

Technology Meets Tinseltown in 'The American Idol Experience' At Disney's Hollywood Studios Theme Park

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. – Guests at “The American Idol Experience” at Disney’s Hollywood Studios will feel like they’re in the middle of a live television production as they enter a theater that features high-definition broadcast cameras, voting keypads at each audience seat, more than 100 plasma and LED video screens and a stage inspired by the famous “American Idol” television show sets.

The attraction – grand opening Feb. 14, 2009 – was developed by Walt Disney Imagineering in conjunction with FremantleMedia Enterprises (FME) and 19 TV Ltd. It is based on the smash-hit television show “American Idol” – produced by 19 TV Ltd. and FremantleMedia North America (FMNA).

Creating the home to the newest Walt Disney World theme park attraction took a team of talented technical and set designers to make the show a shining achievement from a visual, audio and video perspective. The team was given the charge to take a pop culture phenomenon – the “American Idol” TV series – and extend the experience from the television screen to a live theater setting.

The result is a dazzling musical-themed theater for high-energy performances at the showbiz-inspired theme park.

THE STAGE & SET:

Since the television show’s debut, the distinctive look of the “American Idol” stage and set has provided an energetic and exciting backdrop for the show’s singing performances.

To recreate the iconic designs, Walt Disney Entertainment worked with Andy Walmsley, the Emmy Award-nominated production designer who has created the “American Idol” sets since the TV show’s inception.

To re-create the signature look inside the theme park theater, Walmsley took an original cardboard model he used to design the television show set and replicated it as a three-dimensional computer model. Using this, he rescaled and resized the set to not only fit inside the Disney’s Hollywood Studios theater, but to provide up to 1,000 audience members the best view possible from every seat.

The 3,000-square-foot theme park stage is similar to the one utilized in Season 7 of the television show, Walmsley said, with only slight modifications (such as the Judges’ Table featured onstage at the Disney’s Hollywood Studios set so the judges face the live audience) made to enhance the guests’ live viewing experience.

Working on a Disney theme park project was the realization of a lifelong dream for Walmsley, who began his career in the United Kingdom before moving to the United States shortly after “American Idol” debuted in 2002.

“Originally I wanted to be a Disney Imagineer because I’d walk around the Disney parks and look at the quality and design everywhere,” said Walmsley, who visited Walt Disney World Resort regularly for 17 years to enjoy the parks and admire the designs he saw. “I would shoot literally hundreds of rolls of film of the theming and attention to detail. I’d literally photograph every square inch of the park. I was in awe of the design and craftsmanship.”

Walmsley said he takes pride that one of his set designs now has a home in a Disney theme park.

“What’s really nice is that it is now captured in time at Walt Disney World,” he said. “If you think of this theater as a trophy box, one of the best sets I’ve done is now placed inside this wonderful trophy box for everyone to enjoy.”

HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH:

Not only a visual marvel, the theater housing “The American Idol Experience” is one of the most technologically advanced theaters ever created inside Walt Disney World Resort. In addition to being cutting-edge, each high-tech feature was designed and installed to enhance the guests’ experience – whether they are backstage, onstage or seated in the audience.

Providing all the tools for each onstage singer to belt out their best performance, Disney equipped the theater with one of the largest HD teleprompters found anywhere. Hanging at the back of the theater, the teleprompter provides onstage performers with lyrics for their chosen tune. And, as the performers sing for the audience, they do so in front of a 35-foot by 7-foot LED video wall, with digital graphics morphing to fit the mood of each song. Keeping each performer in the spotlight – literally – works like magic with an automated system that allows specific lights to track individual performers in real-time.

But the eye candy isn’t limited to the stage.

In the audience, all 1,000 theater seats are equipped with armrest touchpads, allowing each guest to vote for their favorite musical performance with instant results. Outside the theater, a stadium-sized LED screen will provide a live simulcast of the day’s finale show. It marks the first time any Disney theme park attraction has been simulcast, and will add to the gala atmosphere that surrounds the theater for the final show of the day.

Disney’s Hollywood Studios theme park immerses guests in the glamour of show business 365 days a year with thrilling attractions, incredible Broadway-style shows, world-class atmosphere entertainment and interactive film, television and radio production facilities. The theme park is part of the 25,000-acre Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. For more information, guests may call 407/824-4321 or visit disneyworld.com. For more information about “The American Idol Experience” attraction, guests may visit disneyworld.com/idol.

About the Audition:

Guests 14 or older inside Disney's Hollywood Studios may audition to sing that day at the attraction, subject to guidelines in Frequently Asked Questions at Disneyworld.com/idol. Audition openings are limited and will likely close early in the day. Only a few singers will be chosen to sing onstage. A limited number of assigned audition times may be available in advance from time to time.

Complete attraction guidelines are described in the Frequently Asked Questions referenced above, which are subject to change without notice.

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