

Welcome, Punta Gorda Symphony



Maestro Raffaele Ponti reacts to the cheers of the assemblage at a reception Tuesday rebranding the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra as the Punta Gorda Symphony.

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra faded into history at midnight on Tuesday.

Today, it is now the Punta Gorda Symphony.

The rebranding was announced yesterday to a standing room only champagne reception for orchestra patrons and supporters at F.M. Don's Restaurant in Punta Gorda.

According to Orchestra Chairman Michael Landsberg, the organization has been plagued with branding problems, having the same name as a symphony orchestra in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"We considered many options," he said, "but in the end, Punta Gorda is a specific and unique geographic identifier for us, and its character as the cultural hub of Charlotte County suits our vision for the Punta Gorda Symphony."

Raffaele Ponti, in his seventh year as the orchestra's maestro, and Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce President John Wright highlighted the evening, joining hands as the new PGS banner was unveiled behind them, to the applause and cheers of the assemblage.

Ponti told the *Sun* the change was the culmination of a long relationship between the city and the orchestra, and "this is the time" to solidify the bond.

"We feel compelled, we are drawn, to have a closer connection with the city we love, Punta Gorda," he said. "They have done so much for us with dedicated support all these years. It just makes sense. People are learning who we are and where we are, and this puts us on the map." Also as part of the evening, the orchestra's executive director, Craig Badinger, revealed that the new Punta Gorda Symphony will expand its regional presence with three concerts in 2020 in the 1,100 seat North Port Performing Arts Center. They will be at 7:30 p.m. on Mondays, Jan. 13, Feb. 10 and March 9.

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra will hold its final performances under the CSO name, pre-season concerts on Sunday, Oct. 27, at 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., at the Charlotte Performing Arts

Center in Punta Gorda, reprising its performance last season of “John Williams & Friends,” featuring orchestra music from Hollywood.

The Punta Gorda Symphony will hold its first performance under its new name on Nov. 10, at 7:30 p.m. at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center, as part of its regular subscription season. Tickets may be obtained by accessing www.charlottesymphony.com, www.PGSymphony.org, or calling 941-205-5996.

A brief history

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra began in 1978 as a small chamber group – six retirees and two students – under Fred Blake. In 1987, it became incorporated as the Charlotte Chamber Music Society.

By the late 80s, it had become a full-fledged volunteer orchestra, renamed the Charlotte Symphony Society in 1989, and in 2003, it became the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra.

Janita Hawk became maestro in 1993, bringing the orchestra to professional status with paid musicians. In 2009, after 16 years at the podium, Maestro Hawk retired, and Maestro Toshimasa Francis Wada directed the orchestra until 2013.

Maestro Raffaele Ponti took over increasing the orchestra from some 40 to 70 musicians, and expanding its symphonic repertoire.