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'Batman Live' transforms Memorial Coliseum into virtual comic book

Whether you grew up with the "Batman" TV series or "Dark Knight" movies, you'll enjoy the show.

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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For a 40-something journalist like me who has seen quite a few incredible shows in his day, three words come to mind that best describe the opening performance last night of "Batman Live": Holy Spectacular, Batman!

For nearly two hours, the magic of technology transformed Memorial Coliseum into a virtual comic book featuring all of the beloved Batman characters.

All the well-known staples of the Batman story were included: Gotham City, Wayne Manor, the infamous Batcave, as well as most of the favorite Batman villains, such as the Joker, Penguin, Catwoman and Riddler.

Centered around the story of how Batman and Robin came to be and why they became crime fighters, "Batman Live" came across as the perfect blend of a Broadway show and a Cirque du Soleil performance that was very entertaining and family oriented.

The centerpiece of the "Batman Live" production is a 105-foot-wide video wall that looms front and center over the entire stage.

With its more than 2 million LED lights and ability to generate 4 trillion colors, the video wall carried the story line forward with comic graphics while seemingly blending the actors and props onstage into the picture via the opening and closing of certain parts of the wall.

This allowed things like the Batmobile to appear to burst out from the Batcave onscreen onto the stage and for the actors to appear to walk into the action onscreen or to disappear.

Openings in the stage floor also allowed the actors to disappear under the stage and seamlessly reappear elsewhere.

Anyone who was raised on the older comic book version of Batman and reruns of the Adam West 1960s TV series would be quite at home watching this production.

Several times throughout the evening, I was reminded of the joy of reading the comic books as a child and the childlike wonder of seeing Batman triumph over evil.

For the generation raised on computers, large-screen TVs and smartphones, this show also had a lot to offer.

From the loud booms and explosions of the pyrotechnics to the fast-paced action onscreen and onstage, there was enough excitement to keep even the shortest attention span satisfied.

Even though the coliseum was about half full, the audience seemed to really appreciate the show and clapped loudly each time a famous character entered the stage.

Henry Meyer, 8, and Ruby Meyer, 11, along with their parents Erika and Tom, were among those in the crowd last night.

Both Meyer children had heard of the Batman character but neither was overly familiar with him or the story of his origins. Even though they knew little about Batman, they liked the show, each with different highlights they enjoyed most.

"I like all the confetti guns," Henry Meyer said at intermission after confetti had just been shot into the air surrounding the stage.

"I like all the flying people," his sister Ruby said of the acrobats that appeared throughout the show.

As for mom and dad, they, too, thought the show was good and not what they were expecting.

"My favorite part was the dressed-up audience members," Erika Meyer said with a smile. "I saw a grown man dressed up as Batman, and it wasn't an actor I'm pretty sure.



More Information

Two shows today

What: "Batman Live," a live-action arena show, features an original story and all of your favorite Batman characters.

When: 3:30 and 7:30 p.m. today

Where: Memorial Coliseum, 4000 Parnell Ave.

Cost: \$19.50, \$39.50, \$49.50 and \$79.50. Tickets are available at the coliseum ticket office, select Walmart stores, www.ticketmaster.com or charge-by-phone at 1-800-745-3000. Parking is \$4 per vehicle main lot and \$8 per vehicle preferred lot.

"It (the show) was more interactive than I was expecting," she continued.

"It's like a comic book come to life," her husband Tom added. "It's fast-paced and keeps your attention."

"Yeah," their daughter Ruby chimed in.

From the frenetic video trailer that advertises "Batman Live," I had expected a darker, more modern telling of the Batman saga similar to the recent movies.

While the look of Batman was definitely more 21st century and this Batman wore a metallic-looking suit much like Batman from the recent mega hit Warner Brothers movie "The Dark Knight Rises," the overall feel of "Batman Live" was much closer to the original comic books from the late 1930s and 1940s.

"You want justice, not revenge," a phrase the Bruce Wayne/Batman character repeatedly said to the Dick Grayson/Robin character about the death of Grayson's parents, echoes the sentiment of the original Batman comic well.

Wisely, the people behind "Batman Live" chose to keep more of the comic book feel to the Batman characters, which serves the characters better than the darker take on the Batman saga from the recent films. This approach also makes the show much more family friendly.

If you have a chance to catch one of the two remaining shows today, whether you're an old-time fan or are new to the world of Batman, do yourself a favor and go. You won't regret it.

And if you're an old enough to remember the Batman TV series, even though no "BIFF!," "BAM!" or "POW!" come onscreen, the onstage choreography will make you feel right at home.