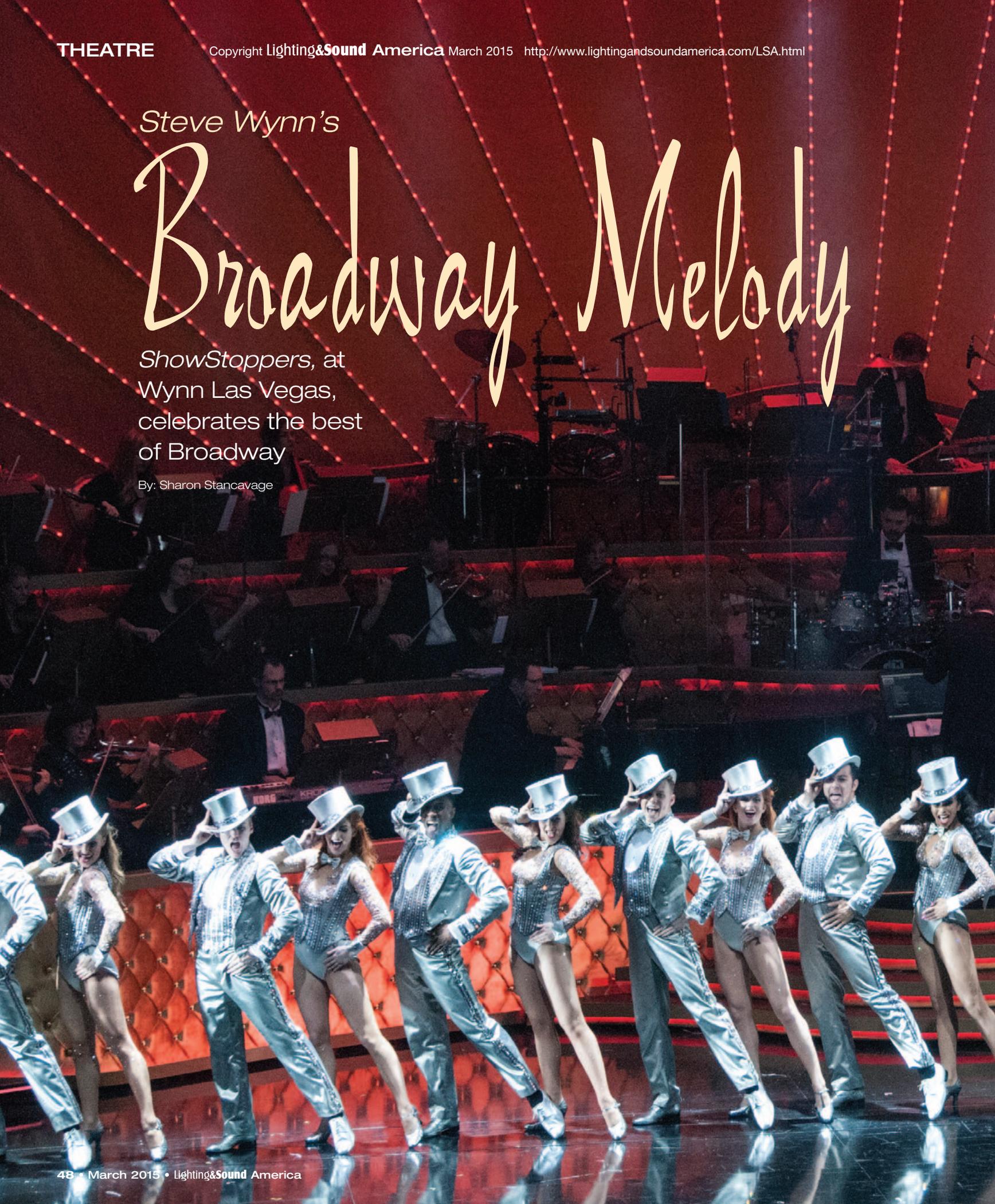


Steve Wynn's

Broadway Melody

ShowStoppers, at Wynn Las Vegas, celebrates the best of Broadway

By: Sharon Stancavage



To celebrate the birthday of his wife, Andrea, Steve Wynn, chairman and CEO of Wynn Resorts, threw a magnificent party for her—a party that included actor Hugh Jackman. According to lighting designer Patrick Woodroffe, of Woodroffe Bassett Design, “Steve also had a big orchestra with 40 pieces, and 40 dancers. Phil McKinley [director of *Spider-Man: Turn off the Dark*] directed it, and I lit it. Everyone loved the music, and, for Steve, it was a dream come true to see all this come to life in front of him.”

Wynn, an aficionado of Broadway show music, decided to transform the party into an attraction for the Wynn Las Vegas Encore Theatre. “We’ve been very involved in the hotel for many years, both with the [water attraction] Lake of Dreams and also with the exterior and landscape lighting of both Wynn and Encore, so it was a nice to be

able to finally put a show into one of theatres,” explains Woodroffe. Thus was born *Steve Wynn’s ShowStoppers*, a revue of classic Broadway show tunes that Wynn personally conceived and wrote. “In the 45 years I’ve been doing this, I’ve never felt as proud or as satisfied with a project I’ve ever been involved with as much as I am with this one,” says Wynn.

The production encompasses the talents of many, including McKinley; Woodroffe; the production design team from London-based Stufish Entertainment Architects; the Broadway sound designer Peter Hylenski; Rick Gray, general manager of entertainment operations at Wynn Design & Development; Dale Hurt, technical director at Wynn Las Vegas; musical director Dave Loeb; and, of course, Steve Wynn himself. “Steve took it very much upon himself to be part of the entire production process.



All photos and drawings courtesy of Stufish



The *Cabaret* set, which is shrouded in Rose Brand beads. Previous spread: "One," the iconic number from *A Chorus Line*.

He's incredibly knowledgeable about music, and knows what he likes," explains Stufish CEO Ray Winkler.

Scenery

Speaking about the production design, Winkler says, "A lot of the conversations were really [about] looking back to the old-school genre of Broadway musicals—what they do and how they did things. That drove us to conclude that it should be old-style in its technique and execution—so there are no video screens, and there are a lot of beautiful drapes and a live orchestra." Stufish production designer Ric Lipson puts it another way: "We tried to take the classic elements of the individual numbers, but reinvent them in the Wynn style."

Winkler adds, "The whole show oozes the Steve Wynn taste for quality and rich materials. If there was a benchmark to aspire to, that would have been it. There is nothing in this casino that Steve hasn't considered, nothing in the casino that you would say is cheap or substandard and doesn't fall into the Wynn palette of tastes."

Soft goods were an important part of the visual aesthetic. Lipson explains, "We felt that in Vegas generally everything is quite hard and mechanical, so this show became more about the soft and the sensual." Thus, the Stufish team worked with Tom Coulouris and Brent Porter, the "gods of drapes" at Secaucus, New Jersey-based Rose Brand. For example, the production's closedown has "15 axes of motion; each winch is individually controlled, and that cloth is Rose Brand Gold Panne Gliss velvet, which takes light in the most beautiful way," Lipson says. "We used the Gliss fabric quite a lot, in the proscenium and on the band riser front. The individual legs and borders are a dipped antique gold, made specifically for the show. There are also layers of Shimmer Organza, by Rose Brand; we use three different colors of it in different ways to get different looks." Upstage is a silver curtain made of a fabric called Frazzle, as well as a Rose Brand Classic Star Drop with LEDs for a border, legs, and drop. "In the scene from *Cabaret*, we use a lot of Rose Brand's 5/8" Plated Faceted Metal Beads for the whole of the set—it's sort of enveloped in these beads," Lipson adds.

An omnipresent part of the show is a winch-controlled, tracking, 19' 6"-deep by 49'-wide band riser, flanked on either side by two 4' rolling staircases. Lipson explains, "We wanted to find a nice way to make the band riser look less old-fashioned and less predictable. By using classic materials, but using LED lighting to change colors throughout the show, we allowed it to get a varying look." This piece also posed another challenge during the production and fabrication process—the orchestra grew from 24 people to 32. Winkler says, "In the end, it worked, because we had started off being very generous with the space, because experience dictates that it might just grow." The numbers that feature the band shell includes "It's Today," from *Mame*; "Razzle Dazzle," and "All That Jazz," from *Chicago*; and "There's No Business Like Show Business," from *Annie Get Your Gun*.

While the band riser and drapes are the nexus of some of the numbers, the songs from *Hello Dolly!*, *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and *A Chorus Line* are more elaborate from a scenic standpoint. "It was all built by PRG in Vegas and New Windsor, New York," says Lipson. PRG supplied all lighting and sound equipment as well.

"Put On Your Sunday Clothes," from *Hello Dolly!*, is the only time there's video on the stage; however, the video is cleverly disguised. "There's a wall of seven 80" HD LED screens that flies in within a big flat; that's the wall the girls go behind to get changed in 'Sunday Clothes.' We play a silhouette of them on the LED screens but, in reality,

they're meant to look like they're behind a changing screen," Lipson. The video is controlled via a PRG Mbox media server. The number also utilizes an automated knife track in the stage that brings on dollies with 11 mirrors, which are on a manual revolve.

The beautifully decadent, bead-laden club, featured in the songs "Wilkommen," "Money," and "Cabaret," from the show *Cabaret*, is moved manually by the talent. Winkler notes, "It has an A and a B side to it, because it turns around at one point in the show—what was the beginning was an entrance to the club, you then flip around and it becomes the background to the cabaret once you've entered it. The *Cabaret* set had to unfold, and we had to very carefully work out how it was rolled on, so that it could fit behind the closedown curtain while it did that."

Such details are a specialty of Stufish. Winkler says, "What the studio does, and does very well, is the set is modeled in three dimensions—it's put into the space, it's worked out what the transitions are, what the maximum dimensions can be, and what the turning circles are. That, in the end, gives people like Rick, the producer, and Phil, the director, the confidence that what is being proposed by us is going to be what ends up on stage working." The set includes banquette seats on stage left and right, with bead curtains behind them. Lipson adds, "The *Cabaret* club has integrated LED on all the steps and around all the trim, and it has some beautiful sculptures, by PRG, of stylized women on the façade."



The automated "Cell Block Tango" structure, which is accessible via the fly floor.

“Cell Block Tango,” from *Chicago*, features: a 2.5'-deep automated cell block that lowers the girls on stage from above. “It is a two-tier structure that was quite complex to create; the girls step out of the cell block, do their dance, and then they ride up again,” Lipson says. “It involved having a bridge attached to the fly floor; the girls could go up the fly floor and walk out along the bridge to the cell blocks.” It is a substantial piece of scenery: “It is very, very heavy and required a massive custom winch that was installed in the basement. We ended up using five linesets deep with serious mechanics to the lift cell block.”

Another piece of scenery, seen in the number “One,” from *A Chorus Line*, and the finale, “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” is a 70'-wide x 30'-high rear sunburst wall. “This was the largest element of the set to be installed,” Lipson. “It is a steel-frame timber surfaced flat that has a large hand-painted canvas stretched over. The paint treatment is an ombré, from light to dark gold to create a radiating glow to the center of the stage. There are 31 radial lines of LEDs spaced at 4”, which, in length, is approximately 760 linear feet in total. This whole back wall creates the most spectacular chases and effects.”

Other pieces include a Swarovski crystal-encased moon, designed by Michael Curry, of Michael Curry Design Inc., in Scappoose, Oregon, which appears in “Razzle Dazzle;” a locker room flat that serves as the backdrop for “The Game,” from *Damn Yankees*; and locally fabricated neon signs for “If My Friends Could See Me Now,” from *Sweet Charity*. Lipson says, “It’s not the hugest amount of scenery, but every act of the show usually has its own individual piece, and, between that, we’re in a more neutral-drape, empty stage or with the band or with the star cloth or the cyc curtain.”

The entire production is framed in a 25'-high by 42'-wide proscenium designed by Stufish. It epitomizes both the Wynn and Stufish attention to the smallest detail. Winkler explains, “The proscenium was done to basically give the theatre a *Steve Wynn’s ShowStoppers*-bespoke look. The nuances or details that you see in band riser are actually embedded within the proscenium itself with the tufting and the cove lighting.”

Lighting

The production’s team had a very simple design brief. Woodroffe notes, “The Stufish design has a beautiful set of five or six swagged legs and borders in rich pulled silks, and, because of this, we wanted very little of the lighting to be visible. Everything had to be tucked up behind the drapes; it was quite a challenge to get light into the places that we needed to.”

The theatre’s five electric pipes didn’t provide all of the positions needed by Woodroffe and his team, which included Adam Bassett, Miriam Evans, and Terry Cook. As





"Put On Your Sunday Clothes." The show's scenery was fabricated by PRG. Upstage are drapes from Rose Brand.

a result some alterations were made, says Woodroffe: “We put in some trusses upstage, where there weren’t any pipes, to be able to get fixtures over the orchestra and the band cart; we put in ladders on the ends of the pipes and added drop-downs to give us nice high-side lights. We also have some little forms on wheels that get moved in and out of the way when space has to be made to bring in scenic pieces.” The left and right ladders—four on each side—feature Martin Professional MAC 2000 Washes. The eight moving forms are comprised of GLP impression X4s. Woodroffe adds, “We also have an advance pipe [comprised of Martin Mac 2000 Washes and Mac 2000 Performances] which is quite steep, and we added in a couple more trusses left and right, where we put in an additional six [Martin MAC] Vipers. This give us a very high, steep sidelight position, which means that when there is a number right in front of the closedown curtain, we are able to pull the performers away from the drapes and get some real separation.”

Woodroffe chose compact GLP impression X4 S units to tuck behind the false proscenium, where they have “quite a lot of the work downstage.” He adds, “They are such small little lights, they change color beautifully and allow all sorts of possibilities.” The gear list includes a significant number of ETC Source Four Lekos, Clay Paky A.leda B-EYE K20s, Philips Vari*Lite VL3000 Spots, Clay Paky Alpha Spot QWO 800s, and Chauvet Professional COLORado 144 and COLORado 72 battens. “It’s lit like a Broadway show, but with far more moving lights,” notes Eric Marchwinski, the show’s programmer. “We knew we would need many options, and we also knew the show will evolve over the years; it was evolving as we were working on it.”

The theatre also features two Strong Super Trouper spotlights. Woodroffe says, “The spotlights and the operators were key—they were with us from the minute that we started programming the show, and they are, in effect, the ultimate moving light. Mostly, they are run in frost, but sometimes we drop the frame to produce that hard edge that works so well in the more theatrical numbers [from shows] like *Chicago* and *Cabaret*.” The spots are gelled using Rosco 05 (Rose Tint), Lee HT 004 (Medium Bastard Amber), Lee HT 021 (Golden Amber), Lee 107 (Light Rose), Lee HT 132 (Medium Blue), Lee 205 (1/2 CTO), and Lee 506 (Marlene).

Programming, which was done on an MA Lighting grandMA2 Full-Size console, was handled by a team. “The preview period went on for three-and-a-half weeks. Eric Marchwinski did a great job for the first couple of weeks, then he had to go to Australia, so his partner, Kirk Miller, came in did a week with us, and then our old friend Dirk Op t’Ende was with us for the last few weeks,” Woodroffe comments.

From a lighting standpoint, one of the more intriguing numbers in the show is “One,” which is staged using Michael Bennett’s original choreography. Woodroffe notes, “Baayork Lee, who performed in the original production joined us during rehearsals, choreographed the piece, and then we lit it together based on the original Broadway lighting [by Tharon Musser]. Of course, we’re using modern instruments and different effects, but much of it is exactly the same lighting, and that was exciting to revisit with Baayork.”

The sunburst wall that appears upstage during “One” was a lighting technical challenge. Marchwinski explains, “It is made out of a string product with RGB nodes. There are 31 strands, each of which has anywhere from 60 to 115 nodes.” Marchwinski programmed the nodes as a lighting unit, not a video wall. “The original plan was to pixel-map the whole thing, which would have been very time-consuming to achieve the concepts that Patrick was looking for quickly,” he explains. “I knew it would be much easier and quicker for me to have control over 2,500 LEDs then to have to say, ‘OK, hold on while I get a piece of content that does what you want.’”

Marchwinski made the control of over 2,500 LEDs manageable by the use of dummy fixtures when programming on the grandMA2 console. He explains, “There were different lengths of strings and they varied from 60 to 115 nodes; I picked the number 120 because that’s easy for me to divide in my head and that was the highest common denominator between all the strings. I rounded up to 120, and patched dummy fixtures on all the other strings to bring it up to 120.” He then put the fixtures into groups and started programming. “I treated the entire wall like a giant grid,” he says. This was the most sensible path, he says, since “the console likes to think in grids and in a linear sense.”

The room also received an upgrade to a fiber-optic-managed network for control. Marchwinski explains “We got into the theatre and realized that the infrastructure wasn’t in place to support the new technology in the show, so we upgraded to a gigabit network and installed managed switches.”

Sound

Peter Hylenski says, “This theatre has housed Broadway-style shows since it was first built, so there was an existing inventory of equipment here. My design directive from Rick Gray was to create the sound for *ShowStoppers* using as much of the existing equipment as possible.”

To create the lively, warm sound needed for the show, Hylenski looked into the Wynn stock and found 14 L-Acoustic dV-DOSC line array cabinets. He says, “It certainly wasn’t enough to create a full system, but we



During "Razzle Dazzle," Woodroffe bathes the stage in color via instruments that remain hidden behind the soft goods.

were able to approach PRG Audio and purchase 22 additional secondhand dV-DOSC cabinets to augment what we had in the showroom. We were able to create a full L-Acoustics dV-DOSC rig with a left-center-right array hang. I also added eight SB-18is—four each to left and right—to give a bit more low-mid punch for the system. The theatre also had six Meyer 650-P subwoofers already installed, and we kept those as-is, creating a three-way system. They added to the low-frequency support," Hylenski adds. System management was handled by Meyer Sound Galileo 616 processors.

Also, says Hylenski, "Scott [Sugden, of L-Acoustics] worked with us to integrate the old and new products into a cohesive system. He was able to help us with the modeling side as well; we used the SOUNDVISION 3D acoustical simulation software to model the room, and put the system together in virtual space before we actually got into the theatre, because we didn't have that much load-in time."

For fills, Hylenski and his team again dug into the

Wynn inventory. "The underbalcony delays, of which there are two rings, and the front fills, are all d&b [audiotechnik] E3s," he says. "There was also a surround system installed in the theatre [comprised of Martin Audio Effects 3Rs], which we repositioned a bit," he adds. "Basically, our mission was to look at what we had, figure out where the weaknesses were—whether it was physically a piece of equipment or position in the room—and come up with a hit list of what we needed to take care of."

From the start, Hylenski knew that there needed to be a new front-of-house console; he chose the DiGiCo SD10T. "It has the theatre software package, which basically deals with the way that the console functions internally from a software standpoint," he says. "It has a number of functions for more intricate cue structures, it has a cue list that deals with VCA assignments, and also has a function that allows you to track changes throughout your show. Consequently, there are certain things that can be automated during your performance and other things that can remain static. It also has an 'alias' function that lets

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you change EQ or other parameters on any given input based on a character or a character's alternate state, such as wearing a hat." The theatre's previous console, a DiGiCo D5T, was moved into a new role as the monitor board.

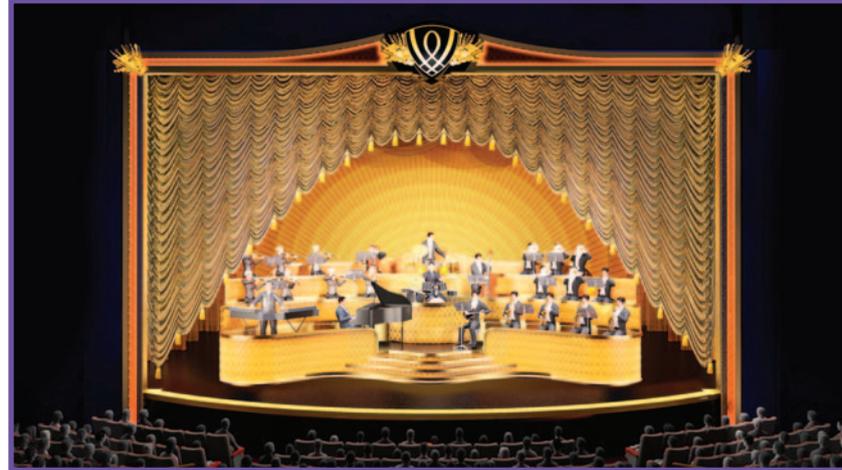
In terms of outboard gear, Hylenski says, "We have a rack of Empirical Lab Distressors, one for each of the six principal characters. I love the Distressor, because you can really tailor it as a compressor to your exact needs. It's a chameleon of compressors in a way, because you can completely adjust its characteristics. That really helps to manage the tiny headset microphone capsules we use. With the mic that close to the performer's mouth, you can use the Distressor or to smooth things out vocally and help it sit nicely on top of the band." He also makes use of TC Electronics 6000 reverbs.

"On stage, I used quite a few mics from the existing inventory, and only added where it would artistically benefit the sound," Hylenski continues. "The entire brass section is all on Royer ribbon mics, which are fantastic; that's my favorite microphone for brass. All of the woodwinds are on AKG 414s, while the violins are close-mic'd with DPA 4099Vs; they also have overheads, which are Sennheiser MKH 40s." He also has a handful of MKH 40s for the percussion, a Shure Beta 52 on the kick, a SM 57 on the snare, and DPA 4021s for the overheads.

For the cast, Hylenski used the existing Sennheiser system of SK 5212 radio transmitters with EM 3532 dual-channel receivers. "We use Sennheiser HSP 2 headset mics on the company," he says. "On many theatre shows, I wouldn't use headset mics, but occasionally I'll lean toward them, depending on the style of the show. With the orchestra directly behind the performers and a number or two where the vocalists are standing on the piano, we needed more gain and isolation than we'd get from a standard head mic."

A redundant click track system plays from a pair of Apple computers running the QLab playback system; triggered by the conductor. "The core rhythm section can hear the click track, just to stay in time with each other. With such a dance-heavy show, locking tempos to click helps keep things stable for the performers," Hylenski says.

Steve Wynn's ShowStoppers can be seen at the Wynn Las Vegas; performances are Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30pm. 📶



A render of the overture look; note the tufting on the band riser, which is reflected in the proscenium.



A render of "Cell Block Tango."



"All That Jazz" and "Hot Honey Rag" as originally envisioned by Stufish; shown upstage is an LED star drop that was provided by Rose Brand.