

The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park Celebrates Five Years

» PAIGE SATTER

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the world was shutting its doors, construction was well underway on the San Diego Bay, where we were creating the permanent outdoor home of the San Diego Symphony. Having spent decades constructing and tearing down temporary summer sites, we are thrilled that the Rady Shell at Jacobs Park has received rave reviews, including an article in Forbes titled "The Country's Coolest New Concert Venue Is in California."

Over the past five seasons, The Shell has welcomed more than 15 million guests to over 500 events, rain or shine (mostly shine). The Symphony's Venue Operations team has learned quite a bit about owning and operating a state-of-the-art outdoor concert venue, including park administration, outsmarting storage restrictions, hosting film shoots (check out Visit California and the Apple iPhone 13 video launch), and the effects of salt air. The San Diego Symphony is the oldest orchestra in California (1910) and has a rich history of presenting the classical canon and popular programming in both our historic 1927 downtown concert hall, Jacobs Music Center, on stages throughout Southern California, and throughout the world when on tour. After nearly 20 years of planning, government advocacy, and friend/fundraising, The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park broke ground on August 29, 2019, and has forever changed the downtown San Diego cityscape.



Rady Shell at Jacobs Park in San Diego turns five years old. (Credit: San Diego Symphony)

Over the past five seasons, we've learned that the time, effort, and collaborative decisions made during construction have paid off. We produce concerts and events at an extremely high level, from the artists on stage to using the latest lighting, sound, and video technology. The 3.7-acre venue is more than any of us could have imagined; it's stunning to look at, and the sound quality is spectacular.

We learned how to run a public park (the site is designated a public park 85% of the time per our agreement with the Port of San Diego). We learned that having an 11,000-square-foot warehouse nearby is essential for storing 6,200 chairs, 500 tables, road cases, equipment, instruments, and more. We learned that salt air is no joke.

We learned that certain elements are beyond our control – whether in the skies or in the water. San Diego is a proud military town and fighter jets soaring overhead or aircraft carriers passing by can

easily draw attention from even the most captivating performance on stage. We also contend with large party boats, jet skis, unruly promenade guests, and amplified sound from surrounding hotels, Petco Park, and the San Diego Convention Center.

Our Inclement Weather Plan includes benchmarks for pausing or canceling events. Using several weather apps and equipment mounted at the top of video towers, we continually monitor wind speed and potential lightning strikes and make decisions in real time. Luckily for us, it doesn't rain much in San Diego, and we can enjoy mostly rain-free events throughout the year.

We stress-tested and fine-tuned SOPs and update them on a very regular basis. Some examples include how to "quickly" set and strike a full venue that has no fixed seating based on the various seating charts or GA requirements (having a pool of 50 event crew members is key), and we expanded our already complex preventative maintenance program to include new equipment and processes at The Shell.

We continue to create exceptional experiences for our park visitors and event guests, knowing that for some, this is their first time at the venue.

We have a wonderful partnership with Petco Park Events (home to the San Diego Padres) when it comes to contracting the venue for private or corporate events. We have seen event scope grow exponentially over the years and continue to be amazed at what The Shell

is capable of. Just recently, I witnessed construction of one of the largest decks I've seen in my career, built over the multi-tiered turf to accommodate a dance party for over 1,000 guests.

In addition to being an amazing venue to hear live music, The Shell is also a wonderful community asset. Every month there are free yoga classes that attract thousands of people. We host annual season preview picnics with music and fun. In 2022, soccer fans watched World Cup matches on large screens while lounging on the grass, and each year the Holiday Boat Parade goes by The Shell, giving guests the perfect viewing location of the 80 or so boats along the San Diego Bay.

Security and technology play an integral role. We have 24/7 site security, access control for the five buildings onsite, and over 100 cameras throughout the venue. For efficiency, all three of the Symphony's venues use the same software, and we monitor them all simultaneously.

The San Diego Symphony is very fortunate to own and operate two state-of-the-art concert venues as well as a support warehouse, and it thrills us that so many San Diegans and visitors to our city can experience the Shell.

Paige Satter is Director of Venue Operations Administration for the San Diego Symphony. **VP**

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