

Is there enough money and talent in D-FW to support all these midsize concert venues?

Mar. 5, 2018 6:00am

With the recent openings of Canton Hall and the Pavilion at Toyota Music Factory, Dallas-Fort Worth is now officially saturated with midsize concert venues, many of them competing for the same shows.

But is this boom in midsize venues a boon for pop and rock lovers? Or is the competition driving up ticket prices and making life more difficult for independent promoters?

The answer is "all of the above."

Midsize venues are bigger than nightclubs and smaller than sports arenas, and hold between 1,000 and 8,000 fans — a spectrum that includes more than 15 places in D-FW ranging from oversize honky-tonks like Billy Bob's Texas to fancy joints like the Majestic Theatre and the Winspear Opera House.

Several new midsize spaces have popped up in recent years, including Gas Monkey Live and the revamped Bomb Factory, as well as Canton Hall in Deep Ellum and Toyota Music Factory in Irving, which holds up to 4,000 for indoor shows and 8,000 for outdoor concerts. (See accompanying list.)

On the one hand, the more, the merrier, says Gary Bongiovanni, editor of the concert industry publication *Pollstar*.

"It's nice to be blessed with those kind of riches in your market. ... It gives fans more of a choice," he says.

of venues can put a dent in the wallets of concertgoers. "In the concert business, competition between promoters tends to drive prices up," he says. "The promoters offer the artists more and more money, and the result is a higher ticket prices."

Clint Barlow agrees — up to a point. The co-owner of the Bomb Factory, Canton Hall and Trees says competition leads to promoters "overpaying for a band because they don't want the other [promoters] to have it." Which means that "an act that might have been a \$40 ticket might become a \$50 ticket," he says.

But Barlow says that sort of cutthroat bidding eventually dies down.

"When a new venue opens, there's always a lot of competition — you only have one chance to make a first impression. But then you see it kind of fizzle out," says the co-owner of several Deep Ellum music venues.

"I've learned not to chase a lot of things, because you go down a dark path where you're thinking, 'Well, I know I'm gonna lose money, *but ...*'"

in D-FW is Live Nation, the country's largest live-entertainment company. The Los Angeles-based firm stages concerts at midsize venues like Toyota Music Factory, House of Blues, South Side Ballroom and Fair Park Music Hall, in addition to operating the 20,000-capacity Starplex Pavilion.

According to Bongiovanni, independent, midsize venues often have a hard time surviving in the shadow of Live Nation. "It's a very difficult job for them, because you're competing with somebody on a much bigger scale. ... Live Nation has such a large footprint," he says.

Representatives of Live Nation declined to be interviewed for this story, senior vice president Danny Eaton said in an email to *The Dallas Morning News*.

So, is there enough room for all the midsize venues to live peacefully in this increasingly crowded landscape?

Barlow thinks so — pointing to the growing sprawl and population of Dallas-Fort Worth (7.2 million and rising) and the idea that suburban venues draw different concertgoers than city venues. He says older fans who like the comfy seats at Verizon Theatre in Grand Prairie probably don't want to stand for a show at the Bomb Factory.

"Certain artists work well in suburbs, and others work better in the inner loop where people are hip to cutting-edge bands that are relatively unknown to the general population," Barlow says. "A couple of venues with the Dallas address are always going to stay busy."

One midsize venue that's survived the competition for years is the Granada Theater, the former movie theater on Lower Greenville that has hosted big names like Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson as well as hundreds of up-and-coming Texas acts.

Granada co-owner Mike Schoder says he's booking as many shows today as he did when he bought the theater in 2004. "It's a tough business. ... It's a miracle all these other venues haven't bit into what we're doing," he says.

The key, Schoder says, is offering something slightly different than the competitors. The Granada is "a venue with a culture and a feeling ... it's a place people use as a discovery zone," he says.

While the glut of midsize venues does have drawbacks for promoters and ticket prices, in the end it means more concerts for music lovers to choose from. Schoder says the area hosts significantly more concerts today than it did 15 years ago, thanks in large part to the influx of venues.

"We live in a land of plenty," he says. "With these new venues, more people have concerts on their radar, and ultimately, more people go out and discover new bands. It's a healthy thing."

Midsize venues in Dallas-Fort Worth that regularly feature pop and rock concerts include:

- Canton Hall (capacity 1,150), 2727 Canton St., Dallas
- Granada Theater (1,150), 3524 Greenville Ave., Dallas
- South Side Music Hall (1,500), 1135 S. Lamar St., Dallas
- House of Blues (1,600), 2200 N. Lamar St., Dallas
- Majestic Theatre (1,700), 1925 Elm St., Dallas
- Bass Performance Hall (2,000), 525 Commerce St., Fort Worth
- Winspear Opera House (2,200), 2403 Flora St., Dallas
- McFarlin Auditorium (2,380), 6405 Boaz Lane, Dallas
- Gas Monkey Live (2,500), 10110 Technology Blvd., Dallas
- Fair Park Music Hall (3,400), 909 First Ave., Dallas
- South Side Ballroom (3,800), 1135 S. Lamar St., Dallas
- Bomb Factory (4,300), 2713 Canton St., Dallas
- Billy Bob's Texas (6,000), 2520 Rodeo Plaza, Fort Worth
- Allen Event Center (6,275), 200 E. Stacy Road, Allen
- Verizon Theatre (6,350), 1001 Performance Place, Grand Prairie
- Toyota Music Factory (8,000 outdoor; 4,000 indoor), 300 W. Las Colinas Blvd., Irving

https://www.guidelive.com/music/2018/03/05/too-many-mid-sized-concert-venues-dallas-fort-worth-time-money#_ga=2.186306537.1747516492.1520268964-343473436.1519678889