

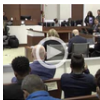
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The new Hard Rock Live: A game-changer for South Florida entertainment

By Ben Crandell
South Florida Sun-Sentinel • Oct 23, 2019 at 6:00 am



Jim Allen
Chairman, Hard Rock International

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The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino offered a sneak peek of its \$1.5 billion expansion project before it opens to the public on Oct. 24. (EmmaKate Austin)

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When the symbol of your \$1.5 billion resort remodel is a laser-lit hotel in the form of a guitar as tall as the Great Pyramid of Giza, the project’s entertainment ambitions must be equally monumental.

The new Hard Rock Live, a centerpiece of the dramatic expansion at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, will have its formal opening on Friday, Oct. 25, with a [concert by Maroon 5](#), celebrity-rock performers who easily could sell three times the venue’s 7,000 capacity.

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The show is an opening statement from the resort that will echo across the South Florida entertainment landscape, reaching full volume with events associated with [the 2020 Super Bowl at Hard Rock Stadium](#) in Miami Gardens in February.

With a transformable theater configuration and state-of-the-art sound wired to accommodate Broadway tours and live television broadcasts, the \$120 million Hard Rock Live will be an entertainment game-changer for the region, in the view of Stacy Ritter, president and CEO of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“With the arts and culture scene rapidly evolving in Broward County, the opening of the new Hard Rock Live is coming at perfect timing. The world-class performers they have lined up are helping bring our offerings to the next level,” Ritter said.

If Maroon 5 is an unexpected booking for such an intimate venue, equally surprising is a [Jan. 10 Hard Rock Live concert by Billy Joel](#), whose frequent New Year's Eve shows at the 20,000-seat BB&T Center have been hot tickets. And then there's the remarkable gathering of pop-culture royalty for the inaugural [Shawn Carter Foundation Gala Weekend](#), bringing rapper-mogul Jay-Z, superstar wife Beyoncé and pop glamour girl Rihanna to the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Nov. 15-16.

[[RELATED: Q&A with Maroon 5 guitarist James Valentine](#)]

Can Madonna, Ellen DeGeneres and Stephen Colbert be far behind? Don't rule it out.

“This is the most advanced entertainment facility in the United States,” said Seminole Gaming president and CEO Jim Allen said during a recent tour of the resort. “We spared no expense in creating something that is not just about live music, but it also set up for complete TV, any type of event, with Broadway, boxing, martial arts. It's really a true entertainment destination.”

Maroon 5 guitarist James Valentine said the band was looking forward to opening the venue and testing its new acoustics.

“It's state of the art. A lot of these venues keep getting better and better as technology gets better,” he said. “We're excited to be a part of it.”

Versatile venue

Hard Rock Live is part of a new section of the resort erected on the footprint of the old Seminole Paradise entertainment complex, and the experience is nothing like the old space, a dark, boxy barn that was, literally, a pain in the neck for those in the many seats positioned perpendicular to the stage.

The new \$125 million venue is bright, modern and built for comfort, with padded seats that face the stage in a gentle clamshell curve. It was designed by Scéno Plus, a Canadian firm that also handled the recent remodel of the Colosseum at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas.



The Couches offer premium seating and cocktail service in the new Hard Rock Live at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. (Ben Crandell / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

None of the seats is more than 164 feet from the stage at Hard Rock Live, a 225,000-square-foot, three-level space that includes nine VIP suites, more than 300 square feet of bar space (each seat has a cupholder) and an area called the Couches, a tier of velvety, premium-view banquettes with tables and cocktail service.

“Frankly we could have gotten more seats in here, but to me it was about having an extra wide seat and having enough distance between [the rows], so somebody really can get up and go to the restroom if they’re in the middle of the row. That’s the most uncomfortable thing in so many environments,” Allen said.

A critical feature of the venue is a system of motorized curtains that can conceal balconies, transforming Hard Rock Live from a 7,000-capacity space for large concerts and events into a 2,500-seat theater for more intimate shows, Broadway productions and television broadcasts.

[[RELATED: Guitar hotel to make its bow as Seminole Hard Rock flexes financial might](#)]

The Hard Rock has a partnership with Nederlander Worldwide, part of the production company that has presented Broadway and touring shows including “Annie,” “La Cage aux Folles,” “West Side Story,” “The

Color Purple” and Mike Tyson’s one-man show “The Undisputed Truth.”

In its smaller configuration, Hard Rock Live is roughly the same capacity as the Au-Rene Theater at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale (capacity 2,658), the Fillmore Miami Beach (2,462) and the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach (2,200).

The Kravis Center is nearing completion on its own \$50 million expansion and remodel. The Broward Center underwent a \$56 million expansion and technical upgrade in 2014 and is currently remodeling the 1,200-seat Parker Playhouse.

Like the Hard Rock complex, the Broward Center’s goal with its expansion was to create a deeper experiential connection with visitors, including new dining and gathering spaces, said Kelley Shanley, Broward Center president and CEO.

“The investment in creating a destination that offers more than a show definitely pays off,” Shanley said.

“The new Hard Rock Live will be a great addition to the entertainment scene here in South Florida for both visitors and residents alike. This is how a growing and vibrant market responds to a growing and evolving audience.”

In its more intimate size, Hard Rock Live would offer a setting comparable to the one talk-show host Trevor Noah experienced during a four-night taping of [“The Daily Show” at the Fillmore Miami Beach](#) in 2018. Allen cagily admitted that he’s already gotten interest from those kinds of performers.

“Certainly the late-night TV shows could be here. There’s a couple of TV shows, late afternoon, that are world renowned, that could be here. There’s one or two morning shows that have been known to go out and broadcast on, say, a location for a week,” Allen said. “They’re all the things we’re working on and, candidly, we’ve had some real, significant interest, and in some cases commitments.”

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The Bora Bora experience cabanas at Seminole Hard Rock Casino and Hotel in Hollywood on October 18, 2019. The hotel formally opens October 24, 2019. (Carline Jean / South Florida Sun Sentinel/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

‘Blown away’

Allen acknowledges the Hard Rock brand was built on popular music and its ability to attract A-List celebrities and fans. A memorable lineup of bold-faces names are expected for opening-weekend festivities bracketing the Maroon 5 concert, including a party that has reserved a private dining room in the Hard Rock’s signature Council Oak restaurant Thursday night, when the Guitar Hotel opens.

“You would not believe it if I told you the names,” Allen said.

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On Nov. 2, the opening of the Hard Rock's dayclub-nightclub called DAER will feature Dutch DJ superstar Tiësto in his first Broward County performance.

[[RELATED: A sneak peek of new Hard Rock restaurants](#)]

Allen says Hard Rock Live also will be a player in the residency trend, which come in various configurations. In December, pop icon Madonna has a seven-night residency at the Fillmore Miami Beach, which also will host new-wave favorites New Order for four nights in January.

On a larger scale, Lady Gaga is performing a two-year Las Vegas residency at the Park Theater in the Park MGM, slightly smaller than Hard Rock Live.

Jay-Z's artist and athlete management company Roc Nation has a direct relationship with the Hard Rock, according to Allen, who said representatives from major entertainment agencies including CAA and William Morris, along with Live Nation and AEG, have been "blown away" by the new venue.

"With the previous facility, we were not able to attract the real residency-type situation with an artist," Allen said. "We will be announcing, very shortly, some residencies of some world-class, major artists on a two-, three-year basis."



Jim Allen, president and CEO of Seminole Gaming, inside the new Hard Rock Live, part of a \$1.5 billion expansion at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino and Hotel in Hollywood. (Carline Jean / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

The Hard Rock brand creates the opportunity for another kind of synergy, Allen said.



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“Certainly we will have the ability to attract the A-List artist and, frankly, it’s a relationship where one night they might play Hard Rock Stadium and the next night they play something more intimate here, right?” he said. “That’s something that clearly we’re exploring and, I think, something you’ll see happening in the future.”

‘100 percent Super Bowl’

Perhaps no event is better suited to showing off the new Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, the Guitar Hotel and Hard Rock Live like the Super Bowl, the annual intersection of entertainment and sports that generates its own special celebrity and cultural cachet.

The Hard Rock will be part of a full-court press in the months leading up to the game at Hard Rock Stadium on Feb. 2. Along with the potential of the resort’s multiple hotels to accommodate participating teams and their fans, Hard Rock Live will be positioned as a location not only for musical performances but for live broadcasts of shows hosted by ESPN, the NFL Network and other outlets.

Allen said that once the resort gets past opening festivities for the Guitar Hotel and Hard Rock Live, it will shift into “100 percent Super Bowl” mode.

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“There will be another whole launch of who and where and what’s playing and what live TV show will be here, and what unbelievable celebrity concerts will occur,” he said. “Frankly, we’re a little surprised at some of the celebrities that have called us and said they want to host private parties and want to have charitable events, things like this. So we’re pretty excited about that.”

Ritter said the expanded resort will be a key part of the pitch that her tourism team makes to prospective visitors.

“We absolutely foresee that the excitement from the expansion and the high caliber of performers coming to the venue will be a big draw for both international and domestic travelers,” she said. “Having the first-ever Guitar Hotel in Broward County is something we are proud to offer.”



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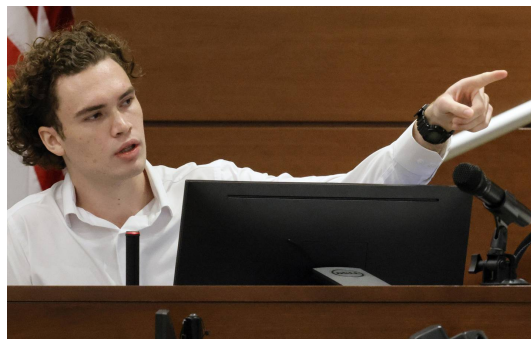
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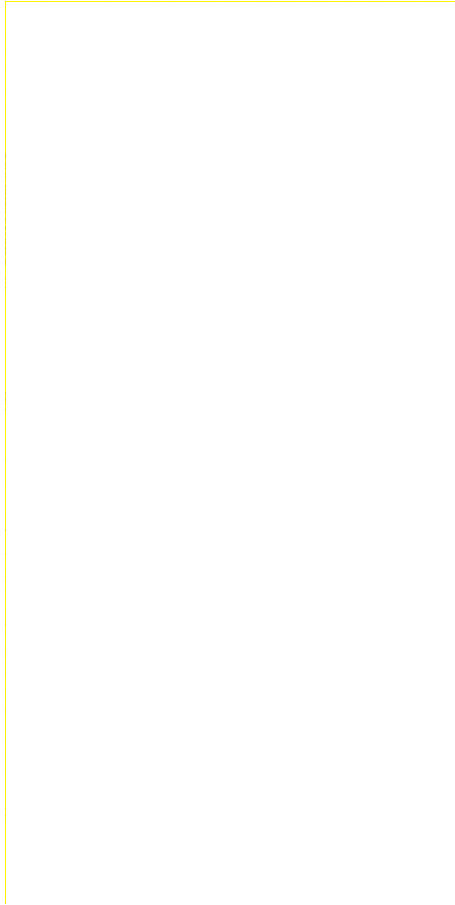
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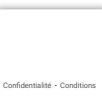
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