

Pretend City Children's Museum Amphitheatre

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An interactive amphitheatre is one of dozens of exhibits at Pretend City Children's Museum in Orange County, CA. The newly opened 15,000sq-ft. complex offers a complete mini-city and invites kids up to eight years old to become citizens by playing, exploring, and learning in a truly "hands on" approach.



Linda Hunter, the museum curator, stated the goal of the amphitheatre was to create an exhibit where children would feel empowered by actually "doing" the things that go into creating a production. She continued by stating we must be careful to not overwhelm the children with technology. We need to take something incredibly complex and make it seem simple to the parents and children which will allow the children to feel empowered to create and explore. The end result was a child-friendly, simplified lighting and sound console that allows children to select a wide range of pre-set sound effects, lighting scenes, and several fully programmed timecoded light shows to various styles of music.

Cantara Design project manager Adam Purath voiced his concerns that kids would be mashing buttons all day, and we needed a control system that could handle this kind of abuse and respond accordingly, bouncing between the many possible permutations. Jim Bras of Cantara Design Group created a rock-solid backbone system using AMX control and an Alcorn McBride DMX LightCue playback unit. The AMX system interpreted the button pushes and handled logic and state changes through complex sequencing, lock outs, multiple task layering, and most importantly, acting as a "stage manager," telling the Light Cue and QSC Rave audio system what to do.

Lighting design, programming, and equipment was provided by Red Fish Illuminations. Lighting designer Doug Norheim says the LED fixtures by Chauvet offered a nice balance of features. They offered low initial acquisition cost and, most importantly, low continued cost of operation with low power consumption and virtually no maintenance. Norheim felt creating a green design was especially important, considering

neighboring exhibits were about conservation, recycling, and keeping the oceans clean.

The miniaturized scale of everything in the museum added several challenges such as extremely tight angles, making conventional lighting impossible, due to short throw distances and proximity of high heat sources to children. Chauvet COLORpalettes did a nice job as back- and side-lighting in the tight over-stage area, while overhead Q-Spot 150s added great textures and movement. The pint-sized Chauvet MiN moving yoke fixtures fit in perfectly to the reduced scale of the exhibit.



The extreme ceiling heights in relation to the exhibit height would have created super long throws. However, a lowered centralized truss idea brought the fixtures in range and became a focal point of the exhibit. Placing the truss over the interactive control console brought immediate recognition to children of what the buttons were controlling, plus this added a fun dimension of being able to see the truss change colors and moving lights dance on cue.

Besides all the glam and glitter of the technology, the exhibit was designed to incorporate over 100 different learning tasks that promote brain development and meet California state educational content standards. Norheim thinks the true measure of the exhibit's success will be in 20 to 30 years when, hopefully, he'll read an interview in *Live Design* about a budding Broadway designer, citing a favorite childhood memory of being fascinated by playing with the lights at Pretend City as inspiration for becoming a designer.

Design Team

Lighting designer/programmer: Doug Norheim, Red Fish Illuminations

Project manager: Adam Purath, Cantara Design Group

AMX programmer: Jim Bras, Cantara Design Group

Scenic design and construction: Murphy-Catton

Sound and music designer: Curt Lyon, Lyon Studios

Pretend City: Linda Hunter, VP/COO

Equipment List

2 Chauvet Q-Spot 150 LED

2 Chauvet MiN Wash LED

2 Chauvet MiN Spot LED

2 Chauvet LEDrain 38

6 Chauvet LEDrain 64

5 Chauvet COLORpalette

2 PAR 64

1 Chauvet DMX-4 *Dimmer/Relay Pack*

1 Alcorn McBride LightCue

1 Horizon Gold Lighting Console
1 AMX Control System
1 QSC Rave Network Audio System
2 QSC AD-S82 Speaker
1 QSC CX168 Amplifier

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