

Almost as soon as the Grand Ole Opry's museum opened

GRAND

Country music is booming. New country music dance clubs and performance spaces are outstripping other types of entertainment from New York to California and Chicago to Texas. To country music fans, the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee is known as the birth place of the art form. Celebrating the history of the "Mother Church" and the Grand Ole Opry that it housed for thirty-one years is a recently expanded, exciting new interactive museum in the Opryland USA Theme Park.

Born in 1925, the Grand Ole Opry is an American institute. Its roster of stars from the past evoke nostalgia for the way things used to be: the names Minnie Pearl, Roy Acuff and Hank Snow, call to mind the familiar barn backdrop and homestyle music and comedy. Since 1925, the show has never missed a Saturday night radio broadcast. It was seen by millions of viewers on ABC beginning in 1955 and then on the Public Broadcasting System from 1978 until 1981. The Grand Ole Opry has helped to shape America's musical heritage.

The eight thousand square foot museum that traces the Opry's performers and their influence originally opened in May of 1992 with a series of displays including musical instruments, costumes, show posters and other memorabilia. Almost immediately however, plans were laid for a four thousand square foot, one million dollar expansion. New, more interactive forms of display were designed and a greater emphasis placed on the Ryman Auditorium's involvement in the Grand Ole Opry.

In the newly expanded and renovated museum, opened in July of 1993, visitors enter what appears to be the back alley behind the Ryman. The entry simulates the sites and sounds of the Opry's former home in downtown Nashville, complete with store fronts, apartments, and even an entrance to Tootsie's Orchid Lounge (a popular hang-out for some of the Opry's performers). Lighting helps create an outdoor mood as do sound effects of cars driving by, a baby crying and life going on behind the "windows" on the alley.

Further exploration of the alley reveals a simulated garage with the 1982 Buick Regal driven by Marty Robbins in stock car races. Around another corner, a ten by ten foot video wall plays vintage film clips of Opry stars and historical vignettes of

the Opry narrated by Porter Wagoner. From this exterior display visitors enter the exhibit space which is divided into separate areas highlighting individual Opry stars such as Patsy Cline and Hank Snow. In addition to illuminated display cases containing memorabilia, each section has interactive touch screen computers from which songs, biographical information, performance history and other details relating to the performers can be selected. Finally, the museum contains replicas of past and present recording studios, a small video studio, and a replica of the Grand Ole Opry stage which is also used for special events.

Museums provide an opportunity for their own form of crossover between full blown theatrical lighting and newer forms of architectural lighting control. The Grand Ole Opry Museum is an excellent example of this blending of disciplines. Richard Davis, Lighting Designer for Opryland USA states, "People expect to see more elaborate lighting now thanks to MTV." To create the desired visual impact in the entry area and on the replica of the Opry stage, Mr. Davis employs the heavy use of color media as well as a series of lighting cues to create movement and interest.

Use of more theatrical types of lighting demanded a different approach to the museum's lighting control. Mr. Davis selected Strand's Premiere Architectural control system to meet the new demands. Prior to the expansion, lighting control was provided by a static preset in each display area. The inability to create and dynamically select presets appropriate to the activity in the museum was identified as a design impediment. Additionally, economies in lamp life, color media, and power usage were prime considerations.

After comparing the cost of the Premiere to simply expanding the existing preset system, Mr. Davis was able to prove a more economical, as well as more powerful control system, justified not only its use for the expansion, but also allowed going back to retrofit this new control into the existing display areas. All museum lighting is now tied into the Premiere. Dozens of cues run automatically according to pre-programmed fade times. The system is centrally controlled from two #2300 Command Stations and a #2200 Display Station. Local override access is provided

