



Arts in the Park

Wolf Trap is a decidedly different national park.

If The Kennedy Center is America's palace for the performing arts, then Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts is its summer home. But this cultural center is more than just a music venue. Tucked away on 130 acres of rolling farmland in Northeast Virginia, Wolf Trap is the nation's only national park dedicated to the performing arts as well as a nonprofit foundation for arts education.

It all started in 1966, when Catherine Filene Shouse, an ardent supporter of the arts, donated 100 acres to the federal government with the stipulation that it be used to create a national park for performing arts. The unique name comes from a 1739 land survey that dubbed the area "Wolftrap" due to the large number of wolves that roamed the area and the bounties that were granted for trapping them.

While the wolves are long gone, every summer evening the lawns of Wolf Trap are overrun by music fans who flock to the majestic Filene Center, the second-largest theatrical stage in the country.

"The Wolf Trap experience, especially at the Filene Center, is very special and very different from what you can get anywhere else," says Graham Binder, manager of Public Relations for the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts. The Foundation partners with the National Park Service to bring a wide range of performances to the outdoor amphitheater.

"We offer a show almost every single night; 100 shows in about 100 days in the summer," he adds. "It's really endless. In addition to the performances, there's a freedom to do your own thing, to bring in your own food and beverages. It's pretty neat."

Top 5 Public Education Programs at Wolf Trap

- 1. A Music Lover's Toolbox: Music Appreciation 101** A multimedia course that explores music styles, theory and history.
- 2. African Drumming: The Djembe Hands-on** Instruction of one of the most prominent West African drumming traditions.
- 3. Artsplay/Baby Artsplay** Early childhood music, drama and movement program for young children and infants and toddlers ages 8 months to 36 months, respectively.
- 4. Group Guitar Class** The fundamentals of guitar as well as its history, notation and traditional musical styles.
- 5. Private Voice and Piano Lessons** Specialized, level-appropriate curriculum for beginning to experienced musicians.

Seating slightly more than 7,000 people (nearly 4,000 under cover and more than 3,000 on the lawn), the Filene Center is surrounded by acres of tall trees and rolling hills, an idyllic setting for summer entertainment.

For a more intimate experience, check out Wolf Trap's other main venue: The Barns. As the name suggests, the two adjacent buildings, one a 382-seat venue and the other a general reception area, are 18th-century barns relocated from Upstate New York.

"You can see the biggest names in show business during the summer out on the lawn," says Binder. "At The Barns, you can still see recognizable acts, but it's indoors and year-round. And the acoustics are phenomenal."

During the summer months, The Barns is also the home of the Wolf Trap Opera

Company, a resident program that attracts the finest artists from across the country. According to Binder, upwards of 13 percent of former Wolf Trap Opera Company residents now perform with New York's prestigious Metropolitan Opera Company.

But while Wolf Trap is popular for its venues, it's also respected throughout the world for its innovative arts-based educational programs. From workshops for educators to residencies in which artists are placed in actual classrooms, the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts is dedicated to early childhood education through the arts.

"We try to ingrain strategies for teaching children about the arts and the value of the arts," says Binder. "It's a passion of everyone here."

From performances by the biggest acts in entertainment to childhood education, and even unique learning opportunities for adults, Wolf Trap fulfills Shouse's dream of bringing people together through the kaleidoscope of arts.

—Rebecca L. Rhoades

IF YOU GO

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TAKE THE METRO

The Wolf Trap Express Bus offers roundtrip service from the West Falls Church Metro station to Wolf Trap for Filene Center performances. Service begins two hours prior to show time and runs every 20 minutes. Roundtrip fare is \$3.10.