

# GREAT NEW THEATRE FOR TAMWORTH



The Capitol Theatre Tamworth is a 402 seat purpose built proscenium arch theatre which is located in the newly built Centrepoint Shopping Complex. The Theatre shares its foyer and bar facilities with Forum6 cinemas.

Theatre Consultant Richard Stuart was engaged to plan and oversee the fit-out of the theatre. With a Jands Serapid orchestra pit lift, automated winch flying system and well equipped sound and lighting rigs, the Capitol Theatre is a great new performing arts venue.

“Originally the theatre was going to be a large cinema but halfway through construction they developed the idea of making the largest cinema a live theatre,” explained Richard. “Consequently the building design was put on hold for a while whilst the theatre design evolved. As the developer started to think about theatre equipment and machinery, I was brought in as Theatre Consultant for the project although the building structure was well and truly locked in design-wise.”

When Richard joined the project the shell of the building was in place including pre-cast concrete slabs for the auditorium seating and his role was to firstly work with the developers to refine the design and infrastructure for live theatre use and progressively the Tamworth Regional Council.

The main issue to be addressed with this particular project was turning what was originally planned to be a large rectangular box cinema into a space

appropriate for live theatre. In creating a theatre out of the cinema, the whole cinema was raised up one floor in the building and that resulted in having an orchestra lift that could double as the loading access for the stage which is four metres above the street level to the rear of the shopping centre.

In fact beneath the theatre is a bottle shop and supermarket which ultimately determined the physical layout of the theatre building.

“This poses logistic problems with getting scenery and props into the building,” said Richard. “Scenery, props and equipment are loaded in under stage level, travels through the under stage area onto the orchestra pit & lift and is then raised up onto the stage. It’s all part of the unique design of the building which is essentially a major shopping centre at ground level with entertainment venues on upper levels.”

Richard turned to Jands for a theatre engineering solution, they delivered a design for the orchestra pit lift using four Serapid lift mechanisms resulting in – according to Richard – a very smooth operating, extremely quiet and very efficient orchestra lift.

“It works very well and everyone has been very happy with the orchestra lift,” added Richard. “Jands also supplied the flying system; originally the theatre was going to have a counterweight fly system but the design didn’t have any fly galleries, loading gallery or grid. Consequently I was

very concerned about the safety aspects of using counterweights in that sort of environment and so we explored the option of using a mixture of manual and motorised winches for the fly system.”

Currently the theatre has a fly system of seventeen lines with structural provision made for more lines to be installed. There is a full set of traditional black legs and border masking, two sets of tabs and a cyc all on manual winches as ‘set and forget’ standard masking. Four Jands JLX lighting bars are on 500Kg Jands H350 pile wind electric winches.

“The JLX lighting bars are pre wired with multicore tails and Socapex connectors with patching on the prompt side as we managed to get one small fly gallery installed during construction that allows for the lighting bars to be patched,” explained Richard. “For scenery, we have four variable-speed computer-controlled Jands SP650AC scenery batten winches and, whilst four isn’t many, it’s better than none. They afford great functionality and safety in the operation of the venue which we consider very important. Many shows coming through will be regional one-nighters and the scenery battens afford most of them the opportunity to quickly and easily hang up a few pieces of scenery or effects.”

Whilst it would have been good to use winches of one type, the tight budget dictated the final specification that includes manual pile wind winches for masking, motorised pile wind winches for

the 12m long lighting bars and variable speed drum winches for the scenery battens all with appropriate safety systems and procedures in place.

As the new venue does not yet have its own dedicated technical staff (only the recently appointed director and an operations supervisor who also has to look after other Tamworth Council venues) Richard was careful to install a system that was very safe to operate whilst providing flexibility. As with most projects of this nature, the fit out budget was incredibly tight. So the primary focus was on safety and providing an infrastructure platform that would provide the essential staging, lighting and sound requirements to support local and regional touring productions, to establish the Capitol Theatre as a new theatre on the touring circuit, with capacity to expand in the future.

"The bells and whistles can be bought in later as funding permits or hired in as required for specific shows," remarked Richard. "The main driver for me is to have the infrastructure first; somewhere to access it, somewhere to hang it and somewhere to plug it!

"The Jands installation has addressed the safety requirements and logistical constraints in the Capitol Theatre



admirably and the project has benefited from Jands highly experienced engineering, design and installation teams."

The Capitol Theatre will be operated as a live theatre by Tamworth Regional Council for forty weeks per year and as Cinema 1 of the Forum 6 Cinemas for twelve weeks per year. To date the theatre and cinemas have been praised by local patrons and performers for their facilities, comfort, restaurants, bars and ease of

access from the three level undercover carpark, since the Centrepoint Shopping Centre opened in November.

The complete theatre fit out included a full complement of black velour masking, white cyc, lighting rig, sound system, stage manager communications, CCTV and audio/visual, with full patching throughout the venue, as well as the cinema fit out, complete with 14m wide roller cinema screen in front of the proscenium.



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