The inpark MAGAZINE

4D Theater Showcase

For the past 200 years, theater productions have generally operated under the concept of a "fourth wall," an imaginary boundary between the action on the stage and the observers in the audience. "Breaking the fourth wall," as it is known, was often considered poor performance etiquette that would disrupt the audience's suspension of disbelief.

More recently, a whole genre of visitor attraction has developed around the opposite pole, figuring out ways to bust right through that fourth wall and draw passive audiences into the story – and by skillful combination of storytelling, multimedia elements, effects and technology, still very effectively support the suspension of disbelief. 4D theaters are ever-more popular with theme parks, museums, tourist attractions, even waterparks.

Their origins and the beginning of their popularity can be traced to two highly successful shows: Muppet*Vision: 3D at Disney parks in 1991 and T2:3D at Universal parks in 1996. Muppet*Vision 3D brought a familiar brand to the masses, and presented the 3D and 4D technology in a humorous and engaging way.

While the Muppets experience is the quintessence of lighthearted playfulness, Terminator 2:3D is marked by a unique element of thrill. "T2:3D was a 'first' in many ways; it combined live action, 3D film, and extensive in-theater effects with a popular storyline in a way that had never been done before," explains Gary Goddard, who played a creative role in the project. "Additionally, it was the first time the stars of the actual motion pictures – including Arnold Schwarzenegger - agreed to appear in a theme park attraction, and the first time the motion picture creator and director - in this case, James Cameron - agreed to participate as well."

The 4D production platform offers much greater capacity for variety, creativity and accessibility than its precursor, the motion simulation theater. The sampling presented here – some new and some not-so-new - demonstrates that. It also shows the various components and creatives that were combined to form each unique project.

While not comprehensive, the selection of 4D theaters here provides a cross-section of the amazing experiences pushing through and beyond the fourth wall. – M.P.

Compiled by Judith Rubin & Martin Palicki >>>>>>>>>>