

Award for Outstanding Achievement

Believe

WHAT'S NEW, SHAMU?

by Mitch Rily

Over the past 42 years, SeaWorld San Diego has been making the dreams of millions of guests come true by showcasing some of the most amazing, exotic, and entertaining underwater creatures from around the world. It is no surprise then that the designers and trainers at SeaWorld San Diego would join forces with their sister SeaWorld parks in San Antonio, TX, and Orlando, FL, to make one of their own dreams come true: a brand new state-of-the-art show featuring the icon of all three parks, Shamu. After two years of planning, training, composing, designing, and rebuilding, the newest show in the Shamu Stadiums has trainers and guests alike excited to "Believe."

From the audience, it is easy to see the joy that surrounds the entire show. Families huddle together in anticipation, ponchos and towels dotting the lower tiers of the seats - the Splash Zone. As the 5,500 seats begin to fill, kids and parents alike peer through the transparent tank walls, waiting.

Everyone's attention is drawn to the center of the aquatic arena where a new bridge spans the length of the pool. Designed by Oceaneering Entertainment Services, Inc., the stainless steel bridge adds a second level to the trainer's stage and features four huge, moving video screens. Each screen, 10 feet wide by 20 feet high, is designed to spin and swivel throughout the show, seemingly dancing along with the music. When the four screens become one, audience members can watch the action on a 20-by-40 foot screen, or later, as the screens rotate horizontally, a panoramic 10-by-80 foot screen that stretches across the stadium.

On both ends of the bridge, waterfalls cascade down over the entrances of the pool. And rising above everything, standing three stories tall and extending 80 feet across, is the world's largest whale tail. Covered with images of the world's most famous killer whale, the centerpiece of the stadium foreshadows the water-tossing tail slap that highlights every show, the Sham Slam.

Cameras and lights set both above and below the water are positioned to capture the action

and provide the audience with up-close shots and awe-inspiring views. A brand-new sound system presents an added dynamic to the show, with sound as clear as the water and beautiful music that flows throughout the performance. Composed by Christopher Ward with lyrical pieces by John Stothers, the score of "Believe" was created specially to synchronize behaviors and music into a seamless performance.

The video introduction of the show starts with a tribute to all the men and women who serve in the U.S. and coalition armed forces. Created as special thanks from the Busch Entertainment Corporation, the operating company of all three SeaWorld parks, "Here's to the Heroes" speaks to the US founding principle of individual freedom. This is followed by a video declaring SeaWorld's commitment to Mother Earth, showing many of the creatures great and small the park is dedicated to protect and conserve.

The final video begins with the story of a young boy and his childhood fascination with killer whales. A dream gives him the chance to fulfill his biggest aspiration, to be face to face with one of the black-and-white beauties of the deep. As the audience watches the screens, the center of the pool comes to life. A magnificent killer whale erupts from the still surface of the water, timed perfectly with a soaring whale on the screen. The show literally leaps off the screen into the real world of the stadium, and "Believe" has really begun.

And then come all the whales.

It is hard to capture in words the majesty and grace of a 3-ton animal flying through the air, one of the deadliest creatures of the water—it is a killer whale, after all—flipping and playing with its friends, later rubbing noses with its trainer. Every breach brings cheers and applause, and every splash produces shrieks of laughter (and

often sends a stream of parents fleeing up the stadium to avoid the aquatic onslaught). There are back flips, barrel rolls, belly flops, and tails waving and splashing all over. With over 100 different behaviors, dozens of which have been recently identified and are brand-new to the SeaWorld shows, the whales dance and swim, jump and play all over the pool with their talented and daring trainers.

At the end of the 25-minute performance, a single whale and a trainer finish up on the beaching platform at the front of the pool. They are both waving and smiling (yes, the whale is actually smiling) and the audience is delighted and possibly damp. From the perspective of the trainers and producers at SeaWorld, the show is yet another amazing success. From the audience's eye, it is a dazzling display of technical skill across many fields to create one amazing entertainment adventure. And as Shamu's trainer quotes at the end of the show, its entire production is larger-than-life proof that anything is possible when you "Believe."



Sea World's dazzling new show, Believe.



Mitch Rily is a contributing writer for InPark magazine. He lives in Monrovia, CA, with his wife, Kim, and newborn daughter, Samantha. He loves the amusement park industry and takes advantage of every story he can where he just has to ride another roller coaster or thrill ride. He looks forward to the day when Samantha will be tall enough to enjoy the rides and shows with him.