

Charlotte Symphony now called Punta Gorda Symphony, plays last show Sunday under old name



The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra is now called Punta Gorda Symphony. (photo Steve Lineberry)

They'd been talking about changing the name for years. Finally, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra announced the big news last week.

After two shows this Sunday, the Charlotte County orchestra will officially adopt a brand-new name: Punta Gorda Symphony.

The move, leaders say, will help brand the professional orchestra and prevent confusion between the Punta Gorda orchestra and another one in Charlotte, N.C., called Charlotte Symphony Orchestra.

That confusion's been happening for years, music director Raffaele Ponti says. It even stumped guest musicians and others in the symphony business.

"It was just a headache," Ponti says. "When people were talking to me about my own orchestra, they'd say, 'Well, I didn't know you were in Charlotte!' And I'd say, 'Well I'm not. I'm with the Charlotte (Symphony) in Charlotte County, Florida.'"

Orchestra leaders know of at least one customer who searched online for "Charlotte Symphony" and accidentally bought a ticket for a show in North Carolina. The North Carolina orchestra often comes up first on Google searches.

"Talking about Charlotte Symphony Orchestra is a little confusing," says Craig Badinger, the orchestra's new executive director. "It's not as specific."

That's where the new name comes in. Orchestra leaders considered other names, such as the Peace River Symphony, but they kept coming back to Punta Gorda Symphony.

"It's hyper-specific, and it's a geographic identifier," Badinger says. "And it's where we originally formed in 1978 as a small chamber orchestra, and where our home has been."

Ponti puts it another way. "Punta Gorda is where we are," he says. "It's a beautiful place, and I'm proud of it."

A few people haven't liked the change, Badinger admits, but most orchestra patrons have been supportive and understanding of the need for a better, less confusing brand name.

The orchestra's board of directors made the decision last fall and announced the change Oct. 14. The musicians begin performing under their new name after Sunday's shows at Charlotte Performing Arts Center in Punta Gorda.

Symphony leaders have already started making the change everywhere else, including a new website, business cards, letterhead, checks, ticket stock and more — all with the new name Punta Gorda Symphony. "It's all the way down to the sign on our door," Badinger says.

Sarasota graphic designer Paula Murray designed a new logo featuring the musical notation for "repeat." "The maestro liked it," Badinger says. "It's a subtle reminder to come back (laughs)!"

Ponti says the name helps give the symphony an identity of its own. The professional orchestra deserves that, he says.

Punta Gorda Symphony features about 70 professional musicians, including some who previously performed with world-class orchestras such as the Boston Pops and the New York Philharmonic.

"They're retiring down here in Southwest Florida, and I'm lucky enough to get them," Ponti says. "It's like an all-star orchestra."

"The orchestra is playing outstandingly well. And it continues to grow. ... If you've heard this orchestra, it's as good as anyone."

The new website, PGSymphony.org, launched on Oct. 16. The old website, charlottesymphony.com, is still active and links to the new one.

The orchestra performs at 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center. They'll play music by film composer John Williams, including songs from "Star Wars," the Harry Potter series, "E.T.," "Spider-Man" and "Pirates of the Caribbean."

They'll perform next on Nov. 10 at Charlotte Performing Arts Center. The program includes Strauss's "Don Juan," Koussevitzky's "Double Bass Concerto" and Mendelssohn's "Symphony No. 5" (aka "Reformation").

For more information, call 941-205-5996 or visit PGSymphony.org.



*Raffaele Ponti, Music Director
for the Punta Gorda Symphony*