

TIGERWEEKLY™

More than stargazing at LASM Planetarium

BY JAMES COHN
Contributing Writer

Galileo may have been able to understand the sun was the center of the solar system, but he never could have imagined the full vastness of the cosmos like we do today. And now with the 400th anniversary of the famed astronomer's first observation through a telescope, Baton Rouge's most sophisticated multimedia presentation venue is taking you even deeper into our universe that Galileo had just begun to understand.

The Irene W. Pennington Planetarium at the Louisiana Art & Science museum, will be bringing in the International Year of Astronomy with "a year long global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture".

Starting the celebration off will be "Digital Universe," one of the planetarium's greatest achievements, that takes viewers on an exhilarating virtual journey through the cosmos.

Mike Smail, planetarium producer, said "Digital Universe will literally take you on a tour of the universe with an improved 3D catalog of Universe, able to go outside of Earth and beyond."

The planetarium's website adds, "Using the world's most extensive, accurate three-dimensional mapping of the universe, the planetarium's new digital software takes the audience on a magic carpet ride through the night sky for an up close encounter of the planets of our solar system and beyond, through the stars of our Milky Way Galaxy, past distant galaxies, and to the edge of our known observable universe."

To help with the mammoth task of mapping the universe, the planetarium teamed up with other trusted science institutes, explains Smail. "We worked with spec. rose planetarium and some government and science agencies to put it together. Together we were able to develop an accurate atlas of the universe. It was a total group effort."

"Digital Universe" is only the beginning though. Throughout 2009, the planetarium will be debuting many exciting new shows including "Stars", and the child friendly, futuristically animated "The Zulu Patrol".

The planetarium also presents large-format films, such as "Sea Monsters" and Katrina documentary "Hurricane on the Bayou", as well as visual music shows using the most advanced sound technology available. "This

includes Baton Rouge's only 70 mm, 8-perf projection system and a 5.1, 15,000-watt digital Surround Sound system."

The advancement of computer graphics technology has also enhanced the visual side of the shows. "Visual music shows are the next evolution of laser shows. We phased those shows out 2 1/2 years, and now its totally CGL."

The computer graphic and sound system of the planetarium will help bring two of rock's biggest names in a way you've never seen them before.

Showing all spring long, the full dome production "U2" sets lighting and animation effects to some of the band's timeless classic tracks. "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "Vertigo", and "With or Without You" are just a few of the songs in this 44 minute, one-of-a-kind experience. In addition, Pink Floyd's acid trip imagery will come to life on dome's massive 60 foot screen.

"We've hand selected 50+ minutes of the best cuts from Pink Floyd's landmark rock opera The Wall. Audiences will feel the album come to life through immersion in amazing computer graphics and 5.1 surround sound.

"Digital Universe" shows daily at 2. Visit www.lasm.org for more show times and ticket info.