

Profiles & Reviews



Avatar stars Jake Sully and Neytiri. Photo courtesy of 20th Century Fox

Esquire IMAX 3D: Avatar, It's Like You're Really There

By John Benton
Staff Writer

A six stories tall, eighty-foot wide screen, wrap-around sound with 12,000 watts of power, stadium seating for four hundred--the cinematic experience will blow you away. Add in the amazing 3D imaging and watching a movie at the Esquire IMAX is an experience that just might be too much for the squeamish.

I recently visited the Esquire IMAX to see James Cameron's newest film, *Avatar*. The line for tickets went across K Street and down toward the Convention Center on this, the twelfth day that *Avatar* had been playing at the Esquire IMAX Theater in Sacramento. Once again, the theater was sold out: 407 patrons were eager for the opening credits.

The Snack line was equally long, although it moved very quickly. Management and employees of Sacramento's almost seventy year-old theater know how to handle crowds. As we took our seats and donned our 3D polarized glasses, we could hear the buzz of excitement coming from the rows of theatergoers. Our seats were in row J, dead center, which some call the "sweet spot." I try to sit in this vicinity each time we visit the IMAX, as it helps the experience to be fully enveloping.

Local celebrity Mark S. Allen (Good Day Sacramento), also six stories high, introduced us to specifics of the theater through a quick opening sequence. The lights fell and the sound system started to crank up. The crowd's voices went silent as *Avatar* began. Set in the future, *Avatar* takes place on a distant planet called Pandora. Marine Jake Sully is indoctrinated into a group of scientists whose main role is to understand and work with the local intelligent life.

The Na'vi people, a large, blue, catlike race, are a civilized and nature-centered group, seen as "savages" by Earth's corporate entity that is there simply to mine for valuable resources. There is also a large military presence on the planet to assist the corporation in their

endeavor. Sully's military background and competitive nature lead him to work closely with the military while getting to know the Na'vi.

The *Avatar* program uses hybrid bodies that look like the Na'vi, which the human scientists "drive" from a remote station, using a DNA connection. In his *Avatar* body, Sully learns a lot more about the Na'vi than he expected to, which interferes with his ability to complete his mission. The film is a rollercoaster ride through action and emotions, causing you to think about humanities role in the universe.

Avatar is a spectacular experience visually, aurally, and emotionally. The amazing 3D brings to life some of the most spectacular filmmaking I've ever seen. Canadian born James Cameron is well known for writing stories and screenplays that bring fantasy to life. His filmography includes such memorable films as the *Terminator* series, *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, and, of course, *Titanic*. He was also the director on these films, as well as many others. I've seen all these movies, and find it hard to say which one is my favorite. This is the first of his films I've seen in an IMAX theater, and I can't wait to see it again.

Whether you are looking for an over the top entertainment experience or a place to host an out of the ordinary business meeting, Sacramento has the perfect place. The Esquire IMAX Theater is available for other events as well. They are available to host groups of 20 or more for corporate events, product launches, multi-media presentations, satellite downlinks and private film screenings. They can help you create an experience for your group unmatched in the Sacramento area. They also offer a wide range of educational experiences for schools.

The Esquire IMAX Theater, located at 1211 K Street in downtown Sacramento, is an incredible theater that offers much more than a typical movie theater. The large format IMAX films, superior sound system, and state of the art 3D viewing make the 1940's style movie theater stand apart from other theaters. Right now you can experience one of the most ...

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Xanadu brings back '80s Fun

By Sandy Carriger
Staff Writer

Xanadu is a fun-filled production in the Broadway Sacramento musical theater series which runs until January 10, 2010. Flashback to the 1980's with roller disco, mirror balls and leg warmers. You may recall the original Universal Pictures Film and screenplay by Richard Danus and Marc Rubel, starring Olivia Newton John, which bombed but became a sort of cult classic. *Xanadu* the Broadway Production is completely campy and light-hearted entertainment. It is appropriate for all ages, although us 'older' folk are most likely apt to pick up on the double entendres and metaphors.

This is a basic love story of boy meets girl, who just happens to be from the realm of gods, boy loses girl and boy gets girl in the end. It takes place at Venice Beach California (you have to picture roller skaters before in-line skates in short shorts along the boardwalk and surfer dudes) and Mt. Olympus, home of the Greek Gods. Sonny, a sort of burned out, beach-bum type artist has lost his lust for life and become disillusioned with his talent or lack thereof.

His chalk mural of the Greek Goddesses, Clio and her "nine" sisters (I only counted seven and two of them were played by men) come miraculously to life to help Sonny realize his true potential. Clio becomes Sonny's muse, dons a disguise by changing her name to Kira, wears roller skates and leg warmers and speaks in an Australian accent.

And so the story ensues, filled with memorable songs and hilarity. The stage is a Greek arena setting where actual audience members sit during the production and with whom the performers interact. With inspiration from Kira, Sonny soon pursues his dream of opening a venue for artists complete with a roller disco to foster the athletic aspect of the arts. Hence, the name *Xanadu*, an idyllic place of great beauty and contentment (akin to Mt. Olympus).

Sonny locates an abandoned theater and persuades the owner, Danny McGuire, to let him use it for free. Danny agrees, but only because a woman from his past (who is really Clio) comes to him in a memory flashback and coaxes him to come to Sonny's aid. Under great time constraints, Sonny must renovate and open. With help from some of the muses, Sonny's dream becomes a reality. Of course, as Sonny and Kira/Clio work together on this project, love blossoms between the two of them. Jealous sisters, Calliope and Melpomene, are thrilled that their younger sister has fallen for a mortal and cast a spell to ensure the love is everlasting so



Elizabeth Stanley and company in the Broadway Sacramento presentation of the national tour of "Xanadu" at the Community Center Theater. Photo by Carol Rosegg

that Zeus will forever banish Clio from Mt. Olympus as punishment. The bungling sisters don't realize there is a glitch in their spell casting. Sonny and Clio's love is really true and ultimately blessed by Zeus.

All of the cast are outstanding singers, comedians and really awesome skaters! Many of the actors were required to play dual roles as was explained by Melpomene due to the lack of cast members. Lead actress, Elizabeth Stanley as Clio/Kira, is cute and perky with quick witted comedic timing. Max Von Essen as Sonny is handsome and quite sexy in his very short shorts and the perfect counter part to Stanley as a stereo-typical dimwit, evidenced by his frequent use of the line, "I don't get it?"

Danny McGuire, played by Larry Marshall, is the well-to-do partner of Sonny with a strong, deep voice and great soft-shoe act. I was particularly drawn to the evil sisters; Calliope played by Annie Golden and Melpomene played by Amy Goldberger during this performance, with their acid-tongued comments and treacherous coniving. Ya just gotta love the villains in this one!

Book for this production was written by playwright Douglas Carter Beane. Music and lyrics by Jeff Lynne of Electric Light Orchestra and John Farrar. Popular songs include: *Magic*, *Evil Woman*, *Suddenly*, *Strange Magic*, *Have*

You Never Been Mellow? and of course, *Xanadu*. Music is played by a rock band comprised of keyboards, guitars, drums and synthesizer. This was a particularly enjoyable experience for me. I was accompanied by my daughter-in-law, a child of the '80s, who fondly remembered being a very excited young girl going to lunch and a movie, *Xanadu*, with her sister and a friend.

Even if you weren't a fan of the '80s, I still highly recommend seeing this production of *Xanadu*. You'll laugh, you'll sing, you'll tap your feet and you'll leave the theater with a huge grin on your face! *Xanadu* is a 90-minute production performed without an intermission. All performances are at the Community Center Theater, 1301 L Street, Sacramento.

Advance tickets are available at the Wells Fargo Pavilion Box Office, 1419 H Street, Sacramento; (916) 557-1999 or online at www.tickets.com. CA

Broadway Musical Theater continues with "RENT," the Tony Award-winning musical, February 3-7, 2010. Tickets and more information available: www.californiamusicaltheatre.com or by phoning (916) 808-5181.

Let no man pray that he know not sorrow. Let no soul ask to be free from pain. For the gall of today is the sweet of tomorrow and the moment's loss is lifetime's gain.




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