

SUBJECT: MICHAEL JACKSON TOUR

by LINDA DECKARD

Booking Michael Jackson The Immortal World Tour, a Cirque du Soleil production, had a unique beginning.

Faced with the need to book a Cirque show that was more concert than circus, with two-day rather than two-week stands, and in all of North America at once for a national on-sale, Finn Taylor, Cirque's GM of arena shows, was inspired.

"My solution was to write to every city in one day and, in the subject line, it would say 'Michael Jackson Tour.' We pretty much got a 100-percent response rate from every building," Taylor said. Not many realize Michael Jackson only did three world tours. "We're effectively his fourth world tour. Interest was high. I didn't have to wait long to get avails for that tour."

This is only the second time Cirque has produced a show just for arenas. Cirque shows generally start in the big top and are converted for arenas after a few years. Taylor books them all, but his success in booking 60 cities in North America in time for a national on-sale of a brand new show has earned Taylor the *Venues Today* 2011 Hall of Headlines award for Bookings.

Taylor has been booking Cirque shows in arenas since 2006. Jacques Aube, manager of Bell Centre, Montreal, Quebec, hosted the world premiere of the Michael Jackson show, just as he did with *Delirium*, the other arena-only Cirque production.

"Finn was instrumental in getting it done properly. It took a lot of preparation. When you bring a big top show into an arena, it's not the same thing," Aube commented, noting that Taylor understands the business and works well with the arena team.

This time, Cirque has partnered with the estate of Michael Jackson who gave them access to original master recordings of all of Jackson's songs, 60 of which are played in part or whole during the show. "To us, it was important to be the 'real' Michael Jackson show," said Taylor. "Michael Jackson was known for the music and dance; Cirque for acrobatics and the quality of shows."

Six weeks after the world premiere in October, the show sat down in Las Vegas at the Mandalay Bay Events Center for the month of December. Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino will host another Michael Jackson/Cirque show permanently beginning in 2013.



Until then, the show plays North America through August 2012, then performs in Europe for a six month tour, which Taylor is booking now. Then he starts on the Asian tour.

Taylor works with a staff of 31 to keep Cirque's arena shows on track, including Dave Pittman, formerly with Feld Entertainment, who helps book arenas.

"We had to book Michael Jackson like a concert, a Tuesday and Wednesday in one market, Friday and Saturday in another market, so we didn't really have too many issues with protection clauses of other companies," Taylor said. "The thing that hit us most was NHL playoffs, always a problem in the April-June time period. This show is so deep we can only really play the bigger buildings," many of which have hockey teams.

Tickets cost an average of \$100 U.S., with attendance six weeks into the tour running between 9,000-10,000 a show. With two shows per city, the gross potential for just the North American leg is in the \$120-million range.

The end stage is 65-feet deep, but there's room for seats on three quarters of the floor, he said. "We are seeing a lot of markets in 2012 selling well so we're considering adding shows."

"This is double our traditional shows in terms of weight, equipment and size. We have 65 artists and about 65 technicians. We're at 125,000 pounds," he said, admitting it started at over 200,000 pounds. It had been pared down to 44 trucks at opening.

By week six in Spokane (Wash.) Arena, load out was down to two and a half hours with 35 trucks. Load in is at about 16 hours.

Kevin Twohig, president of the Spokane facilities, was amazed. "We're so used to a concert that's in and gone in the same day," Twohig said. Their biggest show previously was *Walking with Dinosaurs* at 24 trucks.

The business plan for Michael Jackson The Immortal World Tour is capped at three years. "The thing is Michael Jackson is much more popular outside North America than inside," he said. But even in Europe and Asia, the massive show can't travel forever. The creative team at Cirque is constantly brain-storming its next arena show, and in the future, might go beyond the traditional Cirque du Soleil model, Taylor said.

"We have a lot of ideas up our sleeves."



BOOKINGS

Above: A scene from Michael Jackson The Immortal World Tour.

Another Record Year.....

Despite a drop in the number of events, *Venues Today's* Year-End report shows venue grosses way up

By DAVE BROOKS

If your building felt a little quieter in 2011 than the previous year, you're not alone.

According to *Venues Today's* Year-End Hot Tickets entire database, the total number of shows on the road from Oct. 16, 2010 to Oct. 15, 2011 dropped by 15 percent. Even worse, the total number of tickets available was also down by about 8 percent.

While the top venues in the country are posting more events, the total number reported is down. Despite the drop, there's still one key indicator that is holding on — concerts grosses. The money made from concert tickets grew one percent this year.

So, despite a double digit dip in the number of acts available coupled with a precipitous drop in ticket sales, venues were still able to do more — with less.

"I think we're getting smarter about selling tickets to the right customers and being more careful about buying talent," said Bob Hunter from the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, which saw its total number of events drop from 72 in 2010 to 54 in 2011 — yet grosses climbed by \$1.2 million.

Hunter said the monetary trend was a combination of facilities getting better at using tools like social media and growing their marketing lists to target offers to the right people, as well as a number of high-interest shows on the road that get consumers excited.

TOTAL TICKETS AVAILABLE

2010	63,890,006	
2011	60,567,973	↓ 3,322,033 (-5.19%)

TOTAL TICKETS SOLD

2010	48,138,348	
2011	44,077,878	↓ 4,060,470 (-8.43%)

TOTAL TICKET GROSS

2010	\$2,497,983,545	
2011	\$2,516,828,791	↑ \$18,845,246 (+0.75%)

TOTAL SHOWS

2010	13,708	
2011	11,671	↓ 2,037 (-14.85%)



There's no better example of this than the Houston Livestock Show, which runs 19 days in March each year. Each year the show is one of the highest grossing events on the Hot Tickets chart, and 2011 isn't any different with the event posting an additional \$5 million in receipts for a record gross of \$36,773,095 — a boost of nearly 15 percent.

Attendance was a much different story. In 2011, while total attendance again broke a year-over-year record, paid attendance for the rodeo and concert series was 1,225,323, down about three percent from 2010.

"We raised all of our prices across the board this year, about 18 percent overall," said Leroy Shafer, CEO for the event. The biggest price increases were in the suite and club levels, Shafer said, some of which went up as much as \$15. In those areas, the average ticket price went up from \$24.50 to \$29.80.

In 2011 the average ticket price costs over \$5 more per ticket than in 2010 — a spike of nearly 10 percent in ticket price. "While there may be fewer acts on the

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