

## GETTING THEIR FILLMORE

Local touches make the seven concert venues distinct within the Live Nation chain. New Orleans, opening this month, and Minneapolis, to open early next year, will have their own personalities as well.

## THE FILLMORE CHARLOTTE

CHARLOTTE, NC | CAPACITY 2,000

The Fillmore Charlotte is housed in a historic textile mill, which gives it a unique ambience, feel and tradition. Vintage posters recall legendary live music performances, and the stadium-style tiers create better sightlines from anywhere in the venue.





# WELCOME TO THE CLUB

LIVE NATION ADDING TWO MORE FILLMORES TO A CHAIN WHERE VENUES MAINTAIN CONTINUITY BUT KEEP THEIR OWN IDENTITIES

BY BRAD WEISSBERG

**T**HE FILLMORE THEATERS are a community, not a brand, said the man in charge of growing the chain of intimate music halls, Ron Bension, CEO of Live Nation's Clubs and Theatres division.

The latest addition to the community will be the 2,200-capacity Fillmore New Orleans, which will open Feb. 15 with a performance by the Foo Fighters.

"The Fillmore screams rock 'n' roll, and we're putting the Fillmores in great music towns like New Orleans and Philly," Bension said. "We're really excited about the evolution of the clubs. The Fillmores are not cookie cutter. They each have their own identity in each community. Brands are the same wherever they reside and the Fillmores are not that. They each have their own unique DNA but are part of the Fillmore community."

Live Nation has been expanding the Fillmore chain since it took over in 2007, first by changing the names of a number of the clubs it owned around the U.S., and later by opening new clubs.

"We have been focusing on the Fillmores as being the pre-eminent club in the 2,000- to 3,000-capacity space for some time," he said.

There are seven Fillmores at the moment: the Fillmore San Francisco; Fillmore Auditorium in Denver; the Fillmore Detroit; the Fillmore Miami Beach; the Fillmore Charlotte; the Fillmore Silver Spring in the Washington, D.C., area; and the



## FILLMORE AUDITORIUM

DENVER | CAPACITY 3,600

Located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, the Fillmore Auditorium is the largest indoor venue for general admission seating in the state. The building opened in 1907 as a roller rink but has been hosting concerts under different names since 1960.



## THE FILLMORE DETROIT

DETROIT | CAPACITY 2,750

As you walk through the grand lobby of the building, a circa-1925 movie theater, you are greeted by the famous chandeliers, hung 80 feet in the air. The venue is on Woodward Avenue in the city's entertainment district.

## THE FILLMORE MIAMI BEACH at JACKIE GLEASON THEATER

MIAMI BEACH, FL | CAPACITY 2,713

The story of the Fillmore Miami Beach at the Jackie Gleason Theater began in the 1950s, when Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope and Jack Benny were regular visitors. The venue was reborn in 2007, when it underwent a multimillion-dollar transformation.





## THE FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO | CAPACITY 1,200

The San Francisco Fillmore grew to represent the pinnacle of creative music making in the late 1960s, hosting the most significant musical talent of the day, including Jimi Hendrix, Muddy Waters and The Who.

Fillmore Philadelphia. The Fillmore New Orleans will be No. 8, and No. 9 is under construction in Minneapolis near Target Field and is scheduled to open early next year.

Describing how a fan would be able to tell one Fillmore from another, Bension first pointed out the similarities: lots of chandeliers, red velvet curtains, and an emphasis on sightlines, sound and concessions.

“They all have a lounge-like feel; the restrooms are gorgeous; and every one of them has unique appeal that’s really cool,” he said.

“We believe the Fillmore experience is added value. We want the best fan experience. We want people to come away thinking,

**“Every community is distinctive and so are the Fillmores in them.”**

“That was a great environment; that was a really cool show; we had great food; we had a great time.”

As for the differences, “Every community is distinctive and so are the Fillmores in them,” he said. “They all have unique features and are designed to incorporate the traditional elements of the look of the environments they are in.”

Bension pointed out The Fillmore Philadelphia’s American flag formed by a collage of Fillmore posters and a take on Robert Indiana’s classic “LOVE” sculpture, spelling out “LIVE” in giant letters, and New Orleans’ 10- by 25-foot collage of Fillmore posters of Louis Armstrong as examples of their individual style.

“All of the decor in New Orleans is very voodoo with a French Quarter vibe,” Bension said. “There is a fleur-de-lis at the top of the stairs. It’s a symbol of New Orleans.”

## THE FILLMORE PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA | CAPACITY 2,600

The Fillmore Philadelphia features an intimate club within the club called The Foundry, a “LIVE” sculpture based on Robert Indiana’s “LOVE” sculpture, and an American flag made out of a collage of Fillmore posters.

Bension and his team look first for the right environment, building and location when looking for new cities to grow the Fillmore chain.

“We need a space where we can incorporate the Fillmore style seamlessly,” Bension said. “We’d love to open one a year if we find the right location and right markets.”

Dave Fortin, senior vice president of marketing and business development for Live Nation’s Clubs and Theatres division, said the company is “always looking at cities across the country to find properties where a new venue would make sense. When we find an opportunity there is an internal look at the space, and we discuss whether it should be a Fillmore or if it should be a House of Blues or something else.”

The House of Blues clubs and Live Nation’s assorted theaters are also under Bension and Fortin’s watch.

“As we grow as a division, we’re always looking to serve every size room,” Fortin said. “Typically, a House of Blues capacity tops out at around 900 in the main rooms. The Fillmores

hold 2,000-3,000. After that we look to program our amphitheaters and our arena and stadium partners.”

Building new Fillmores is a “no-brainer” to Fortin. “If a band can play Houston or Dallas and is looking to head east, and the next right room isn’t available in a market, they will skip the market. We’re always looking to have strategic cities with a great live music scene available, so markets don’t get skipped. We want to bring fans’ favorite bands to as many markets as possible.”

After a location is chosen, Live Nation looks at how to get the most out of it. “We bring in state-of-the-art technology. We look at how much space is between seats, how high should the risers should be, where to put VIP areas and how to best serve the fans in that space,” he said.

The Fillmore name first became associated with concerts

# NOLA GETS A FILLMORE WITH ITS NAME ON IT

**THE NEW ORLEANS FILLMORE**, opening this month, will fill 35,000 square feet of prime space on the second floor of Harrah's Casino in the downtown area.

"Harrah's has had the NOLA space for the last 18 years," said Dave Fortin, senior vice president of marketing and business development for Live Nation's Clubs and Theatres division. "The space has always been earmarked for live entertainment but has never had an entertainment partner."

Harrah's is the landlord and will have no say in how the venue is run or who is booked. The Philadelphia branch of EwingCole, which works on many of the Fillmore projects, designed the space.

The lease is for 20-plus years. Live Nation did not reveal the cost of the project.

"We have our own entrance off Canal Street, which will allow us to put on shows for any age, including under-21 fans who couldn't go inside the casino," Fortin said.

Live Nation picked New Orleans for its eighth Fillmore primarily because it saw a gap in the marketplace.

"We thought a (general admission) space would be a perfect opportunity to serve the market," he said. "The 2,000- to 2,500-capacity venue is our sweet spot. The last three Fillmores have fallen into that range."

The Fillmore New Orleans' capacity is 2,200. It's divided into the music hall, a lobby bar that holds 300 people, and the VIP room, called BG's Lounge to honor original Fillmore impresario Bill Graham, which can accommodate 200 people.

The Foo Fighters will play the first shows Feb. 15 and 16. Almost 30 shows have been booked, including Duran Duran, Willie Nelson, the Avett Brothers, Bob Weir and Jason Isbell. Ticket prices range from \$25 to \$75, and VIP will carry an additional charge.

Concessions are being handled in-house. "The Live Nation team has created a unique New Orleans-based menu that will include charcuterie boxes, cheese boxes, chicken pressed wraps, the Impossible Burger, Cajun poutine and Creole shrimp," Fortin said.

"We've taken great care to make sure the food, the atmosphere and the look will have the underlying sense of the NOLA community," he added. "This fills a really nice spot in the live entertainment landscape of one of the country's most vibrant cities."  
— Brad Weissberg



The New Orleans location, shown in a rendering, opens this month. The design will feature a voodoo and French Quarter vibe.



when Charles Sullivan started booking performers at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium in 1954. In December 1965, Sullivan began letting future rock impresario Bill Graham book shows there.

The Fillmore Auditorium went on to host numerous 1960s counterculture icons. The Grateful Dead played 51 concerts at the venue. The Doors, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd and The Who played there.

Benson said Live Nation "has international aspirations and we're looking at other countries. Where it makes sense, we would love to have a Fillmore."

"I've been part of Live Nation and House of Blues for 25 years," Fortin said. "There is a sense of underlying community and family associated with the Fillmores and it comes from Bill Graham and who he was. He escaped from Europe during World War II and was put in foster care. He would sneak out of his foster home in France to steal apples.

"He was a survivor in every way, and Bill put out apples out at the end of his shows because he wanted everyone to go home with a full belly."

"That's what the Fillmores were built on and what we carry and it's what the Fillmore became," Fortin said. "It was a real scene at the start with Jerry Garcia, Janis Joplin and Santana and it was all a family with a great communal vibe, and we try to honor that in the way we run it. That history is a really cool piece of what makes a Fillmore a Fillmore.

"We are all about honoring the past in contemporary way."