

DELIGHTFULLY DISNEY



by Martin Palicki

You might think that Disney's wet and wild offerings can only be found in the company's two waterparks in Orlando. But lately Disney has been bringing water to all of its parks, in various forms of entertainment, and it has been earning the company accolades for innovation and design. Finding Nemo, The Musical brings the undersea world to life in a live stage show in Disney's Animal Kingdom park at Walt Disney World Resort. The Legend of Mythica is an energetic show that rises out of the water at Tokyo DisneySea. And the Muppet Mobile Lab, currently making its home at the Hong Kong Disneyland park, brings two popular Muppet characters to life in a roving rocket ship that interacts with guests (and occasionally sprays them with water). All three projects, though vastly different in their implementation, draw from Disney's legendary ability to delight and entertain guests.

Nemo: Fishing for Fun

While Disney has successfully made a name for itself in creating Broadway shows based on its movie franchises with such hits as *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, Finding Nemo The Musical marks the first time the company has taken a movie that originally contained no musical score and turned it into a show. Furthermore, Nemo debuted not in New York, but inside Disney's Animal Kingdom, in Orlando, FL.

Just because the show plays inside the gates of a theme park doesn't mean it mimics a typical park production. In fact, the show has many ties to Broadway, including designer Michael Curry, who created the puppets for the stage version of *Lion King*, and original songs by Tony-award winning Robert Lopez and Kristen

Anderson-Lopez. The production feels much like a Broadway musical thanks to its lavish and extensive set, fully orchestrated soundtrack, professional lighting and projection effects, and its talented cast of performers.

Finding Nemo the Musical is essentially a 30-minute reduction of *Finding Nemo*, the movie, with all the familiar characters making an appearance. Principal characters such as Marlin, Nemo and Dory are represented by live performers operating animated puppets. Some puppets are larger than life, such as Crush, the cool sea turtle who is nearly the size of a Volkswagen, and Nigel the pelican, who stands 22 feet tall. Other characters are portrayed by a diverse array of puppetry styles, including rod, Bunraku and shadow.

"It was our goal to bring the undersea Nemo characters to Disney's Animal Kingdom in a live setting in a way that captures what is truly special about the film," said Jay Rasulo, chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. "This production

- *Finding Nemo The Musical*
- *The Legend of Mythica*
- *Muppet Mobile Lab*

has met that challenge in a dynamic and wholly original way to bring us into the fantastic ocean world."

Guests experience the show in the renovated Theater in the Wild, which was converted from an outdoor amphitheater to an enclosed venue specifically for the Nemo production.

Of Mythica Proportions

While Nemo brings guests in from the outside to experience life in the big blue world, over at Tokyo DisneySea the park's central lagoon is taken over daily by the enormous production, *The Legend of Mythica*. The show is part parade, part stunt spectacular, mixed in with good old-fashioned Disney showmanship.

Creative Director Steven Davison developed the show, one of the largest undertakings at the Tokyo Disney Resort. In partnership with the Oriental Land Company, Disney created *The Legend of Mythica* to be a daytime lagoon show



TOP: Finding Nemo The Musical. BOTTOM: The Legend of Mythica



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The Themed Entertainment Association's 15th Thea Awards

that drew guests from all corners of the park to take in the spectacle.

The story, narrated by the Diamond Goddess, relates how mythical creatures used to co-exist alongside humans, united by a common rhythm and drumming beat. Along the way, the drumming ceased, and the creatures of fantasy retreated back into the oceans. The Diamond

Goddess is raised up from the lagoon's large floating central performance stage, which gushes with fountains and conceals jet skis that emerge and race around the lagoon. The Goddess calls forth five ships, each revealing a classic Disney character that invokes a unique Spirit to call back the legendary creatures. The ships dock along the lagoon and performers ceremoniously bring rhythm and drumming back to the lagoon.



Four more barges appear, each carrying one of the mythical creatures as the score, written by Alan Silvestri, reaches a crescendo and once again the link is forged between the human and beast worlds. The production makes full use of the lagoon and captivates audiences on all sides with its quick pace and high energy. The Legend of Mythica is surely one of the largest and most ambitious lagoon shows ever produced.

No Strings: Muppet Mobile


While Disney certainly has a reputation for producing big, expansive shows like Mythica, the company is also equally renowned for attention to detail. The Mobile Muppet Lab, currently at home inside the Hong Kong Disneyland park, is a perfect example of a blend of the two extremes. The roaming showpiece packs a punch with a combination of technology, creativity and special effects, all rolled into a space roughly the size of a small scooter.

The project began as a continuation of Disney's "Living Character Initiative," a program designed to take the company's trademark Audio-Animatronics® characters out of show buildings and into the midway, interacting with guests. The first major roll-out of the program began with Lucky the dinosaur, several years ago. The Mobile Muppet Lab drew from Lucky and developed into an even more complex show.

Built onto a two-wheel scooter, two popular Muppets, Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and his assistant Beaker, pilot a roaming science lab that roughly resembles a spaceship. The two Animatronics characters and the special effects onboard the ship are controlled remotely by a puppeteer. The advanced control systems even allow the controller to be located miles away from the actual show location. On-board cameras allow the characters to see guests and interact with them directly.

Bruce Vaughn, chief creative executive of Walt Disney Imagineering, said, "This is an incredibly compelling and powerful way to experience the characters. They are fully aware of the people in their presence and can call you by name. It is a 100% live experience."

Special effects on the Muppet Mobile Lab include foggers, flashing lights, moving signs, confetti cannons and spray jets that occasionally douse a nearby guest. The entire unit rolls and moves around with ease. Smaller guests are fascinated with the realism of the characters, while older guests seem mystified by how it actually works.

The Muppet Mobile Lab was tested at Disney's California Adventure park in Anaheim, CA and at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, FL before making its home in Hong Kong. 

Finding Nemo The Musical; Muppet Mobile Lab