Stage theatre evolves with the use of new technology

March 22 2007

UCF's Conservatory Theatre and its partners are pushing the envelope of traditional theater by not only bringing it into the 21st Century, but launching it into the 22nd.

Using new techniques that merge the Internet 2 with traditional stage theatre, the University of Central Florida, Bradley University in Illinois and the University of Waterloo in Canada performed a play that put actors from Florida and Canada on the stage in Illinois without them ever leaving their respective campuses.

"Literally it's an evolutionary advance in this area," said UCF Professor John Shafer who performed on the virtual stage earlier this month. "It's a small bit of history and we are quite proud of it."

A receiving broadband-connected computer at Bradley, which handled as much as 130 megabytes of data a second, was hooked into Shafer's computer at UCF during the performances March 6-11. That's how his body was "beamed" onto the stage where he joined live actors from Bradley and another virtual actor from Canada. It was all done in real time and merged with 3-D and 2-D sets on multiple screens. Bradley put together the computer images. At times it was difficult for the live audience in Illinois to tell who was live and who was virtual.

Next year the partners plan to take the virtual stage to the next level – simultaneous performance of actors on three live stages. In that play, "Alice Experiments in Wonderland," actors from each school will be

beamed onto the stages of the three communities and interact together. They are already working on logistics, including some technical challenges.

James Oliverio, a professor of fine arts from the University of Florida, called the performance a big step forward. Oliverio is a five-time Emmy award winning composer and producer.

He told the Discovery News this month that the project was "the first successful adaptation of an emerging art form and culture of multimedia that enables seamless presentations." He went on to say that the "capabilities and where it might lead us in the future" are open to the imagination.

Shafer agrees. He can't say exactly what this means for tomorrow's audiences. However, he knows this is big.

"When film was invented, some people knew it was going to be big," Shafer said. "But they could not have envisioned Star Wars, industrial training films for fortune 500 companies, or (the impact of) An Inconvenient Truth. The collaborators involved in this project believe we are on the cusp of another creative movement and we are happy to be part of the exploration."

Shafer has been experimenting with technology for years, finding ways to blend it with theatre for the benefit of audiences. Collaborating with people like Bradley Theatre Chair George Brown and Waterloo Theatre Chair Gerd Hauck, these pioneers in "techtheatre" are sure to be producing some exciting results.

Source: University of Central Florida

Citation: Stage theatre evolves with the use of new technology (2007, March 22) retrieved 24 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2007-03-stage-theatre-evolves-technology.html