

# Living the dream

The Sentosa theatre in Singapore had to be decked out with a dazzling array of engineering and special effects to do justice to a production of *Voyage de la Vie*

Singapore's new integrated resort, Resorts World Sentosa, has notched up plenty of records – the world's largest Marine Life Park, Southeast Asia's first and only Universal Studios park, the nation's first casino, and now Singapore's first-ever home-grown resident circus spectacular.

Installation designer Theatre Projects Consultants, and show producer The Generating Company, turned to worldwide stage engineering specialist Stage Technologies for bespoke engineering, rigging and automation of the purpose-built Festive Grand Theatre. Stage Technologies also provided control systems for the Hollywood Theatre in the complex's Universal Park. With a long history of working on purpose-built resident theatres with Cirque du Soleil and Dragone, Stage Technologies had both the foresight and experience essential to help the Singaporean venue create its own distinctive style of pageantry from the ground up.

Designed by DPA Architects, the 1,600-seat Festive Grand Theatre is a plenary hall style venue, approximately 4,000m<sup>2</sup>, situated in a chamber beneath the orchid-themed Festive Hotel, and home to *Voyage de la Vie*. The show was conceived by Mark Fisher as creative producer and Phil Mckinley as show director, and sets were designed by Ray Winkler. Stage Technologies has worked on bringing numerous Mark Fisher designs to life, including the award-winning Tree of Prosperity at the Wynn Hotel in Macau and Las Vegas resident casino shows *KÀ* and *Viva Elvis* by Cirque du Soleil.

*Voyage de la Vie* played its world première on 2 July and follows a boy's journey to find his purpose. His adventure takes him into realms

where he encounters metaphorical characters representing themes such as Love and Death, played by contortionists, jugglers, rope aerialists, crossbow artists, balance performers and illusionists.

Engaging over 40 cast members from 16 countries, *Voyage de la Vie* is not short of quick-fire action and electrifying stunts and needs a theatre automation system that can keep pace. The whole-house system includes performer flying winches and point hoists, multi-line winches carrying up to 1,400kg each, lighting bars, curtain tracks, scenery tracks, lifts, three stage trucks, three revolving carousels, two Nomad portable control desks and two Solo G3 handheld consoles. The grid of the venue is exceptionally low as the theatre space is situated below a swimming pool, meaning that there is no fly tower for scenery storage, so tracks feature heavily in the stage design.

## Automated tracking

The opening 'office block' sequence uses automated tracking to bring in two 'buildings' from stage left and right, which, along with a flown set piece, perform a sequence of choreographed movements while acrobats perform on the moving platforms, culminating in spectacular pyrotechnic displays. Several cross-stage overhead tracks carry a variety of rapid-change scenic elements. A substage lift along with a drop-and-slide trap are frequently used for dramatic exits and entrances, as well as for lifting heavy props onstage, including a piano and a motorbike.

Fisher's dream-like sets are constantly dissolving and reforming and, to help create this



The main stage at Resorts World Sentosa in Singapore



Voyage de la Vie finale on the Festive Grand Theatre stage © 2010 Resorts World at Sentosa Pte Ltd



impression of fluidity, the power flying system is used to bring in a miscellany of set pieces: an avenue of Chinese poles, the Crystal Cat's crescent moon throne, a dragon's head that drops pearls for the jugglers, and the crossbow 'hoop of fire' that fires flaming arrows in a death-defying William-Tell scene.

Of course, for a circus-themed show, flexible performer flying was high on the system specification list, as trapeze, hoop, rope, silk and strap aerialists are omnipresent throughout the boy's rite of passage. His ascension into the other world offers a unique performer flying moment, in which the boy, suspended from the end of a pivoting golden ladder, is flown out to the theatre grid. This is a complex timing issue for the operators, as the arc of the bottom of the ladder produces a considerable increase in speed as the set piece travels – a speed change that needs to be matched exactly by the point hoist that physically lifts the performer playing the boy. Another distinctive performer flying routine is the 'battle' scene, in which each 'warrior' closely mirrors the other's movements on dual straps; if either one is just one fraction out of sync, the knock-on effect would throw their intricate combat dance out of harmony. The battle choreography was precision-programmed using eChameleon automation software and 3D visualisation tool Sculptor and controlled using both Nomad desks.

But the jewel in *Voyage de la Vie's* crown is the high-tech stage machinery referred to as the 'skating carousel'. This consists of one 'half pipe' and two 'quarter-pipe' laser-guided Explorer stage trucks, the largest of which is 14.5m long and 9.5m high and weighs in at 7,000kg. In the show's finale, these three discrete trucks join together seamlessly mid-stage to form a composite stage within the stage – a 14,000kg, rotating platform.

Stage Technologies Explorer stage wagon first broke ground in London's West End in 1994,

**Nomad control desks at *Voyage de la Vie* (above left); skating carousel steelwork in production at Delstar Engineering (above right)**



Aurelia Cats © 2010 Resorts World at Sentosa Pte Ltd



driving scenery towers onstage in Martin Guerre. Now a far cry from its first prototype, Explorer 2 has been reinvented for the new technological age of theatre – a cutting-edge wireless truck with a positioning accuracy of around 10mm. Modern trucks are no longer bound by the constraints of straight lines and right angles; Explorer 2, for example, consists of two steerable drive wheel cassettes built into the two ends of each truck, allowing it to be steered around curves.

The perfect complement to the free-form truck is Sculptor software, which allows operators to plot direct point-to-point lines with translational and rotational targets and also to generate curves, rotations and speed profiles. This enabled set designers to play with a whole host of creative concepts such as the 'Harley spin', in which a truck carries a lift and revolve for a Harley and handstand act; the spinning truck and upper platform are co-ordinated to keep the handstand artist and the Harley continuously facing the audience.

### Specialist contractors

Paul Cockle, line producer on the project for The Generating Company, talked about the role of the various specialist contractors in helping Resorts World Sentosa to bring the show to life. "As with all the best collaborations, *Voyage de la Vie* grew out of technical teams from different disciplines all coming together on common ground," he said. "Stage Technologies and Delstar Engineering designed and manufactured the winches, rigging, automated scenery and all the large structural elements of the set. Terry Murphy scenery completed these large scenery items and White Light installed the lighting and sound equipment. Arina Hogan, based in Singapore, also delivered a number of scenic items that weren't automated and we were all delighted to work with them.

"The Generating Company ran an exacting procurement process for the project and it was great to see that groups that began life in the UK are running with the front of the crowd competing in international services, all the way from design and creation through to production engineering and installation. The show is playing to standing ovations and continues to develop as a world-class international production." ■

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