

EXPLORING THE CITY

BY JIM MURPHY

Surround Yourself With History: ‘Liberty 360’ Adds a New Dimension to Learning

A few steps from Independence Hall, state-of-the-art technology is making Philadelphia’s history come alive in powerful new ways for young and old alike. Liberty 360, a dazzling 15-minute, 3-D, visual tour de force, is now showing daily in the newly renovated, high-tech, custom-built PECO Theatre at 6th and Chestnut Streets. The program, hosted by Philadelphia’s favorite son, Benjamin Franklin, and viewed on a giant wrap-around screen, 8 feet high and 150 feet in circumference, celebrates America’s history through its most important symbols.

Extraordinary Video and Sound

As you stand in the middle of the 65-person capacity theater, you are surrounded by 3-D images presented in 9.5 million pixel resolution, while an original music soundtrack with 65 musicians and 128 audio tracks envelops you, enriching your experience. I thought the program was a little slow at first, but quickly picked up the pace. During the short presentation, you are whisked from Philadelphia to Baltimore, San Francisco, St. Louis, Paris and beyond. All this while focusing on some of our nation’s most important symbols — and problems.

The video pyrotechnics reminded me a bit of the fabulous animation at the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Show. That’s not surprising, since Liberty 360 was developed by David Niles, whose previous works include programs at Radio City Music Hall and the Comcast Center.

But like all new technology, there can be glitches. The day I attended Liberty 360 in early December, the equipment malfunctioned and



Visitors to Liberty 360 wear comfy 3-D glasses and are surrounded by high-definition 3-D images.

I had to come back later in the day. While there, I learned similar problems had been occurring for several weeks. That may also be why I was the only person at the early afternoon performance of the show, which runs three times an hour.

The 3-D glasses were comfortable, and the visual experience was more realistic than last year’s 3-D Comcast Christmas Show at the Comcast Center. In short, the show is interesting, educational and even provides a surprise ending. Be sure to experience it.

Coming Soon

This summer, Historic Philadelphia, Inc. will debut its new 3-D Lights of Liberty evening one-hour show. It’s designed to take visitors on a starlit journey through Independence National Park with head-turning surround-sound and high-tech imagery. The previous shows were excellent, so I can’t wait to experience the new one.

WHEN & WHERE

Location: PECO Theater, 6th and Market Streets
 Winter Hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, Shows start every 20 minutes.
 Admission: Adults, \$7; Students, Seniors, Military, Children 12 and under, \$6.
 Phone: 215-629-4026
 Web: historicphiladelphia.org

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