as the Irvine Meadows Amphitheater and which is being redeveloped. That figures to make even more shows available for Southern California's remaining arenas in 2016 and beyond.

The Forum opened in 1967, just a few weeks before the inauguration of its East Coast counterpart, the fourth-generation Madison Square Garden Arena in New York. Both buildings were designed by the same architect — Charles Luckman — and together they helped birth the arena-rock era in the 1970s and '80s.

MSG acquired the Forum in 2012 for \$23.5 million from the Faithful Bible Central Church, which had struggled to keep it afloat for nearly a decade.

The gamble for MSG in investing an additional \$75 million to bring the Forum back to life was whether a major arena could succeed without a resident sports team — a key revenue source the Forum lost to Staples, which was built and opened in 1999 by the Anschutz Entertainment Group. The Forum's innovation is the reconfiguration of a former sports palace into a venue dedicated to music.

"We've stumbled into a model here, which is music first," Azoff said. "In any decent-sized arena, music plays as many nights and pays as many of the bills as sports franchises, yet we're the second-class citizens. Music is always the afterthought, from backstage facilities to sound quality."

"This kind of music-first building isn't as expensive to build as one where you have to include basketball equipment and ice rinks, and it's a model we intend to spread." He said MSG has two similar projects on the boards — "one in the U.S., one outside the U.S." — that the company hoped to bring online soon, with an overall goal of half a dozen such music-focused arenas springing up over the next five years.

Azoff said the one genre in which the Forum might expand is country music. "I think we were a bit short on country — that's because so many acts book so far ahead." He added that MSG officials had responded to early customer complaints about the Forum's history of restroom shortages for women by adding more facilities after the arena reopened.

Staples isn't relaxing in its pursuit of concert activity, said Zeidman, noting that two of the three leading trade publications that focus on the concert industry — Billboard and Venues Today — ranked Staples as the No. 8 arena in the world (for venues in the 15,000 to 30,000 capacity category) and No. 3 in the U.S. for 2014. (Bongiovanni said the Forum is in the running as best new venue in Pollstar's annual industry awards, which are based on the calendar year and will be announced in February.)

"We believe, when properly scaled, Staples Center out-grosses other venues in our marketplace," Zeidman said, adding that "the use of L.A. Live's assets as a destination to make the attendance of a show more of a night or weekend out and to help promote the artist's music make Staples Center a very attractive play."

randy.lewis@latimes.com

Twitter: @RandyLewis2

Copyright © 2015, Los Angeles Times

This article is related to: Entertainment

[VIEW COMMENTS \(12\)](#)

Content Continues Below

