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Kenny Wayne cranks it up H-3

INSIDE!

Thrills & chills

Celebration City, Branson's newest amusement park, is nighttime adventure

By John Woolley
World Scene Writer

BRANSON, Mo. — Officially, it's called "a multimedia laser production show." Visually, it's pretty doggone impressive.

A 30-minute outdoor extravaganza called "Celebrate!" plays nightly at Branson's new Celebration City, an amusement park designed to be a kind of complement to Silver Dollar City, which is located only a mile or so away.

The idea is that you hit Silver Dollar City early, stay all day, and then head everybody down the mountain to Celebration City — touted in publicity as "The Night Place for Families" — for more fun.

The Kodak-sponsored "Celebrate!" begins an hour before the park's closing time (11 p.m.), and uses all kinds of visual and auditory elements to take viewers through a decade-by-decade look at 20th century America, beginning with the '50s.

Those expecting a laser show will find that — but they'll find a lot more, too.

"I think that actually works in our favor," says Brad Schroeder, director of events and entertainment for Silver Dollar City Attractions, who was involved with "Celebrate!" from the beginning.

"I think people go in with a certain amount of expectations, and come out with another."

In addition to lasers, the presentation includes fireworks, lighting effects, a giant water screen and film footage, among other things.

travel
CELEBRATION CITY

In fact, there are so many different components to the show that even Schroeder isn't sure of the number.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't stopped to count 'em all up yet," he said with a laugh. "We just kept on going and stopped when we ran out of money."

From the beginning, he added, he and the other creators wanted a storyline to frame the historical material in the show.

After working up a number of different concepts, they settled on a simple one in which a young person and her grandfather release a tornado-like spirit called Fizzgig, "the queen of celebrations," who takes the two, and the viewers, through the past five decades. Grandma and his granddaughter are on film, projected onto an artificial bluff rising up 12 or so stories, looming behind a large pool that also provides the water screen.

Out of this giant wall of water come towering images of Elvis and Madonna and James Dean, who make the cycle — and, later, the likes of the Beatles, Michael Jackson,

and even the Apollo rocket that first carried Americans to the moon.

The projected characters are pretty amazing — Elton, for instance, appear to splash the water atop the pool as he performs — and look authentic enough to be enhanced footage of the real performers. That's not the case, however.

"We worked with LCL Laser Creations International, in England,

The centerpiece of Celebration City's thrill ride is the Ozark WildCat — the first drop is eight stories with a 310-degree spiral thrown in for dizzying effect.

Celebration City

SEE PARK H-3

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SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2003

PARK:

Ozark WildCat is a wooden rollercoaster that reaches 45 mph.

FROM H-1

and for that footage we hired imitators, choreographed it all and filmed it in a studio in London," he explained.

"Anything on the water screen has to be specially shot. You can't do it with existing footage because it won't translate."

While the '50s through the '90s are covered in the production, the park itself mostly recalls an earlier part of the 1900s. The entrance opens onto a turn-of-the-century scene, with water sculptures, fountains and a carousel, as well as a nostalgic main-street area.

There's also a boardwalk area intended to evoke the trolley-park ambience of the '20s and '30s, with games of chance lining the walk and young barkers challenging passersby to participate — kind of like the Tulsa State Fair midway with a retro vibe.

The pre-Beatles rock 'n' roll era of the '50 and early '60s, with its classic symbols of fast cars, burger joints and the endless ribbon of Route 66, also gets its own area of the park.

Next to "Celebrate!" the outstanding feature of the park is a roller coaster called the Ozark WildCat. While it, like the rest of Celebration City, is brand-new, it also imparts a nostalgic quality, built of wood like the celebrated coasters of the past.

Reaching speeds of 45 mph, it drops some eight stories and boasts a unique 310-degree spiral in its first drop.

That's also about the point when you begin wondering why



Provided photos

Above, the Orbiter. Below, welcome to Celebration Street.



you ate so much.

We should also mention an impressive young a cappella group called Chapter 6, which performs free shows blending pop, jazz, gospel and rock 'n' roll music daily at Celebration Theater.

The same day Celebration City opened, May 31, sister park Silver Dollar City kicked off its Na-

tional Kids' Fest. Returning from last year are the singing, dancing and talking vegetables from "VeggieTales," who'll be seen again in daily stage shows at the Riverfront Playhouse.

New this year is "Meet the Nicktoons" at the Boatworks Theater, a 30-minute show in which kids can meet Nickelodeon TV stars like *SpongeBob SquarePants* and characters from "Rugrats" and "Wild Thornberrys."

One of the park's most popular shows from last year also returns. "Extreme Stunts on Wheels," at the Red Gold Heritage Hall, features bike riders and in-line skaters, with a song-and-dance group performing between stunts.

The group performed in a clean-cut, Backstreet Boys kind of style last year. This time around, they're streeted-up a bit, doing "Stomp"-inspired rhythm things with trash cans and other urban paraphernalia.

As was the case last year, we saw no skateboards in the show, and the two skateboarders with me spent much of the show explaining in detail the vast difference between in-line skating and skateboarding.

The National Kids' Festival runs through Aug. 17 at Silver Dollar City, with gates opening at 9:30 a.m. and closing at 7 p.m. During that time, Celebration City opens at 3 p.m. and closes at 11 p.m.

Tickets to Silver Dollar City.

including tax, are \$39.21 for patrons 12-62 years old, \$28.61 for children 4-11 and \$37.09 for those over 62.

Celebration City costs \$30.10, \$24.52 and \$27.87 for the same three groups.

There's also a CityHopper Pass available that allows you to visit both parks as well as the White Water water park as many times as you want during four days. The pass must be used within seven consecutive days. Those are \$86.25 for 12 and older and \$5.45 for ages 4-11.

For more information, call 1-800-831-4FUN or visit the **silverdollarcity.com** Web site.

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