

**FUNWORLD AUGUST 2010**

Get Them Up Off Their Seats

Interaction with the audience is a key element of new live entertainment

by Marion Hixon

From skating Snoopys and world-renowned magicians to battling X-Men and a nostalgic throwback to the TV shows like "Gilligan's Island," the industry's live entertainment offerings in 2010 showcase both traditional song-and-dance talent and special effects and performances like LED lights, martial arts, and flame throwers. Whether stunt focused or heavy on the song and dance, all successful shows had one thing in common: guest interaction.



"We're trying to be mindful of today's audience and give them an experience they can interact with," says Joey Wartnerchane, an effects designer at RWS and Associates, which designed "Snoopy's Hot Summer Lights" at Worlds of Fun in Kansas City, Missouri, and "Snoopy's Starlight Spectacular" at Kings Island in Mason, Ohio. Tarrah Hirsch, the senior operations producer at New York-based RWS, mentions entertainment's role in providing something for the whole family, as grandparents may not be keen on riding a roller coaster.

Guests actually play a role in "Rock Band Live," an audition-based RWS show traveling to Cedar Fair parks this year, as they have the opportunity to try out for an onstage audience built band. Wartnerchane, creative director for the show, says the auditions, which take place throughout the day, utilize audience members to their full potential.

Similarly, in Busch Gardens Williamsburg's "Celtic Fyre," guests are placed in the middle of the action, as viewing tables have been built at the same height as the stage, which extends into the audience. "I think what makes "Celtic Fyre" stand out is its completely immersive environment," says Phil Raybourn, senior production manager at Busch Gardens Williamsburg.

Lisa Rau, director of publicity at Silver Dollar City, says a successful show also relies on the relationship between a performer and the audience. "A live performance is dynamic; it ebbs and flows in response to the communication that's taking place between the artist and the audience," Rau says. "An audience member could sneak out in the middle of a movie and the dynamic would go on unchanged, but if an audience member leaves during a live performance, you can bet there will be a noticeable shift in the dynamic of the artist."

Here's a look at just some of the new shows this season.

'World of Color'

Disney California Adventure

Walt Disney Parks and Resorts is renowned for its nighttime entertainment, so to have a show debut this summer that's being called the best spectacle the company's ever done says a lot.

"World of Color" debuted in June on Disney California Adventure's Paradise Bay. The 25-minute spectacular combines water, fire, and light with classic Disney films and characters; some of the footage was taken from movies, while other moments were created especially for this show.



THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

These animations are shown via high-definition projectors on a 380-foot-long water screen, while nearly 1,200 fountains shoot water up to 200 feet high and mingle with flame and laser effects to round out a feast for the senses. The show even incorporates new LED lighting installed on the recently refurbished "Mickey's Fun Wheel," which rotates along Paradise Bay's shoreline.

In development for more than five years, "World of Color" runs multiple times per night at Disney California Adventure; pent-up demand was so high, the park installed Disney's first Fastpass queuing system for a nighttime show to help manage the crowds. www.disneyland.com/worldofcolor

**'Celtic Fyre'**

Busch Gardens Williamsburg

This season, the production staff at Busch Gardens Williamsburg introduced "Celtic Fyre" and transformed a theater into an Irish Inn for a wedding reception scene. With help from Irish choreographer Marcus Maloney and Irish composer Colm O'Foglu, performers intrigue and engage guests with traditional storytelling, live music, and Irish dance. "We also incorporate American-style tap, musical theater Broadway style moments, and pigeons that fly over the heads of the audience members," says Phil Raybourn, senior production manager at the park. www.buschgardens.com/va

the video game demographic to create a show that forms a band from the audience and pits them against a predetermined "house band" four to five times a day. "It's not just about sitting and watching the show," says Joey Wartnerchane, creative director for "Rock Band Live." "It's about people getting up and cheering for their friends on stage." He feels "Rock Band Live" boils down to three core elements: community, competition, and a moment to shine. "In the game you can be a rock and roll star," Wartnerchane says. "This is taking it even further." www.cedarfair.com

'Sea Lion Splash'

Darien Lake Theme Park

Four rescued sea lions star in the comical show that brings guests up close to the animals and displays their intelligence, charisma, and comedic antics. Trainers relay a message of conservation while the sea lions play, mimic Michael Jackson's famous moonwalk, dance in conga lines, and imitate a shark swimming across the water's surface. "Sea Lion Splash has had a huge impact on our guests," says Cassandra Okon, public relations supervisor at the park. "We have had amazing shows here in the past, but the sea lions bring something very different and have definitely won everyone's hearts." www.godarienlake.com



DARIEN LAKE THEME PARK RESORT

park's CEO. After the SpongeBob storyline, an even more advanced laser show plays, celebrating the "artistry of light." www.dreamworld.com.au

**'Illuminate'**

Dreamworld

In April, Dreamworld in Queensland, Australia, debuted its Laserequest show in an outdoor arena with water fountains that created more than 13-foot-high screens. The show stars crowd-favorite SpongeBob Square Pants and his friend Patchy the Pirate, with high-powered lasers creating moving character formations on the screens and fog machines, flame throwers, and water cannons rounding out the special effects. "The show lifts the SpongeBob story from a two-dimensional TV cartoon into a 3-D world," says Noel Dempsey, the show's CEO. "It's a celebration of the "artistry of light." www.dreamworld.com.au

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'Azul: Lure of the Sea'

SeaWorld San Antonio

The new show takes place at the park's 3,000-seat Beluga Stadium. The show features colorful costumes, original music, enhanced sound and lighting, and a cast of 22 high divers, synchronized swimmers, aerialists, bungee artists, and animal trainers, along with Pacific white-sided dolphins and graceful beluga whales. www.seaworld.com/sanantonio

'FantaSEA'

John G. Shedd Aquarium

Beluga whales, red-tailed penguins, and Pacific white-sided dolphins headline this aquatic show performed from the perspective of a young girl's experiences and emotions with sea life. "Not many show creators get the opportunity to work with both animals and humans in the same theater space," says Bryan Schuetz, show creator and senior director of planning and design at Shedd. Schuetz scripted Broadway shows and live productions for the inspiration behind "Fanta-SEA." "It's been a tremendous honor to create a mission-driven show that creatively engages and educates our audience, while providing each guest with a never-before-seen multispecies, multimedia experience." Accompanied by a musical score, performers sing and dive throughout the show, and audience members get up close and personal with sea lions and penguins. www.sheddaquarium.org

'Peter Pan'

Parque de la Costa

Presented on two stages at this Argentine park's outdoor theater, one scene depicts Neverland deep in greenery and colorful flowers, and another shows the evil Captain Hook in a giant moving ship. "We are constantly in search of shows that leave a positive message on the audience," says Barbara Caram, adding that visitors will be in awe of Peter Pan flying overhead. www.parquedelacosta.com.ar



PARQUE DE LA COSTA



PUY DU FOU

'The Secret of the Lance' and 'Organs of Fire'

Puy du Fou

The French park that specializes in live entertainment added two new productions this year—"The Secret of the Lance," a medieval adventure, and "Organs of Fire," a night show where performers appear to skate on water. At an expense of €3.5 million (US\$4.3M), "The Secret of the Lance" chronicles a young shepherdess meeting her knight right before he leaves for battle. The score blends medieval instruments and sound design for a fast-moving, modern production.

"Organs of Fire" follows a love story between a pianist and his violin-playing muse, accompanied by classic compositions by Mozart, Bach, and Bizet. Water nymphs, fairies, ballerinas, and goblins round out the mystical cast, and special effects include a golden harp and organs that bellow fire and water. Puy du Fou spent €2.5 million (US\$3.07) producing the show and commissioned Prague's philharmonic orchestra and choirs to adapt and record the music. www.puydufou.com

'Snoopy's Hot Summer Lights'

Worlds of Fun

More than 2 million LED lights illuminate the light and sound show throughout the Africa and Europe sections of Worlds of Fun. Guests not only view the Peanuts characters among outdoor settings, they can also participate in summer themed games including picnics, campfires, and sports. The \$1 million show complements the display with an audio soundtrack throughout the attraction. All LED lights are low energy and mercury free, which reduces carbon dioxide emissions. www.worldsoffun.com

'Circo Brazil'

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

For 30 minutes of boardwalk entertainment, "Circo Brazil" at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in California combines martial arts, freestyle soccer stunts, fire limbo, and acrobatics. "We have a large Brazilian community in our area," says promotions manager Karley Pope. "They're big fans of soccer and capoeira, a Brazilian martial art and dance." Brown Entertainment, which produced "Circo Brazil," is also responsible for the Boardwalk's "Cirque Magnifique" show from 2009, which won an IAAPA Big E Award for Best Sports Show. Pope says the show's draw to the boardwalk plays a large role in the attraction's attendance, as free summer entertainment is often what attracts guests to the park. www.beachboardwalk.com

'Die Rückkehr der Magie'

Phantasialand

The magic show concentrates heavily on mysteries surrounding the number seven and transforms the park's winter garden into a mysterious land between Heaven and Earth. German magician Jan Rouven, who was recently named Entertainer of the Year by the International Magician's Society, pairs his illusions with a story of twin brothers separated at birth—one of whom was drawn to dark magic. Once one brother begins searching for the other, the stage is set for a dark and mischievous tale. www.phantasialand.de

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RUNNING THE SHOW AT SILVER DOLLAR CITY

Every year during the nine-month operating season at Silver Dollar City (SDC) in Branson, Missouri, 175 different live shows are presented, totalling 10,300 performances. Roughly two years of preparation is invested in each show before it's ready to open for the public. This year, the park introduced "Chris Perondi's Stunt Dog Experience" to guests. Brad Schroeder, director of entertainment and events at SDC properties, talks to FUNWORLD about the preparation behind the final product.

How do you decide on shows at SDC?

Every show on our stage arrives here one of three ways: We create and produce the show in-house, we book a self-contained show, or we collaborate with the artist(s) on the overall presentation. The most important contribution to the entertainment and events staff makes toward the success of the show is the knowledge of our audience.

How do you work with performers to create the best product?

In all aspects of our business, relationships are the glue that bonds everything together. Whether we're dealing with talent, agents, designers, directors, or support personnel, we stress that while talents and skills are important, so are attitude and personality.

How important is it to involve guests in SDC's shows?

All of our shows involve the audience; sometimes literally, but always figuratively because the rapport between the artist and the audience is intrinsically a communicative activity. This communication process is the essence of live entertainment ... the actor does something onstage and the audience reacts, then the actor responds to that reaction—it's a give-and-take communication. www.silverdollarcity.com