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Living

CONTACT US: Beth DeCarbo, features editor / living@ajc.com / 404-526-5009

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INSIDE TODAY

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Was Diana dumped?

Peach Buzz: The pride and joy of Snellville and "American Idol" runner-up has parted ways with her record label.

The crowd rocks to the music of gospel artist Debra Killings outside the Georgia Dome on Thursday during MegaFest, Bishop T.D. Jakes' four-day gathering where spirituality and self-help converge.



RICH ADDICKS / Staff

Multiply fest by mega, get 'church kicked up a notch'

By **BO EMERSON**
bemerson@ajc.com

What is MegaFest? Walk around downtown Atlanta this week, and you can see that it is, if nothing else, big. A gathering organized by Bishop T.D. Jakes, preacher, prolific author and creator of the Woman, Thou Art Loosed franchise, MegaFest is a wildly successful way to attract a predominantly African-American crowd to the city for foot-stomping gospel, self-help seminars and fellowship on a massive scale.

Perhaps 175,000 will come through Atlanta in the course of the four days. But what brings the crowds? Why not stay at the home church?

There's a multiplier effect, say the participants, in which the principle of "wherever two or more are gathered" is expanded by a few orders of magnitude. "It's your local church kicked up a notch," said gospel performer Tina Campbell, half of the duo Mary Mary.

The theme for this year's MegaFest is "It's a

► Please see **MEGAFEST, G6**

Fires alter shelter's ministry to hungry

By **DANNY C. FLANDERS**
dflanders@ajc.com

For years, an Atlanta homeless shelter has come to rely on donations of fresh vegetables from area gardeners for feeding the men who stay there.

But since last month, when someone set fire to Clifton Sanctuary Ministries twice within one week, tomatoes, corn and squash have been the least of the shelter's worries.

"We don't have a kitchen in our temporary location, so we can't cook and have no place to store any food anyhow," says Prince Davies-Venn, Clifton's chaplain and case manager.

Until the shelter — housed for the past 25 years in the former Clifton Presbyterian Church in Lake Claire — can be repaired, he says the 30 clients would like nothing better than to receive cooked vegetables from any gardener willing to take the extra step.

Typically, contributors to a metro food drive, Plant a Row for the Hungry, simply drop off their vegetables throughout the summer and fall at sites like Clifton Sanctuary Ministries.

► Please see **FOOD DRIVE, G6**

Attendance off at classical ASO concerts

By **PIERRE RUHE**
pruhe@ajc.com

While the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra managed to keep its \$29 million budget balanced last season, attendance for its classical concerts was down 6 percent, according to new figures tabulated by the ASO.

This comes after four years of slight but steady audience growth, averaging almost 3 percent a season.

Like most of its peer ensembles, the ASO is struggling to balance artistic ambitions with economic realities and a fast-changing cultural landscape.

The figures reflect only the ASO's classical main season, not its pops or Chastain Park concerts. Total box office (for classical, pops and Chastain) makes up about 40 percent of the orchestra's budget.

Ticket prices for classical concerts are unlikely to have made a significant impact on the decline, says ASO vice president for marketing Charlie Wade.

► Please see **ASO, G6**



Getting heard: The old ticket to the top — signing with a major label — is no longer the only path to fame. Artists are turning to technology in their quest to build an audience.

By **NICK MARINO**
nmarino@ajc.com
and **SONIA MURRAY**
smurray@ajc.com

The best-selling rapper in the country is Atlanta's Young Jeezy, who Billboard magazine says sold 172,000 copies of his major-label debut in its first week in stores.

How did a new artist manage to do so well so quickly? Because he's been releasing music independently for years, building his street-level reputation until powerful hip-hop label Def Jam couldn't ignore him. According to Def Jam, Jeezy and his local label, Corporate Thugz Entertainment, have sold more than 200,000 mixtapes (underground compilations), making Jeezy a rising star before his official record

came out.

For most of music's recorded history, the path to stardom has remained the same: Play club gigs, record a demo and pitch it to record labels. If you're good — and lucky — some executive will hear your demo or catch your performance and offer you a deal. Then that label will try to get radio stations to play your songs so that people will buy your records.

That's still the way it usually works. But today, artists are increasingly finding alternate routes up the ladder of success.

"I think the independent artist now has such an incredible amount of choices," says Kathy Gates, the manager of next week's Atlantis Music Conference + Festival, which tries to help break independent acts. "Whereas before, it was

just 'Do whatever you can to get with a major label.'"

That's largely thanks to technology.

The Billboard R&B /Hip-Hop Conference on Thursday devoted a whole workshop to the digital revolution and the opportunities it presents, things like Internet radio, MP3 blogs, ringtones, online communities such as MySpace and such cutting-edge Webzines as Pitchfork.

These new ways aren't likely to make an artist rich, but that's OK.

"For an emerging band, it's really more about exposure," says Antony Bruno, the digital and mobile music editor for Billboard magazine. "But when you get exposure and you get signed, you can get an advance — and there's your money."

► Turn to G6 for the ways artists these days are getting that elusive exposure

BOOK BUZZ



LOUIE FAVORITE / Staff

Jim Dale — the audiobook voice of some 200 "Harry Potter" characters — doesn't just read, he gets into the part recently at Barnes & Noble in Alpharetta.

He's Harry, Hermione, Hagrid, too

By **DON O'BRIANT**
dobriant@ajc.com

When Jim Dale talks, people listen. Especially if they're Harry Potter fans.

The 69-year-old actor is the voice of the boy wizard on the audiobook versions of J.K. Rowling's novels. He's also the voice of Ron, Hermione, Professor Dumbledore and every other character in the books.

Dale has created some 200 voices for the series, including 96 for the just-released "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" (Random House, \$50 for cassettes, \$75 for CDs). And he's in the Guinness Book of Records for creating the most number of voices in an audiobook: 134 for "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix."

"It helps if you have an ear for voices and accents," Dale said on a recent visit to Barnes & Noble in Alpharetta, where more than 100 kids and their parents gathered to hear him read.

"I was a stand-up comic for a few years, traveling to cities and small towns in England," he says. "I listened to all the accents. I suppose it's something that comes naturally to me."

Dale creates some of the voices based on Rowling's descriptions. Others are derived from friends, relatives or people he meets. The late actor John Houseman's authoritative headmaster

► Please see **DALE, G3**

COMING SUNDAY IN ARTS & BOOKS

► Review of **"Shakespeare by Another Name,"** an investigation into the identity of the real Bard.

► Review of **Gwyn Hyman Rubio's** novel "The Woodsman's Daughter."

