

# Beyond The Third Dimension

by Scott Lehane

**M**useums, amusement parks, zoos and science centers are always looking for fresh new ways to engage their visitors—to immerse them, entertain them and maybe even make them think about issues in a different way. One popular approach gaining traction recently is the use of 3D films. And with the proliferation of high-quality digital projectors, the cost of building a small to mid-sized 3D theater is starting to come down.

It's a niche market that El Segundo, CA-based systems integrator Edwards Technology has been playing in for 20 years. The company recently entered into an alliance with Panasonic and nWave Pictures to jointly market what it calls a 4D HD Theater system.

Based on a digital 4D theater attraction that the company installed at Legoland theme parks in Denmark, England, California and Germany earlier this year, Edwards Technologies and Panasonic have developed a 3D digital cinema package. The package includes two DLP projectors, a dual-channel HD server, a 5.1 surround sound system (or better), and a high-gain silver screen by Stewart Filmscreen designed to maximize polarization (which the company calls "the secret ingredient in 3D").

Viewers wear anaglyph glasses to get the 3D effect. But where does the fourth dimension come in? "In some cases, we've added special effects for what we call the fourth dimension," explained company CEO Brian Edwards. "We've done different effects—wind, smoke, water mists and sprays and specialty lighting—things that come off the screen so that it further sells the 3D effect."

Edwards added, "When I introduce myself, I say that I deal with the presentation market. I don't think of us as your average AV company. We do things most don't even consider."

For Edwards, that tends to include being an integral part of the conceptual development team. "We kind of help figure it all out," he said. "Nowadays, projects have tons of new technology in them, and when the clients realize that, they bring us in very early. So we sit through all of the phases of development that sometimes happen a year before a typical AV contractor would even get involved."

"And then there's a lot of service in terms of design engineering, sightline studies, installation and training," he added. "Then we stay with the project for a while afterwards to train the hosts how to run our theaters. But now, as opposed to it being a 'one off' every time, it's a package that we're offering these folks."

And the package idea seems to be taking off. Since announcing its alliance with Panasonic and nWave in June, Edwards revealed that the company has just signed a contract to install its seventh theater for the Association of Science-Technology Centers' annual

The first Panasonic Digital 3D Experience has opened at the Broadway at the Beach entertainment complex in the heart of Myrtle Beach, SC. There, high-definition, 3D video is displayed using Panasonic's new 3-chip DLP-based projectors, Edwards Technologies' HD media server and 3D content from nWave Pictures.



systems  
on stage



convention in Minneapolis in November.

In addition, the company has been called upon to do numerous temporary installations for Paramount to show its new 3D *SpongeBob* movie.

Temporary installations are something the company has down pat, taking as little as six hours to set up for a screening. "If we wanted to do a permanent installation, it wouldn't take more than a couple more days to get in a bigger screen or find some way to permanently rig the projectors from the ceiling," Edwards said. "We've been doing very well with these shows that Paramount has us do. Some of them we've even set up in less than four hours."

Earlier this summer, the company installed a permanent system at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, CA, which is showing nWave Pictures' latest release, *PandaVision*. Produced in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, the animated film takes audiences on a journey to the most environmentally sensitive areas of the planet to explore the challenges of habitat preservation.

For Edwards, nWave's participation in the alliance is crucial. It's one thing to build 3D theaters, but there has to be a continuous stream of content to play in them. nWave is one of the world's largest suppliers of 3D films, and the alliance ensures customers that they'll have a supply of content to play in their theaters. Four new 3D titles will be released by nWave through the end of the year.

Because of this intimate relationship between selling a theater system and supplying content, Edwards is also developing technologies to help filmmakers in the 3D production process. "We're putting a lot of effort into 3D film producers to help them," he stated. "What we've developed is not just a display system, but we've developed some tools to help them see what they're doing—getting output out of their computer and onto a screen."

The company is also in the process of developing a 3D, dual-camera rig that will enable filmmakers to capture 3D video live on set. "It's more of a partnership where we're doing it all together, [but for the customers] it's one group," Edwards revealed. "So, when people sign a partnership contract with us they are getting films; they're getting hardware; they're getting service; they're getting everything—even marketing assistance. What we are really trying to do for the end-user is give them a space that makes money for them."

So is there room for growth in the market? "It's a great niche for us," Edwards said. "And we're getting a lot of calls about it, so I think that there's growth there. And there are all sorts of uses for it. I think it's a great branding vehicle for corporations that want to display their stuff in a new way. It offers a different way to articulate a brand."

Scott Lehane is a writer based in White Plains, NY.

## The Rise And Fall Of A Magic Industry

by Steven J. Thorburn

**I**n television commercials and newspaper ads this summer, all of the major theme/amusement parks were offering "two for one" or some other form of discounted admission price. As evidence of one of the first precepts discussed in this column, how the themed entertainment industry is supported by discretionary income, the recession that we are just now supposedly coming out of has put a severe crimp on the discretionary money available for trips to major parks.

When speaking with a family with two teenagers, the parents remarked that while their two boys had fun at the park, both said they were glad they went early. That was in reference to the start of season when prices were lower, since some rides were still being brought on line for the season. Even the boys felt the experience would not be worth the \$40 per person it would cost later in the summer; they wanted the money for their X-Box games!

The pendulum is swinging back, in that in-home entertainment is pulling bodies and dollars away from out-of-home entertainment. The revolution continues.

Other recent comments overhead: "The magic is lost," one parent stated after two days of being immersed in a park's branding. They felt they did not have the same experience that they used to.

So where, in this global economy, do we see projects happening? There are three major parks approved for China.

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# Street Smarts

Legendary Minneapolis Club Revamps Mic Collection

Infamous live rock venue, First Avenue/7th Street Entry, immortalized in Prince's 1984 movie classic, *Purple Rain*, recently revamped its live mic collection with numerous microphones from Electro-Voice.

Known throughout the country as Minneapolis' premier live rock venue—mentioned in the same breath as NYC's CBGB's and L.A.'s The Whiskey—First Avenue/7th Street Entry hosts more than 1,500 acts a year on its three stages: the Main Room stage, VIP Lounge and 7th Street Entry. The latter stage, known as the club's side bar on 7th Street, features a weekly "new band night" as well as hosting national touring bands who prefer a smaller, more intimate venue for their performances. Stories abound about talent first seen at 7th

Street before they "made it big": the White Stripes, the Replacements, Soul Asylum, Hüsker Dü, the Cows, etc.

So what makes the 7th Street Entry unique? Well, for one, it only holds about 200 patrons at full capacity; although the venue has a kind of Encyclopedia of Rock 'n' Roll history, it is not large. Intense volume levels are also a trademark of the venue. Because of the SPL, the FOH engineer (inside a barricade of chicken wire) has a most difficult job of making the band and the room sound good. A bit of psychology enters in when dealing with the bands no doubt, as does a fair amount of equipment that is designed specifically for high-SPL environments. Enter the Electro-Voice ND967.

Designed specifically for high-SPL environments, the Electro-Voice ND967 is a favorite among monitor engineers, as well as musicians who favor clear, loud monitor mixes.



## systems on stage

▲ Performing at 7th Street Entry's New Band Night event, the Threat puts the EV mics to the test.

FOH engineer Bill Batson swears by the EV ND868 mic. ▶



With top-notch gain-before-feedback and vocal clarity, the EV ND967 has solved much of 7th Street Entry's problems with feedback. FOH engineer Bill Batson commented, "Right off the bat, the EV ND967, when A/B'd with other mics, is much hotter and its feedback rejection is far better than any competitive mics. What that really means in a room like 7th Street Entry is that I can run the monitors at 20-30 percent less the level than prior to spec'ing the ND967. I can always get what I want from the mic. I've been using it religiously."

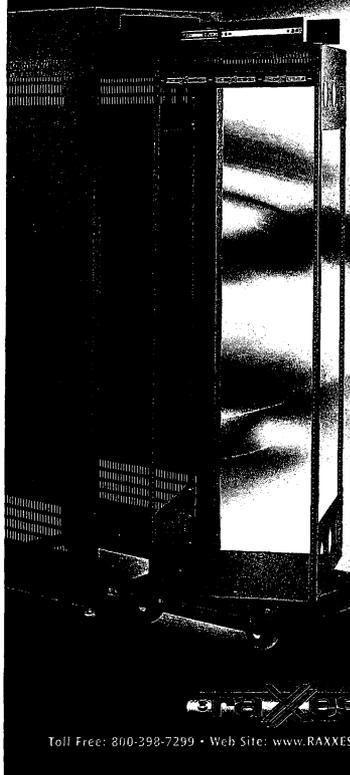
First Avenue/7th Street Entry also expanded its live mic arsenal to include several ND468, ND868, Cobalt Co4 and RE200 mics. Batson commented on the other EV models: "The ND868 has a whole bunch of usable low end, and I'm running it flat. You

don't need EQ. It really provides a fantastic kick-drum sound. The EV ND468 is also great for all of the positions that the swivel-head allows. I can get in really close to toms, even the snare, and I've also used it on the entire backline—guitars, bass, etc. One of the real surprises I've discovered from EV is the Cobalt Co4, which is hot and flat. It's wonderful on guitars and snare. And as far as condensers are concerned, the RE200 on cymbals and percussion is great."

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## industry

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These projects are being designed here in the U.S. through the design development phase. Chinese firms will then prepare construction documents, bid and build the parks. Other than these parks, it seems that Disney, Universal, Cedar Fair and Six Flags are all completing small upgrades and refreshes of parks and attractions while waiting to see how and when things will turn around. We hear rumblings that the majors are looking at new expansions, but they are still regrouping after the last big push of the late 1990s expansions.

A review of the job boards for two major themed entertainment newsletters shows that one lists four openings for staff (all senior administrators for museums and civic centers) and the other has multiple

RFPs for the design of city master plans for downtown redevelopments. There are no listings for traditional themed attractions, one more indicator that everything is moving very slowly. The only local action we see right now is the initial planning of small regional family centers, retail upgrades and retrenching plans as we come out of the current economic environment.

It will be interesting to see how the IAAPA tradeshow in Orlando this November is attended and received. It is one of the first tradeshows in the new Eastern Building of the Orlando Convention Center; let's hope it is the start of a fresh revolution of the industry.

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