

Rockin' on the River

The Horseshoe Casino is more than just a riverboat with a \$70-million theater install, bringing top echelon acts to The Venue.

By David John Farinella



The Venue can be used for everything from corporate and sporting events to concerts.



Opening night star Bette Midler performing at The Venue.



Sixty percent of the stage is covered with acoustic liner and/or panels to help with the high frequencies.

The Horseshoe Casino has been rocking for years, since it's been one of the most popular resort and casino destinations in the Chicago area. Yet, it's only since The Venue opened earlier this year that the Horseshoe has been rocking, rolling, shaking and shimmying.

The Venue is a 3,300-seat hall that can host music concerts, sporting events, corporate happenings and special events. Montreal-based Scéno Plus managed the \$70-million project. Other partners included Las Vegas-based architecture firm Friedmutter Group, acoustic firm Legault et Davidson from St. Lambert, Canada, and Montreal-based Lightemotion who handled architectural lighting.

It was once known as "riverboat gambling" — as long as it was floating, gambling was legal. But the behemoth properties of today bear little resemblance to any boat you have ever seen. The Horseshoe Casino, a floating vessel that is the size of six football fields and is docked on the shores of Lake Michigan, was recently refurbished and expanded (including The Venue, which is on the third tier of the vessel) to the tune of \$500 million.

Casino owner, Harrah's Entertainment, let it be known early on that The Venue was going to be Horseshoe's anchor attraction.

"They wanted to attract high-end artists to play here, which would bring people down to the casino and the resort," explains Normand-Pierre Bilodeau, Scéno Plus' director of technology and specialized equipment. "So, we didn't get an unlimited budget, but the mandate was clear to make sure the venue could do a lot of things."

"This Venue Does Everything." FOH

A quick look at the events booked into The Venue proves that point. On the musical side of things, acts include opening night star Bette Midler, Smashing Pumpkins, Aretha Franklin and Tesla. Comedians Howie

Mandel, Bill Cosby and Jeff Foxworthy are also appearing, and special events like ShoXC Elite Challenger Series, World Series of Poker and Arabian Nights are also booked in.

The first challenge that the team encountered was the venue's location. Being on the water, Bilodeau says, was not that much of an issue. "It feels like you're in a normal house, it's just that when you look outside you see water," he explains.

The third floor location, though, created some angst. "Ninety percent of the theaters we build are sitting on a concrete base," Bilodeau says. "In this case, it's on the third floor and there's a casino underneath." That meant that sound and vibrations had to be contained within the venue and could not leak below.

That challenge was answered with a combination of construction and rigging innovations, including the use of light concrete technology, stronger structural steel that can hold double or triple the capacity of previously available steel and a rig that was supported by the venue's roof.

Volume Control FOH

Containing the volume within The Venue itself was accomplished with a special Scéno Plus acoustic treatment recipe. "In most of the theaters we do, we will have one end that is live and another that is dead," Bilodeau explains. "We work a lot on the noises of the balcony, to be sure there is no slap back coming back to the stage."

The open ceiling at The Venue — done because the roof needed to support the weight of the grid — made Bilodeau change up the recipe a bit. "We couldn't close the ceiling, so all the steel is visible and it reflects," he explains. "So, we covered everything with acoustic liner to help with the high frequencies."

To dampen the mid-frequency energy that was coming off the stage and the hung

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