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GREATEST GENERATION

Beyond All Boundaries

by Judith Rubin

Images on the screen combine with effects in the theater to draw guests into the drama of World War II at the National World War II Museum's Beyond All Boundaries show in the Solomon Victory Theatre. Photos courtesy of the World War II Museum.

Since opening in November 2009, the National World War II Museum expansion in New Orleans has drawn glowing acclaim and healthy visitor numbers. The new, 70,000-sq.-ft., \$60-million complex's venues are The Solomon Victory Theatre, Stage Door Canteen, and The American Sector restaurant: the first phase of a \$300-million project to develop the museum's six-acre campus, set for completion in 2015. The grand opening celebration included a retrospective honoring the museum's founder, the noted historian Stephen E. Ambrose.

The central feature of the redeveloped museum is the 250-seat Solomon Victory Theatre, the home of Beyond All Boundaries, a 45-minute, 4D multimedia show that tells the story of America's experience of the war and endeavors to preserve the voices of WW II veterans and eyewitnesses. "It was in one of our several iterations when we sat down with Tom Hanks and he suggested, 'Could we tell this in the voices of the people who were there?'" recalls show producer and creative director Phil Hettema.

Tom Hanks was Beyond All Boundaries executive producer and the Dr. Gordon H. "Nick" Mueller, museum president/CEO, was producer. With Hanks doubling as narrator, the show features an all-star voice cast including Kevin Bacon, Blythe Danner, John Goodman, Neil Patrick Harris and Gary Sinise.

The theatre's raked seating is cocooned snugly within the curve of a projection scrim 115'-wide by 28'-tall. Giving depth to the illusion are special effects that work in concert with the action onscreen, and a host of physical props that are revealed by lighting when they fly overhead or emerge from the pit. Additional projections appear on a secondary screen about 25' behind the main scrim and three smaller screens in front that raise and lower from the pit.

The dramatic scale of audience to screen was part of the core concept for putting people in the middle of the experience. Theatrical scenic and set pieces were part of the concept, so the creative team exercised theatrical license, approaching each scene thinking what they'd do in a traditional theatre environment rather than a film documentary. Elements of the film were considered as cinematic representations of theatrical elements - such as scenic, lighting, and performers - and images were

conceptualized as being projected beyond the plane of the screen, as if the screen were a proscenium. The aesthetic was painterly, rather than photorealistic. The rich color palette, perspective, and POV were based in dimensional physical space rather than a 2D screen. Performers were shot on film and composited into a scene most often at a 1:1 scale, to appear life-sized. At the same time, the real-world physics of actual theater did not constrain the process.

The Normandy D-Day landing is the most elaborately realized battle scene. The film imagery interplays with physical set pieces: five tank traps rising up from the pit. Other sequences are fully CG-animated, the biggest of which depicts US B29s firebombing Japan from the viewpoint of someone inside the plane, accompanied by Jesse Eisenberg's reading of a graphic quote from a veteran who had been there. The creative team were vigilant in curatorial accuracy - making sure material was



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vetted by historians. The tools of 4D were applied in moderation, to create setting and emotion and enhance the theatrical suspension of disbelief. It wasn't a 'ride,' it was placemaking.

Custom-made set pieces include the B-17 bomber nose section for the scene in which the front fuselage of the plane travels down from the catwalk into the theatre space. The scene is a big factory. A worker waves to a crane to bring in the nose cone for a big bomber. The prop comes in and mates with the screen.

Other dramatic props that enhance the sense of authentic immersion are the tank traps for the Normandy beach scene. During the D-Day sequence, 3D tank traps rise up from the pit on mast lifts, coming into view in front of the scrim. At the same time, behind the scrim, 2-D ones go up and down on a pneumatic, counterweighted mechanism. They sit onstage at right angles to the audience, behind a 6' wall.

Another formidable element is the Auschwitz guard tower scenic that rises out of the pit in front of the scrim, and others that raise and lower the Tokyo skyline scenic profiles behind the scrim.

Several key project creatives were involved a couple of years before their contracts were formalized, helping set preliminary budgets, talk over preliminary designs and ultimately sell the project to the museum. Doing prep work, 'on spec' before the job is actually awarded is a calculated risk that attests to the high level of trust in the business relationships around Beyond All Boundaries.

This automated theatrical presentation, with its layers of projection, effects and surround sound also has layers upon layers of control to deliver the experience again and again with precise timing and sequencing. Control consoles and data distribution systems run a host of fixtures and other devices producing or contributing to effects such as the choreographed searchlight sequences, the nuclear explosion (simulated with sound, wind, vibration and strobes), the snow effects, and more.

"The National World War II Museum must collect, record and pass on their stories for the next generation," says Phil Satre, chairman of the Museum's national board of trustees. With experiential exhibits such as Beyond All Boundaries backed by collections, the museum is endeavoring to bridge the

gap between the "Greatest Generation" that is now fast dying out and the younger generations of today and tomorrow whose connections to and understanding of World War II may be tenuous—in contrast to many of the creatives on these projects, whose parents or grandparents experienced the war. Phil Hettema's own personal tie was a powerful one - his father, David Hettema, was an Air Force pilot in the war, flew B-17s and conducted 30 missions over Germany. But like many World War II vets, he rarely, if ever, spoke of his experiences with his family. The museum afforded him and many others the opportunity to share their stories.




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LA ProPoint would like to congratulate
The Hettema Group
and
the entire *Beyond All Boundaries* Team
on receiving the 2010 Thea Award.

Congratulations to the National WWII Museum and
The Hettema Group for *Beyond All Boundaries!*



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**17th Annual Thea Awards
Award for Outstanding Achievement**

Beyond All Boundaries

Solomon Victory Theater
The National World War II Museum, New Orleans, LA, USA
(Museum Attraction)

Narrated by Tom Hanks

Featuring the voices of

Adam Beech: Pvt. Ira Hayes; 2nd Lt. Daniel Inouye
Kevin Bacon: Robert Sherro, Time Magazine Correspondent
Corbin Bleu: Eddie W. Robinson; Sgt. Dan Levin
Patricia Clarkson: Marguerite Higgins, New York Herald Tribune
Correspondent
Kevin Connolly: Donald Sanborn; Pvt. Raymond Howell
James Cromwell: Maj. Gen. Alexander Archer Vandegrift; Fleet
Adm. William Halsey
Blythe Danner: Elsa Maxwell, New York Post Columnist
Viola Davis: Hortense Johnson, Arsenal Worker
Jesse Eisenberg: Lt. Fiske Hanley; Sgt. Benjamin McKinney
Jennifer Garner: Kate Grant, Ship Welder; Carol Lynn Heggen, Red
Cross Volunteer
John Goodman: Capt. Edwin Simmons
Neil Patrick Harris: 1st Lt. David Hetteema; Sgt. William Manchester
Jay Hernandez: Manuel Castro Vara; Lt. J.T. Shea
Emile Hirsch: Pvt. Don Jackson Benedict; Cpl. Gordon Carson
Kevin Jonas: Mike Mervosh
Tom Kane: Edward R. Murrow, CBS News Correspondent
Justin Long: Cpl. James R. Garrett, Sgt. John H. Morris
Tobey Maguire: Pvt. George Strang
Joseph Mazzello: Pvt. Eugene B. Sledge
Paul McCrane: Pvt. Kurt Vonnegut
Daran Norris: 1940's Newscaster
Wendell Pierce: Sgt. Thomas McPhatter
Chris Pine: Hanson Baldwin, New York Times Military Editor; Sgt.
Bill Reed
Brad Pitt: Sgt. Bill Mauldin, Editorial Cartoonist, Stars And Stripes
Giovanni Ribisi: 2nd Lt. Paul Fussell
William Sadler: Lt. Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller
Hans Schoeber: Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister Propaganda;
Hermann Goering, Reichsmarschall
Sab Shimono: Japanese Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro
Gary Sinise: Ernie Pyle, Correspondent, Scripps-Howard News
Service
Elijah Wood: Corp. Wilfred Hanson, Capt. John C. Chapin

Production Credits

Tom Hanks, Executive Producer
The National World War II Museum, Dr. Gordon "Nick" Mueller,
Producer
The Hetteema Group, Concept, Design & Production
Phil Hetteema, Show Producer, Creative Director
Chris Ellis, Writer
Historical Consultants & Co-Writers:
Dr. Gordon "Nick" Mueller, Dr. Don Miller, Hugh Ambrose
David Briggs, Director
Bruce Broughton, Music Composer

Project Directors:
The National World War II Museum, Bob Farnsworth, The
Hetteema Group, Anthony Pruett
Allison Diamond, Asst. To Tom Hanks

Research Team

The National World War II Museum
Seth Paridon, Tom Czekanski, Joey Balfour, Tommy Lofton

The Hetteema Group
Diana Cimadamore, Laura Colon, Corrine Cunningham

Media Production

Doug Yellin, Producer
Daren Ulmer, Production Design
Susan Beth Smith, Assoc. Producer
Mousetrappe, Inc., Visual Effects/Post Production
Tim Williams, Music Scoring And Conducting
Bob Wackerman, Paul Freeman/Audio By The Bay LLC, Sound
Design And Production
Yael Pardess, Art Direction

Theatrical Production

Daniel Ionazzi, Scenic Design
Steven Young, Lisa Passamonte Green, Michael Mahlum/Visual
Terrain LLC, Lighting Design
Paul Freeman, Audio Sound Design
Bob Chambers/It's Alive Co., Technical Supervision
Susan Cummings, Technical Manager

Technical And Production Credits

Jason McKinley/Radical 3d, 3d Animation
Cedar Conner, Lead Composer
Matilda Production Services, Inc., Media Production

Technical Production & Special Effects:
L.A. Propoint, Inc.
Electrosonic Systems, Inc.
Soundworks
Bandit Lighting
Rando Productions, Inc.
Artistic Entertainment Services, LLC

Additional Production Credits

Lisa Nash, Consultant Project Director
Judd Nissen, Installation Project Management
Matt Sweeney, Project Coordination
Curtis Porsche, Site Coordination
George Wiktor, Gus Stone, Production Development
Jerome Sirlin, Concept Production Design
Kalmenson & Kamelson, Casting Services
Kabuki Productions, Inc., SAG Signatory
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History Project; Nettle Lee Benson Latin American Collection;
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