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NORTHERN VIRGINIA
SPRING/SUMMER 2008

COUNTRY COOKING:
NEW RESTAURANTS

STARS COME OUT
AT WOLF TRAP PARK

SPA TRIPPING:
NEW AGE TO YOGA

DREAM FIELDS

Vineyards in the mist, gardens of Shenandoah
and meadows for the summer rites of polo

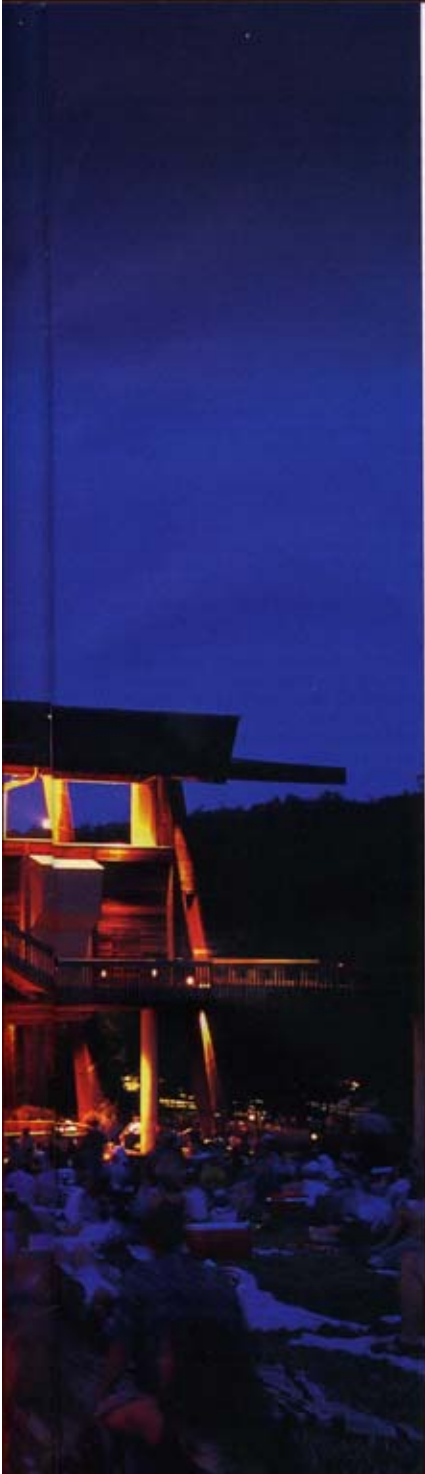
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Park Performances

Wolf Trap's nights of song, dance and theater alfresco

BY ANN MAH





At the Filene Center, the outdoor amphitheater at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, picnickers port in baskets and coolers or purchase food on the grounds.

Bob Hope, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Miles Davis, Tony Bennett, Bob Dylan, Ella Fitzgerald, Celine Dion, B.B. King, Whitney Houston, Dizzy Gillespie, Peter, Paul and Mary—they've all performed at a surprising venue. It's not New York's Madison Square Garden or the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. It's Wolf Trap's 7,000-seat Filene Center near Vienna, Virginia.

Wolves once ran wild across the hills and woods of the 130-acre swath of land, now the nation's only national park for the performing arts. Philanthropist Catherine Filene Shouse (1896-1994), an avid supporter of live music and the stage, purchased the land in 1930 as a family retreat and named it for a bit of hunt country lore. In the 1600s trappers built pits to snare their prey, trading wolf heads to the state assembly for tobacco. Wishing to preserve the greenery and to benefit the arts, Shouse donated the property in 1966 to the U.S. government to create Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. She also gave funds to establish the Filene Center, which opened in 1971. Now this exceptional arena built of Douglas fir and natural pine draws about 500,000 each year to its plein-air performances.

This year Wolf Trap continues to land top talent. R&B star Gladys Knight (July 19) and Grammy-award winning country music singer Gretchen Wilson (August 9) debut here this summer. Tricia Yearwood returns (June 11) as do musical acts like Hootie and the Blowfish (July 13) and the Gipsy Kings (August 7 and 8). The British rockers of Jethro Tull celebrate their 40th anniversary here in August.

With a hundred different performances packed into only 110 days, Wolf Trap produces more shows, in a shorter period of time, than any other theater in the country. "We try to represent as many genres as possible while staying family friendly," says Peter Zimmerman, Wolf Trap's director of programming and production. In its 37th season, the Filene Center still honors Shouse's philosophy of "something for everyone." The stage hosts not only musical acts but also leading dance, opera and theater troupes. Zimmerman says, "We've got urban funk, R&B, soul, comedy, oldies, youngies and everything in between."

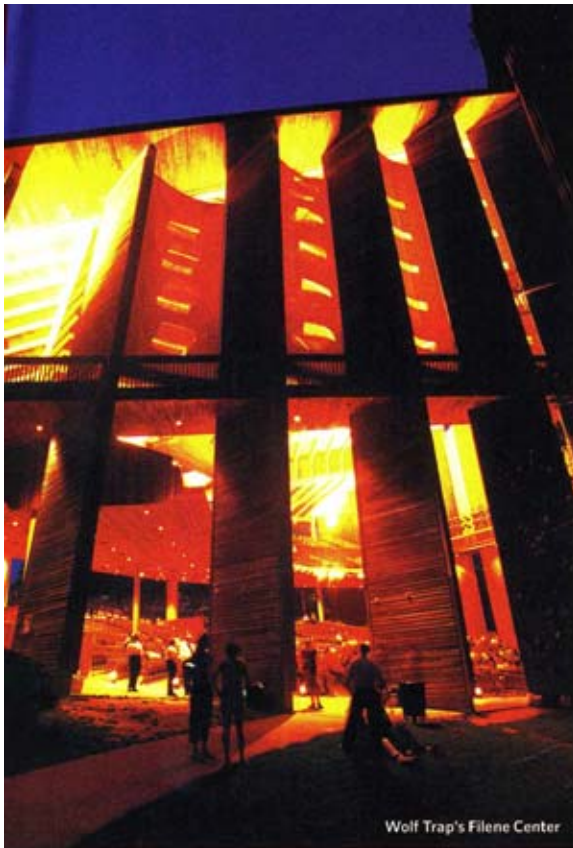
BEYOND A SOUND STAGE

Public radio personality Garrison Keillor presents musical guests and comedy sketches from his popular show *A Prairie Home Companion* to open the season May 23. For jazz devotees, three renowned bassists Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten join forces in the Thunder Tour (August 16). Zimmerman says, "All have different careers but are coming together to create something new."

Besides Broadway shows like *Rent* (June 27 to 29) and *Les Misérables* (August 29 to 31 and September 2 through 7), Wolf Trap brings New York's Gilbert and Sullivan Players back for their 14th season. The ensemble presents *The Gondoliers* (June 21), Gilbert and Sullivan's last operetta, which hasn't been performed at Wolf Trap in 30 years. The players also revive *H.M.S. Pinafore* (June 20), which artistic director Albert Bergeret calls "the essence of musical theater. It's totally accessible, concise and packs a punch in terms of social commentary."

Wolf Trap also books dance troupes. Famed Irish step cloggers of Riverdance (May 29 to June 1) return, as do contemporary dance ensemble the Paul Taylor Dance Company (July 8) and the American company of dancer-athletes Pilobolus (June 17).

PHOTOS BY ROBERT LEE WELLYN



Wolf Trap's Filene Center

PRICE OF ADMISSION

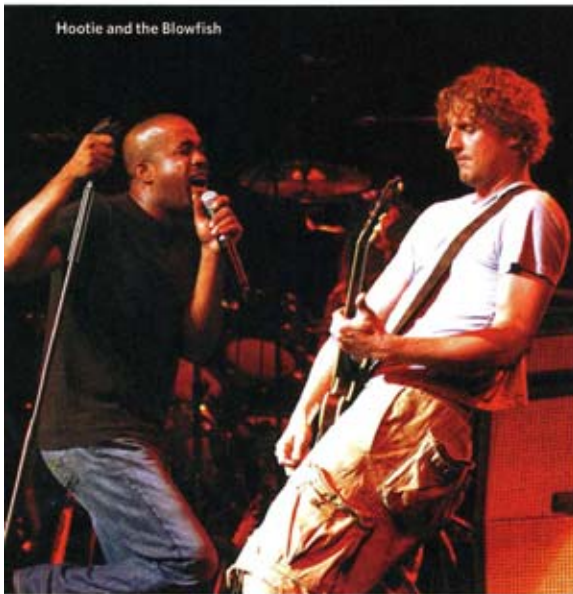
What it takes for a performer to become a Wolf Trap regular remains somewhat a mystery. President and CEO Terrence Jones plays a role in finding acts, as did founder Shouse. "In the early years, nothing got booked that she didn't approve," says Wolf Trap's Ann McKee.

Shouse, a life-long supporter of the performing arts, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 from President Gerald Ford. Her mother Therese Filene, a founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, cultivated Shouse's interest in music. Though Shouse revered the classics, "she had the most fun at some of the rock shows," says McKee.

Shouse lived on the grounds during the summer months and attended most of the concerts, occasionally throwing parties for performers and stagehands. The close proximity to the performing arts center allowed her to pop in unexpectedly, riding on her baby blue golf cart. "She'd tool all over the park with it," McKee says. She would drop in on picnickers in the meadow or surprise workers turning sets into the wee hours. "Many times she came over in the middle of the night and brought treats to the stagehands," McKee says. "There was a great deal of fondness and respect."

Shouse traveled to Europe every year to scout foreign companies, often visiting dignitaries. In 1976, the year Queen Elizabeth II named Shouse a Dame Commander of the British Empire, Shouse helped book the Scottish military tattoo and its 350 bagpipers to play Wolf Trap. "It was the Queen's gift to us for the bicentennial," says McKee. "It became the hottest ticket in town."

Under Jones's leadership, Wolf Trap selects performers who fit its mission and mandate but who are willing to play at reasonable rates. The programming department shuns ticket gauging. (Stars like Hannah Montana who command \$400 a ticket need not apply). Wolf Trap's organizational structure also helps keep tickets accessible. The Filene Center operates as a public/private venture of the National Park Service and the Wolf Trap Foundation, which includes an education center, resident opera company and winter performance venue The Barns. As a result, lawn seats for some shows go for as little as \$8. Although 10 to 12 shows sell out each season, visitors find tickets for most performances even at the last minute.



Hootie and the Blowfish



Pilobolus

FILENE CENTER AND LAWN BY ROBERT LEWELLYN; HOOTIE AND GIPSY KINGS COURTESY WOLF TRAP; PILIBOLUS BY JOHN KANE

A DEDICATED BENEFACTOR

Wolf Trap might never have made it big if not for Shouse's determination to preserve a green spot. She attempted to donate the property as a performance space to Fairfax County, the National Symphony Orchestra and even the Smithsonian Institution but found no takers. Fairfax County never answered her letter of inquiry.

Shouse persevered, and the U.S. government accepted, and the Filene Center opened in 1971. But a decade later, a fire burned the venue to the ground six weeks before the summer season was to open. "The destruction was so complete that they couldn't pinpoint how it started," says McKee. Shouse sped from her house on the Eastern Shore as soon as she heard about the disaster. "She pulled staff together and said, 'Can we still have a season?'" recalls McKee. "We said, 'Of course.'"


Working around the clock, Wolf Trap staff erected a temporary structure, a gigantic vinyl hangar with a peak in the middle that served as the main theater for two years. In 1984, thanks to Shouse's relentless fundraising efforts, the new and improved Filene Center opened, equipped with more rehearsal space, bigger dressing rooms and, of course, a sprinkler system.

REPEAT PERFORMANCES

Today Wolf Trap's state-of-the-art facilities keep world-class performers coming back. Although the venue, which seats up to 7,000, is not intimate, its high-tech lighting and audio equipment make every seat seem close to the stage. "For us, it's crucial," says Albert Bergeret, artistic director of the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players. Their 19th-century operettas rely on excellent audio to relay the speed-driven jokes and witty dialogue. In 1984, *The New York Times* praised the new stage's acoustics, reporting that: "The thousands on the surrounding lawn received...splendorous tones carried by nicely natural-sounding amplification."

The venue's pastoral setting also attracts performers. "There's something rustic about it, but at the same it has all the amenities you could ever need," says Renee Jaworski, rehearsal director of Pilobolus. "It feels so solid, as if it should have walls. But it's out in the open."

Attuned, responsive audiences are also a draw. Under cover of the Filene Center's open-sided structure or sprawled on the expansive lawn, the audiences who pack the house each evening appear to be both enthusiastic and engaged. The venue's cozy ambience creates an indescribable "feeling that is emotionally warm," Jaworski explains. "It's just so nice under the stars."

Beyond the bucolic setting, endearing legacy, high-tech accoutrements and user-friendly accessibility, the intangible magic of Wolf Trap, it seems, is what keeps performers and fans returning season after season. Jaworski puts it simply: "This is a wonderful venue, with a special energy and synergy." 



Gipsy Kings