A WIRELESS, handheld electronic music guide that tracks a concert in real time is being touted as the latest thing for classical music audiences.

The Concert Companion, developed under the auspices of the Kansas City Symphony, provides an experience akin to museum audio tours except it is a visual enhancement, instead of audio.

The concept is the brainchild of Roland Valliere, a former executive director of the Kansas City Symphony, who stepped down from that post two years ago.

The Concert Companion displays a sort of musical road map during a performance. As the music begins, a technician with a laptop computer pushes a button at set points in the score and the information is transmitted to the handheld devices.

Users can turn off the backlit devices at any time.

The gadget, which assists symphony listeners with real-time musical commentary and live video of the performance, has been used experimentally by the Kansas City Symphony, Aspen Music Festival, Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic, as well as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and other groups.

Barry Goldberg, chief executive of Opera Glass Networks, says the company developed all aspects of the software and hardware technology for Concert Companion.

Our management has been building personalised media systems, principally in professional sports venues (NFL, NBA, thoroughbred racing and other spectator/entertainment venues), Goldberg says.

The device appeals to people who have little experience with classical music, while experienced concert-goers can use Concert Companion as an interpretive aid for new compositions, Goldberg says.

"Users feel more connected to the piece. It helps people become better listeners," he says.

The business model is to rent it to audience members during a concert and to have the machine configured so it can only be used for its intended purpose.

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