

WorldStage Teams with Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer on “Voice Tunnel”, A Large-scale Interactive Art Installation

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Sep. 5, 2013

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The New York Department of Transportation's Summer Streets 2013 arts festival featured many unique installations but none more unusual than Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's "Voice Tunnel," which opened the 1,400-foot vehicle tunnel on Manhattan's Park Avenue to pedestrians for the first time ever. WorldStage filled the interactive art installation's needs for an extensive



lighting package and a custom audio system that delivered the once-in-a-lifetime experience to art lovers of all ages on three Saturdays in August.

The tunnel, which runs on Park Avenue from 33rd to 40th Streets and date back to the 1830's, featured a sound and light installation that came alive when pedestrians spoke into a microphone at the center of the tunnel triggering 300 pulsating spotlights and 150 loudspeakers. Called "part architecture, part performance art" by one critic, "Voice Tunnel" invited the public to play with the very unique space around them.

WorldStage had previously teamed with Lozano-Hemmer on "Pulse Park" in Madison Square Park, "Levels of Nothingness" at the Guggenheim Museum and "Pulse Room" at the Madison Park Conservancy Gala. "We love working with Rafael," says WorldStage president Joshua Weisberg, "He challenges us technically and the results are always magical."

And the feeling is mutual. "I've worked with WorldStage in the past and been very pleased," says Lozano-Hemmer. "Our collaboration process for 'Voice Tunnel' was great - I got WorldStage involved at the beginning to make sure my numbers and logistics were right. When

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I work with WorldStage I can get all of the lighting, staging and sound from a single source. My projects are all about the integration of these elements in unique ways, so to work with a company that's comfortable with all the AV disciplines is very beneficial."

WorldStage provided 300 Source Four Lekos, 150 self-powered 50w speakers and many miles of cable for the tunnel. The artist said he didn't want to create "a big intervention" in the tunnel.

"It's quite pretty with beautiful rock shapes and metal cladding so I didn't want to bring a big installation into it." Instead he preferred to "work with something more ephemeral, like lights" and sounds that would "create a sense of choir."

WorldStage mounted the spotlights along the tunnel floor base, sitting on 18" curb at either side of the tunnel and spaced six feet apart, to produce glimmering arches of light. Pedestrians were able to influence the lights' intensity by speaking into an artist-supplied intercom at the tunnel's center, which recorded their voices and looped them. The trailing voices of the last 78 participants were heard as pedestrians strolled through the tunnel; the voices were played back on 150 loudspeakers, one beside each light arch and synchronized with it. As each new participant spoke into the intercom, older recordings were pushed one position down the light array until they left the tunnel. In this way the content of "Voice Tunnel" changed constantly. Lozano-Hemmer described the voices as "quiet...more like little memories of the tunnel."

Josh Weisberg likened the experience to "visiting an old cathedral in Europe where the light is streaming in and you hear the low murmur of tourists' voices out of which you can pick a lot of individual voices. It was a swirl of light and sound activity, sometimes chaotic, sometimes calming and sometimes totally absent.

WorldStage staff audio engineer Kate Brown led the team that worked with the artist's programmers to craft a unique audio solution for the installation. She opted to use a digital audio network run over fiber optic cable to eliminate noise induced by the extensive runs of lighting cable and achieve a distance not possible over copper. Each group of 8 to 16 self-powered speakers was connected to a Yamaha Rio digital stage box. The Rios were connected to the fiber switch network, which was linked to the artist's computer. The computer was outfitted with a RedNet sound card to output 75 streams of audio into a matrix that Brown configured using Dante network protocol. The 150-channel matrix output then fed the individual speakers.

Some 30 WorldStage crew members were on site for the install, which had a very short load in. "We had to pull an overnight prior to each Saturday exhibition, and install the system from scratch each time" Account manager, Terry Jackson points out. "It was a monumental amount of work, but we had Phil Alfieri and a great crew from Local 1 and they really made it happen.."

Lozano-Hemmer says, "one of the things I love about WorldStage is that they maximize the impact of the show for the available budget. This show was a big one, but WorldStage is able to respond to any size budget and get the most out of it."

At WorldStage Terry Jackson, who handled the account is vice president and director of lighting, Daryl Carmen was brought in to manage the production and Erik Perry, WorldStage senior project manager, was the site manager.

WorldStage Inc., the company created by the merger of Scharff Weisberg Inc and Video Applications Inc, continues a thirty-year legacy of providing clients the widest variety of entertainment technology coupled with conscientious and imaginative engineering services. WorldStage provides audio, video and lighting equipment and services to the event, theatrical, broadcast and brand experience markets nationally and internationally.