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The International Museum Theatre Alliance is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Association of Museums.

The mission of the International Museum Theatre Alliance is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience.

Graphic Design

Timothy Schletter

EDITORS NOTE: EYE ON DESIGN VOL. 21 SPRING 2011

Last year, at the American Association of Museum's conference, I was lucky enough to sit in the presence of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. I've always loved dinosaurs; I've even performed as one at the Orlando Science Center and the New York Hall of Science. I have great dinosaur movement skills and can act like one great raptor about to descend on its prey (I love reenacting scenes from Jurassic Park for friends -- though I don't think they like it too much). While I've always found joy in performing as a thunder lizard, the giant Tyrannosaurs Rex puppet designed by Erth made my mouth drop. I kept thinking: How'd they do that? What materials did they use for the dinosaur skin? How is this dinosaur designed and engineered?

Design is important. It takes our work to the next level and helps to inspire our audience members and visitors to lose themselves in the theatrical world we create. I'm happy that Scott Wright, Artistic Director for Erth-Visual and Physical in Australia, helps to answer some of my dino design questions by contributing to our second annual design issue. Not to be outdone in the puppet world, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago provides a great review of how they partnered with Jim Henson Studios to create imaginative puppet shows for their visitors. Additionally, Jennifer Boyes-Manseau discusses a great example of how theatre programs are integral to the design of exhibitions at the Museum of Civilization in Canada.

While it may be difficult to challenge our design thinking, I hope this issue sparks your imagination about what may be possible when we keep our EYE ON DESIGN.

Marcos Stafne
Publications Officer



CREATIVE COLLABORATION IN JIM HENSON'S FANTASTIC WORLD

Clayton E. Faits

Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) recently hosted Jim Henson's Fantastic World, a touring exhibition by the Smithsonian. From September 24th through January 23rd guests could see 100 original creative works including sketches, cartoons, and puppets by Jim Henson and his associates. The exhibition was an excellent fit for MSI, as our mission "to inspire the inventive genius in everyone". Writers and designers at the museum partnered to create a puppet theatre space and interactive show within the exhibition. Collaboration between writers, artists and designers within the museum ensures that each aspect of a theatrical program is driven by the same strategies toward the same goal - in this case, to inspire creativity and interest in science by offering guests a chance to role-play as scientists and astronauts and experience puppeteering.

The theatre space was designed concurrently with the development of the program script, which allowed writers and designers to exchange constant feedback with each other. This was essential to designing a stage that met the needs of the performance, from the cartoon-styled façade and colorful backdrop that set a playful tone to the backstage area that could accommodate parents and chaperones along with child puppeteers. Close collaboration also ensured that the show took advantage of all the space had to offer; notably, the script included time to teach volunteers to use a closed-circuit monitor backstage which allowed the puppeteers to see themselves performing the same way Jim Henson would have.

MSI is focused on creating a guest-centered culture and incorporating interactivity into exhibitions and programming. Offering guests a chance to perform in a show or contribute ideas that shape the story is an effective way to foster an emotional connection to an exhibition and its content, which is an important element in creating a memorable museum experience. Another key guest-focused strategy is the use of positive reinforcement, which at MSI takes the form of high-fives and stickers. These rewards affirm and encourage participation and associate science with a fun and positive emotional experience.

Creating an interactive puppet show was an opportunity to capitalize on these approaches, and the script was written to incorporate as many opportunities for participation as possible. Guest puppeteers were asked to perform in the show, guest suggestions drove the story forward, and all audience members

THE EXHIBITION WAS OVERWHELMINGLY SUCCESSFUL DURING THE THREE MONTH RUN AT MSI, WITH TOTAL ATTENDANCE EXCEEDING 100,000 GUESTS.

participated physically by leaning in their seats or dancing during the show. Guests that contributed to the show with a creative suggestion or energetic participation were recognized with a sticker or applause. These strategies were crucial in bringing this experience to life.

The exhibition was overwhelmingly successful during the three month run at MSI, with total attendance exceeding 100,000 guests. The interactive exhibit components added for this installation were noted in Chicago Parent magazine. The puppet theatre could comfortably seat up to 20 guests at a time, but often shows were standing-room only with crowds of over 50 people in attendance.

Perhaps a more telling, if less scientific, measure of success was the reaction from our guests. We produced many hilarious and creative moments in the show, like a pair of young children who named their puppets Jimmy Buffet and Neil Armstrong - while Jimmy continually urged the audience to 'chill out', Neil wanted to prove he was not too old to go back into space. This showed that they were emotionally engaged and that they were successful in imagining themselves as a different person. We also received several comment cards from guests which illustrated how guests related to the show on an emotional level, such as this example: "We saw the puppet show in [Jim] Henson's Fantastic World and Ray did an amazing job. He was very good with the children. He was funny and charming. Excellent job!"

Collaboration between writers, performers, designers, and exhibition staff within an institution allows a unified vision to come to life. In this case, such collaboration resulted in a performance that brought MSI's style of interactive, guest-focused programming to Jim Henson's Fantastic World. Studies have correlated guided role-play as in a puppet show with increased self-control and the ability to delay gratification in developing children, and moreover, it's fun and imaginative. One young guest captured this spirit in a comment overheard in the exhibit, "I want to be a puppet when I grow up!"

Clayton E. Faitsm, Facilitator II
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

Clayton Faits has been with the Museum of Science and Industry for three years. He graduated from Tulane University with a degree in Theatre in 2007, but only started working with puppets after moving to Chicago.



MAKING THE REALLY OLD, REALLY NEW: DESIGNER DINOS BY EARTH

Scott Wright



It was in October 2000 when George F. MacDonald, Anthropologist and guest director of the Melbourne Museum, made an inquiry in casual conversation to me about whether Earth had ever considered making dinosaurs? As the Artistic Director of Earth, a Sydney based theatre company that specializes in puppetry, spectacle and public performances (among many other things), my initial reply was no, but the only thing holding us back was the cost of creating a dinosaur that met our standards. This seemed no problem to George and after being introduced to a few other key personal from the museum, Earth was commissioned to produce two life-sized dinosaur puppets, which would become one of the museums signature showpieces.

By April we had created a small South American raptor, Deinonychus, and small Australian quadruped, Minmi Paravertebra, capable of housing a human performer inside, who operated the puppet, providing the dinosaurs with its actions and voice. The dinosaurs were an instant hit, and since their release in 2001 Earth has been engaged by no less than two dozen museums world wide, with projects spanning months and years. Each project is developed always on a case-by-case basis, and as a result we have created close to a similar number of dinosaurs.

OUR DINOSAURS COULD NOT BE WHAT THEY ARE TODAY IF IT WEREN'T FOR A DEDICATED TEAM OF CLEVER AND SKILLED INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DRIVEN BY AN UNUSUAL DESIRE TO DESIGN AND BUILD UNIQUE AND OFTEN COMPLICATED CREATURES.

It is Earth's prerogative that we never rest on our laurels, so each new creation is informed by lessons learned from each previous puppet. There are many challenges when designing and building a dinosaur or any puppet for that matter, but one of the most important factors is the ability to learn from our mistakes.

Conflict of anatomy is a major factor in the design of the dinosaurs. How do you conceal or fit a puppeteer in to the anatomical structure of something that shares very little in common with humans? There are the obvious anthropomorphic solutions such as Barney the Dinosaur, Dorothy the Dinosaur and even Mickey Mouse, but they do not conjure awe inspiring responses and wonder. Earth spends as much time as possible consulting with numerous paleontologists who are usually connected to the various museums we work with during the design and build process of each dinosaur. Initially we were met with skepticism and the misconception that we wanted to make amusement park, mascot-styled dinosaurs, much like the previously mentioned individuals. It took little time for people to realize that we took our work seriously, and we quickly gained respect and developed some great relationships.

One person in particular, Luis Chiappe, gave us the next important lead into our work by insisting on an approach of honesty and insisted that the puppets be referenced as puppets and not as live dinosaurs. This was the complete opposite of what we had just completed for the Auckland Museum, New Zealand, as a local newspaper and TV station had convinced half the country that a live dinosaur had



been released into the Auckland Museum as a full time resident. This not only caused a meltdown of the museums phone system and thousands of people flocking to the museum to see the new inhabitant, but also had crypto zoologists from around the world wanting to come and visit the prehistoric inhabitant. Of course in all the press and media we had planted obvious signs and clues that the dinosaur was not real; however, people see and hear what they want which was the point that Chiappe had pointed out. Imagination is an important tool that we needed to nurture in both our young and old audiences. So now we are always clear with our audiences and clients that our creations are presented as puppets that are used as learning tools to investigate anatomy, appearance and behavior.

In regards to the design and build process for any of our dinosaurs, we look at the factors that allow us to construct something that is able to behave physically appropriate (according to what is know of its anatomy) without impounding on the person inside. Weight and vision compete with structure and aesthetics, and we have come up with novel ways of operating a dinosaur half blind while carrying a dynamic load of over 160-pounds/80 kilo's or more. The internal structure is the result of many trial and error research periods to engineer a structure that supports the puppeteer, gives physical bulk to the dinosaur, and forces the puppeteer to travel in a completely contrasting way to what their human form determines.

Most recently we have mounted small cameras into the nostrils of our puppets allowing puppeteers to view everything directly in front of them on a tiny monitor; however, they are still reliant on their peripheral instincts. We are constantly developing and researching ways in which we can reduce the weight of the costume; the heaviest factors being skin and the sound system for voice. New skins are constantly being developed by researching various fabrics, glues and paints, and we have created our own sound systems which keep getting smaller and lighter while providing something that allows the puppeteers voice inside the puppet to be altered and amplified.

Our dinosaurs could not be what they are today if it weren't for a dedicated team of clever and skilled individuals who are driven by an unusual desire to design and build unique and often complicated creatures. Our performers apply tried and true methods of street theatre and are dedicated to providing an accurate and believable performance while steering away from any anthropomorphic traits. This means no dinosaurs talking, wearing clothes, walking upright or even curtailing to human behavior.

In 2011 we will engage with no less than another dozen museums throughout the world and create at least two completely new types of dinosaurs, while building new models of previous dinosaurs with each one being better than the last. We love challenges and with every new project there is always something to be learned or somebody's theory to consider. Our job is to create magic and if our track record is anything to go by we have been responsible for the joy and amazement of no less than a few million people and counting.

Thank you, George.

Scott Wright

Artistic Director, Erth

Scott Wright took the advice of his inner child and made his love for puppetry a life long career. He has been performing with puppets since he was a child, and took a brief distraction and trained as dancer/choreographer for 3 years. Returning to visual theatre and puppetry Scott became one of the founding members of Sydney based, Erth- Visual and Physical Inc.

IMTAL 2011 PRE-WORKSHOP MINI-CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 25, 2011 10:30AM - 7:00PM

Hosted by the Indianapolis Children's Museum in partnership with the Theater in Museums Workshop Indianapolis, IN

IMTAL IS PLEASED TO BE PARTNERING WITH THE THEATER IN MUSEUMS WORKSHOP TO OFFER THE FIRST-EVER IMTAL PRE-WORKSHOP MINI-CONFERENCE!

EXCHANGE IDEAS WITH OTHER MUSEUM THEATRE PROFESSIONALS, BRAINSTORM INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMMON QUESTIONS, AND BRING HOME REAL-WORLD STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING QUALITY THEATRICAL PROGRAMMING IN YOUR MUSEUMS.

SESSIONS WILL CONSIST OF PANEL-LED DISCUSSIONS ON TOPICS OF INTEREST TO BOTH NEW AND EXISTING MUSEUM THEATRE PROGRAMS. THEMES FOR THE SESSIONS INCLUDE:

- Training for non-actors: How do you prepare staff, interns, volunteers, or others to present theatrical museum programs?
- Creating appropriate performance spaces that work with the structure of your building and beyond: How do you transform an exhibit gallery or other area into a stage that meets the needs of performers and visitors?
- Funding and Institutional Support: How do you best advocate for the use of theatre in a museum, where can funding come from, and how do you navigate the question of "the bottom line?"
- The final session of the day will include a Showcase of Museum Theatre performances with Q & A and a reception with light appetizers and complimentary beverages.

Cost \$50.00 per attendee (includes reception.) IMTAL membership is not required to attend. Registration for the Workshop is not required to attend the Mini-Conference. Designed to complement the Workshop experience or stand alone as a rejuvenating Museum Theatre "infusion," the Mini-Conference will provide valuable networking opportunities and in-depth, practical information for anyone currently using or interested in the full range of performance programming possible in museum settings. *Registration is available through the Children's Museum of Indianapolis.*

USING DESIGN AESTHETIC TO CREATE ENLIGHTENING VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Jennifer Boyes-Manseau

Museums work with designers and interpretive planners to create exhibitions that facilitate unique, surprising and memorable visitor experiences. Museum theatre practitioners face the challenge of adapting their design process and theatre aesthetic to integrate with each exhibition and thereby create innovative forms of museum theatre that engage, move and challenge museum visitors. Dramamuse, the Canadian Museum of Civilization's theatre company's recent promenade play, *A Trick of Truth*, by Steven Gin, was created for and performed in the special exhibition, *Profit and Ambition: The Canadian Fur Trade, 1779-1821*. It is a fine example of how museum theatre can draw inspiration from both the exhibition's content and design, and can apply the art of theatre and its inherent design aesthetic in innovative and effective ways to create, moving, instructive and enlightening visitor experiences.

Dramamuse has extensive experience in creating authentic and interactive historical theatre set in historical realism. Year round, the Museum's theatre company offers engaging and immersive learning experiences of Canada's history to over 140,000 visitors in the Museum's most popular permanent exhibition, the Canada Hall. This exhibition invites visitors to explore a series of life sized recreated environments and travel through time and across the continent. The museum theatre they experience in this exhibition enhances this immersive time travel experience and encourages visitors to make personal connections to Canada's past.

Profit and Ambition was a special exhibition created by the Canadian Museum of Civilization that promoted a completely different visitor experience – one of suggestion as opposed to recreated representation. In this exhibition, visitors were introduced to the fur trade through a mix of portraits, original paintings of the period, maps, trade goods, canoes, clothing and everyday objects used both by First Nations and the fur traders, clerks and partners in the Western fur trade. The exhibition designer, Stewart Bailey, of Intu Design used color, layout of space, images, and suggestive representation to evoke a sense of a journey out west, the vast wilderness of Canada, the driving ambition of the Partners of the North West Company and encounters between the different people who met for the first time because of the fur trade. I worked with Senior Interpretive Planner, Claire Champ to identify the aspects of the exhibition that museum theatre could most effectively interpret: the voices of the men and women of the fur trade, the timeless theme of ruthless ambition and the complex legacy of the fur trade. Just as the fur trade brought different people together, I assembled a team to create an innovative theatrical experience and a fresh look at an important Canadian story. A key member of the design team was Western playwright Steven Gin who brought a vast knowledge about the Western fur trade, a mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry and a commitment to subtle and suggestive rather than obvious and didactic museum theatre. Costume and props designer, Thea Yeatman of Woven Streams, had the



theatre design skills necessary to combine authentic historical costume research with a more suggestive aesthetic. I brought my dramaturge and directing skills and keen interest in applying a theatre aesthetic that would engage visitors' hearts, minds and imaginations. We had the content of the script reviewed by both curator David Morrison and Métis historian, Heather Devine. During the rehearsals and development of the show, Aboriginal Theatre Educator Suzanne Keeptwo joined the design team and contributed an invaluable Aboriginal perspective in the design of the costumes and props and the interpretation of the Cree country wife.

There were a number of very significant sources of inspiration for the design of this theatre production. We began our first script and design meeting in front of the large print of a well-known painting by Francis Anne Hopkins used to create a tableau outside the exhibition. We asked ourselves, "What is missing in this painting? What are the men doing? What time of day is it? What details did the artist leave out of her painting?" Our questions lead us to the idea that this play would invite visitors to explore what is truth in history.



Playwright Steven Gin proposed telling this story with the help of a Trickster – the mythological figure of transformation for many First Nation peoples. But how to represent or design this character? Steven invited us to study the art of Aboriginal Artist, Kent Monkman, whose work explores historical paintings with a wonderfully challenging contemporary edge. Monkman's illustrations of a trickster figure for a children picture book also helped us to conceive the theatrical version of a Trickster for this play. Trickster was both male and female and needed some kind of a sound maker to signal his/her power to transform him/herself and others. Inspired by another painting in the exhibition, this one depicting Aboriginal women harvesting wild rice along the river, Costume and props designer, Thea Yeatman proposed a wand of reeds for the Trickster that would make a sound like the wind in the grasses and could evoke the different animals that represent the Trickster for different Aboriginal peoples across Canada – the wing of the Raven, the tail of Wiskey Jack, the ears of Rabbit. In line with this same notion of transformation we also used theatre's power of suggestion by transforming the paddle – a key artifact in the fur trade – to not only be used as a paddle but also to be transformed into a walking stick, a flag pole, and cradle board and papoose.



The design of the exhibition as described above was another source of inspiration. While Dramamuse usually performs its plays in one location in an exhibition, both the content and the exhibition's design demanded a travelling play that would take our visitors on a journey out west. The exhibition designer had created seven unique spaces in the exhibition where seven different parts of the story could be shared.



Another artifact in the exhibition had a significant influence on the style and design of this promenade play. Original panels from a trading post at York Factory were on display on which an unknown artist in the 1700's had painted humorous cartoon figures representing a privileged partner of the Hudson's Bay Company and his wife. These painted figures gave us a new way to look at the bosses in the fur trade and this humorous and larger than life aesthetic was used in the scene played in front of these cartoon drawings. The actors portrayed the Bourgeois partners by singing their words to the tune of "There's a Hole in My Bucket Dear Liza", by moving in a stylized manner, and by donning beaver top hats and suits with huge shoulders to look like floating islands of

privilege and entitlement – a clever and humorous way to underline the North West Company partners' ruthless ambition. A Trick of Truth invited visitors to look at history with new eyes. This required a different form of theatre, a more overtly theatrical form than the historical realism in Canada Hall. In this new form of theatre the actors played multiple human roles and also a mythological character who playfully invited the visitors to question what they think about history. The art and aesthetic of theatre in tandem with respectful consultation helped us to tell the neglected stories of fur traders and country wives – two players for whom there is little written record. Inspired by the content, artifacts and exhibition design this walking play offered visitors a museum theatre experience that reinforced and humanized core messages of the exhibition and was “a poignant and instructive interpretive walking play (that) add(ed) important insights into the lives of the men and women of the fur trade and should not (have been) missed as part of the experience.”

Jennifer Boyes-Manseau

*Senior Interpretive Planner, Artistic Director Dramamuse
at the Canadian Museum of Civilization*



COLONEL MUSTARD IN THE LIBRARY WITH A WRENCH **OR USING MUSEUM THEATRE TO THINK “OUTSIDE THE BOX”**

Lisa Hayes

Last month I gave a workshop on museum theatre at the Small Museums Association conference. Museum theatre is a valued part of our interpretation here at the Accokeek Foundation, particularly during the summer when a coterie of museum theatre interns joins us at the National Colonial Farm.

I generally submit proposals to present at a conference for one of two reasons: 1) it's being held somewhere I'd like to visit (this has gotten me to Ireland, Poland, Italy, Scotland, and Turkey) or 2) it gives me a deadline for writing/planning something I've been thinking about. For the Small Museums Association conference, it was not the idea of traveling to Ocean City, Maryland in February that attracted me (surprise!), but the theme of “Night at the Museum” and the opportunity to give a workshop to museum folk on using museum theatre.

After giving a bit of background on the Foundation and the kinds of museum theatre projects we have done, I asked for volunteers to come up and “perform” the first few pages of last year's “A Colonial Wedding.” For those of you who missed this stupendous event last July (yes, I'm prejudiced, but it was awesome, visitors became guests at Chloe Bolton's wedding, witnessing the “behind the scenes” discussions about the young couple's plans and prospects, and then the wedding ceremony itself (performed verbatim from the 1771 Book of Common Prayer). When the workshop “performers” finished reading the excerpt from “A Colonial Wedding,” I asked the audience what they had learned. Participants immediately named about ten things they had learned. I made the point that theatre, with its focus on story and characters, is an extremely effective and entertaining way for people to learn historical information and appreciate its relevance to their own lives.

COLONEL MUSTARD IN THE LIBRARY...CONTINUED

Next I asked workshop participants to take out a blank piece of paper and jot down the following:

1. Current or planned events/programs/exhibits at their site;
2. Three different locations at their site where a performance could take place other than a room where such programs are usually held;
3. Three objects at their site that if the object could talk, it would have an amazing story to tell;
4. Three people that are a part of their site/museum's story and a question they would ask each of them;
5. Three sensory experiences that would enrich a visitors experience of their site (eg. Sound of a bird? Smell of barnyard? Feel of particular fabric?)

Then I asked participants to go through these lists and pick one thing from each list - I compared the exercise to playing a game of Clue that might end with "Colonel Mustard in the library with a wrench."

With these choices having been made, participants divided into small groups, shared their "scenario," and then chose one scenario from the group to brainstorm further and come up with ideas for turning the idea into a real theatrical event. Finally, the groups shared their prospective "events," which ranged from visitors at Plimoth Plantation gathering around a campfire as witnesses to a meeting between Wampanoag Indians and English settlers to a performance at the Brunswick Railroad Museum focused on the dangers of working on the railroad. In the case of the former, the idea was triggered by thinking about the sensory experience of the smell of a campfire and in the case of the latter; inspiration was drawn from an object, that being a wicker body basket in the museum's collection.

At the end of the workshop, I asked for a show of hands of people who had come up with ideas that they might actually use to create an event at their museum. I was delighted to see so many hands go up. Historical museums and sites will only thrive if we embrace our roles as storytellers and transform our visitors into passionate shepherds of history.

Lisa Hayes

Director of Education and Public Programs, Accokeek Foundation

Lisa Hayes is Director of Education and Public Programs at the Accokeek Foundation in Maryland where her work includes museum theater projects at the National Colonial Farm. She has a PhD in American Studies from the U. at Buffalo, and has toured extensively in her solo shows of "Jane Eyre" and "Nurse!"

2011 ANNUAL THEATRE IN MUSEUMS WORKSHOP

Hosted by the Indianapolis Children's Museum in partnership with the Theater in Museums Workshop Indianapolis, IN

SESSIONS WILL INCLUDE

- The importance of a collaborative exhibit and interpretation planning process in meeting the main message and goals of an exhibit.
- The use of actors and interpreters in exhibits, including examples of museum theatre, demonstrations, facilitated programs, character appearances, informal interpretation, and exhibit hosts.
- Administrative and personnel needs of institutional theatre and interpretation programs
- Budgeting
- Working with professional writers
- Actors in institutional settings
- Tours of local museums
- Guest performances and sessions

SEPTEMBER 26 - 28, 2011 PART 1

Basic information needed to start a theatre program and an opportunity to hear about and observe other museums' programs.

SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 1, 2011 PART 2

An opportunity to work on your own script or to participate in the process of working on others' scripts. Please note: in order to enroll in Part II you must have taken part in Part I this year or in the past. If you are submitting a script for the workshop, it must reach the Children's Museum of Indianapolis by July 30, 2011.

For more information or to receive a brochure and registration form, please email Patricia Daily at patriciad@childrensmuseum.org or call (317) 334-3819. Registration deadline is August 19, 2011.





Jillian Finkle

INTERPRETING “SIN” IN THE OLD WEST: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Last year, the High Desert Museum (HDM), located in Bend, Oregon curated and hosted a temporary exhibition titled “Sin in the Sagebrush” that examined the roles of gambling, alcohol, and prostitution on the 1880s Western frontier. HDM is a natural history, art, and history museum interpreting the geographic region of the Columbia Plateau and the Great Basin. The exhibition featured living history interpreters portraying saloon patrons, ladies of the night, professional gamblers, and other characters. The exhibit is now touring and is available for rentals.

IMTAL Vice President Jillian Finkle recently discussed the exhibition with the Museum’s Vice President of Programs Dana Whitelaw, Senior Living History Interpreter Linda Evans, and Communications and Promotions Manager Cathy Carroll.

JF: Can you tell IMTAL members about the exhibition?

HDM: Sin in the Sagebrush is an immersive, multi-sensory exhibition with over 500 artifacts, including a 15-foot oak and mahogany bar from Montana. Each room depicts a different location, including the recreated Stockman Saloon, as well as a gambling hall, a bordello, and a canvas tent saloon that would have been found out on the range.

JF: How did the living history element evolve?

HDM: Our Museum’s living history program is nine years old. On busy days we might have 20-30 living history interpreters in our Spirit of the West exhibit and outdoor 1880s Homestead. We have also used characters in natural history exhibits, such as a wolf trapper in our Bears and Wolves exhibition. As we developed this exhibition it was clear that we would use living history to humanize the stories of the people who lived these harsh, lonely lives.

JF: How is all that living history funded?

HDM: We are lucky to have a large group of extremely dedicated volunteers. Many of them work at the Museum once a week in areas aligned with their specific interests and passions. They make their own costumes and we help them thoroughly research their characters. We also employ two full-time living history interpreters.

JF: What roles did actors portray in Sin in the Sagebrush?

HDM: In this exhibit, actors (or “interpreters”) portrayed the saloon keeper, gamblers, bar patrons (miners, ranchers, railroad workers, teamsters, and soldiers), saloon girls, hurdy-gurdy girls (that danced with patrons), and prostitutes.

JF: Were any of the interactions scripted?

HDM: Because our interpreters were challenged with such delicate subject matter, some scripted lines were drafted to minimize the possibility of offending visitors. This was especially true with the female characters. We also presented one scripted scene between a prostitute and a madam.

JF: How was the exhibit received?

HDM: While we were a little nervous when we began this project, the response was overwhelmingly positive. The exhibit received a great deal of funding from public and private sources. As always occurs, some visitors did object, but in general the exhibit was regarded as a very tasteful presentation of a controversial topic, showcasing humanities themes over stereotypes. It was a serious look at early communities and how people came together during difficult times.

JF: How about families visiting with children?

HDM: We posted signs warning visitors that some of the content might not be appropriate for children, and the “bordello” area was located in the back so parents could choose to avoid it. Many children became engaged in the card games and learning how to “cheat.” Children were also interested in the artifacts in each area, such as the bed and bedpan. All of our interpreters were trained in how to tactfully explain the content to adults while appropriately engaging the children.

JF: What were some of the most popular exhibit elements?

HDM: In addition to the living history interpreters, the exhibit included three documentary-style videos that included music and quotations. We also produced a 30-minute audio tour that visitors could download for free onto an MP3 player at home or pay a nominal fee to borrow one from the Museum.

JF: Will other venues hosting the visit include Living History?

HDM: Other museums have shown a lot of interest in developing living history characters for this exhibit, and several historical societies came to observe our staff. We are encouraging the other venues to use living history, even if it is on a limited basis, or for special events.

JF: Would you say the exhibit was a success?

HDM: This exhibit was one of our most popular exhibits in a long time. From 2008-09 HDM had already seen an attendance increase of about 14%, and for the two months after the exhibit opened, there was another jump of about 10%. We feel that indicates it was an outstanding success!

For more information on Sin in the Sagebrush, check out photos, links, and the exhibit’s press kit at www.imtal.org/sagebrush.asp or www.sininthesagebrush.com. For information on exhibit rentals, please contact Dana Whitelaw at (541) 382-4754 ext 233.



2011 Theatre in Museums Workshop

Call for Papers for the
IMTAL 7th Biennial Conference,
October 16 – 20, 2011
Melbourne, Australia
Museum Theatre: Access All Areas

**The conference will be hosted by
International Museum Theatre Alliance,
Asia Pacific (IMTALAP) a network organization
of Museums Australia**

The organizing committee consists of members from the following organizations: State Library of Victoria, Federation Square (Fed Ed), Melbourne Museum, Immigration Museum, Scienceworks, Sovereign Hill, Old Treasury Building, National Gallery of Victoria, National Sports Museum, The Happy Android Company, National Trust, CSIRO Education, Museums Australia (Victoria), Museums Australia

**Conference website: www.imtal2011.org
IMTAL Asia Pacific site: www.imtalap.org**

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is to inspire and support the use of
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