

Planning creative laser show takes inspiration

By Peggy Polacek

Strains of Journey, Rolling Stones, the Who and Pink Floyd escape from the echoing halls of UNL's Morrill Hall. The mastodons haven't turned to rock 'n' roll, but Mueller Planetarium has, to produce crowd-drawing laser light shows.

The planetarium finished a series of laser shows last weekend and hopes to present more, Jack Dunn, coordinator of the planetarium, said.

"The programs show people another facet of our facility," Dunn said; "and they draw another part of the community audience."

Hundreds of people were turned away from the five Pink Floyd laser shows on Halloween because there was not enough room in the planetarium, he said. About 600 people viewed the show that night in the planetarium that seats about 100.

The dome provides the best surface for the popular laser shows, Dunn said. Laser shows help attendance at regular shows, he said, because people come to the planetarium to see what is offered.

With the help of assistants Lisa Hooker and Greg Phillips, Dunn developed original laser shows and helped

other companies present shows on the UNL campus.

Variety offered

Last week's shows were presented by Colorado Laser Systems in order to offer a variety of shows that Dunn said they couldn't produce themselves because of time limitations.

It takes about two weeks to select the music for the shows, he said, and it takes one to two months to choreograph at 45-minute show.

The choice of laser show music is based on rock music, Dunn explained, because laser lights historically have been aimed at rock audiences. Country rock, classical and jazz music audiences aren't as receptive to the light shows, he said.

Rock music laser shows are easier to design because the music has a steady, strong beat, he said, as compared with jazz music that involves free-flowing improvisation. It's easiest to draw a rock audience because they're used to the lights at concerts, Dunn said.

He said a Christmas laser show of classical music, including Tchaikovsky, is planned and that next semester

a history of rock 'n' roll will be designed. He said this type of show will ensure a large audience because of the variety of music.

Audience is first concern

"Our first concern is the audience," Dunn said, "and we need feedback to know what the people want to see."

Local radio stations gathered opinions on the shows from their listeners, he said, and reported them to the planetarium for further show references.

"We learned that a lot of Lincoln people like Pink Floyd," he said.

Dunn said he enjoys presenting shows, although it's a lot of work.

Presenting a laser show compares to playing a musical instrument, Dunn said. The laser show requires inspiration, he said, like music does.

Recently, the laser was transported to Chadron State College for a country-rock laser show, he said. He said it was good to make contacts in the state by doing something on other campuses, but it was very difficult to physically move the laser and present the show.

The light shows, which began about two years ago, provide only part of the planetarium's programs. They draw more people to provide greater income, he said, thus allowing the planetarium to become more self-dependent.

Regular star programs, such as the current moon show, will continue at the planetarium, Dunn said. Next month, the planetarium will present the traditional Star of Bethlehem Christmas show.

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Police Report

The following calls and complaints were received by UNL police from 7 a.m. Sunday to 7 a.m. Monday.

10:58 a.m. - Citation issued for fireworks violation at Abel Hall.

2:10 p.m. - Windshield reported shattered in the Nebraska Union metered parking lot.

8:15 p.m. - Hit-and-run accident reported in the Nebraska Union metered lot.

9:45 p.m. - Drunken person taken to the detoxification ward.

4:25 a.m. - Fire alarm at Manter Hall set off by malfunction.

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