

What the home viewers DIDN'T get to see...

Editorial Comment by John Grimshaw

Peter Faiman Responds...

You are of course entitled to your opinion but as the Opening Ceremonies presentation has been so highly acclaimed both across Australia as well as internationally it is fair to conclude that that telecast must have captured something that excited the worldwide television audience.

The show could not have been so positively received if the telecast did not at the very least do it justice. And, as it is live television it will of course be imperfect.

As far as comparing what you saw in the stadium to what you saw on the screen I would like to remind you that television is a very specific electronic medium that can only relate in the best way possible what it sees.

The process requires the selection of images to portray the event in quick grabs that together build a picture of the whole. It cannot see everything. When you are watching a live event you can choose whatever you wish to see at anytime with focused or peripheral vision. I feel you acknowledge this difference between the two experiences yet are rather contradictory in that you nevertheless choose to be critical of television for being what it is. You also say you wanted close up shots yet didn't like them when they were there, preferring instead to see more wide shots.

You say you were "looking forward to the following Friday's telecast to see all of the secrets Ric Birch had hidden from the rehearsals". So was I. Much of the show was not fully revealed at rehearsals and much of it was seen by me and the crew for the very first time during the performance on the 15th of November.

I believe that everyone on the extraordinary television team drawn together for this event was professionally brilliant in their efforts to capture an event that cannot be properly rehearsed and only fully manifests itself once only. That once only time was on September 15th,

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Two days before the opening ceremony, I had the chance to see the final dress rehearsal. I was duly impressed with what I saw, and was looking forward to the following Friday's telecast to see all of the secrets Ric Birch had hidden from the rehearsals. On Friday night, it was obvious that the performance quality that night was an order of magnitude better than the Wednesday night – it is a pity that the vision telecast by was in some ways flawed.

For those of you who did not have to opportunity to compare the live event to the broadcast one, you may not have missed what you did not see. Peter Faiman is a well known and well respected television director of many years experience. For the telecast, he had a supremely difficult show to direct. The sheer number of camera operators and other technicians used to cover this event live would have been incredibly complex to control. It also should be remembered that any theatrical event is the hardest type of performance to be captured on television. However, the overall result was disappointing. It appeared as if the telecast was being directed as if it were a stadium sports event, rather than a huge scale theatrical event.

The most important aspect of televising a performance like this would be to know how the creative team intended to show to be seen. The stadium was to become a theatre for the night, and the show's creators designed the performance to be viewed on a large scale. Because of the theatrical approach, almost any seat in the stadium could:

1. See "the big picture" of what was happening across the whole ground and/or large sections of the audience;
2. See the smaller performance vignettes as they passed;
3. See a big screen at the Stadium if there were "close up" moments important to the show.

From the point of view of the live audience, the above list also describes what was watched in order of importance. The television broadcast should have been able to build on that experience by being able to explore some moments more closely, as well as being able to give the best view of whatever the focus of the show

was at the time.

When I watched the telecast, I noted numerous large-scale moments that were missed while the audience was being shown less important aspects of the whole show. What really raised my ire was when a "Classic Crappy Shot" was on the screen while one of these moments was happening.

Other "moments" were lost when the

audience was being shown far less important parts of the show. The classic example of this came in the Tap Dog sequence. Not only did we miss the start of the first dancer rising out of the centre stage, we also missed the start of the next twenty of so joining him. When they eventually hit the screen, there were numerous shots that missed the most important part of any tap dancer – their legs. Then, the next hundred dancers joining them and you guessed it, they missed the start of this as well. By the time the remainder of the dancing cast joined them, the

director had gotten the idea and picked them up streaming out into the arena.

Another difficulty came when the focus of attention shifted from one part of the show to another. The best example of this (and I had a few to choose from) was prior to the tap sequence when the coloured floats were coming out, each with a different culture dancing on and around it. For every culture, a different type of music set to a continuous dance beat was played as each started out. As a result, the live audience's focus of attention quickly shifted to each one as they entered the arena. This was not the case for the television audience who lagged behind on at least two of floats, and as a result completely missed the Cossack dancers out the front of the blue float.

This particular segment of the opening ceremony also missed the exceptional large-scale choreography that highlighted this and many other moments in the show. In this case, the moment was lost to "Classic Crappy Shots" and a frustrating number of close ups on the performers. The impact of seeing one performer dance their routine is considerably less than the impact of seeing two hundred of them do it. Close ups are an important element to use, especially in televised sports, drama, news, documentaries etc. The staggering lack of medium and wide shots had me ranting at the television on numerous occasions that night.

Television will never be as good as live - but in my opinion, the broadcast was sadly deficient.

Classic 'crappy shots' of the night:

- Close up moments of people in the audience (nice for the person being shot, but the show is on the stage!)
- Medium shots of the audience (the most useless shot of the night because neither did you get to see the vast scale of the audience that a wide shot would give, it had no personal interest of any particular individual that a close up had)



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SONY

WOW! Flying antics set new heights

By Madeleine Murray

Peter Faiman

(continued from previous page)

2000 when the whole world watched, both from seats in the stadium and on television. At that time we all shared this unique experience together, live, uncensored and unedited; both brilliant and blemished.

Australia should be proud of a great live show and a great live telecast both executed by some of the most professional and experienced people in the world.

Thank you for your comments. I can point to a lot more faults than you could possibly come up with but I am proud of our efforts and am sorry your experience was flawed.

- Peter Faiman

Some of the greatest of many dazzling moments in the Opening Ceremony were the flying antics of the fish, little girl, swimmers, and spinning cogs. The aerial work lifted the show right out of the grid of the stadium floor, and into another dimension. The choreography and costumes were so brilliant that no one noticed the complex rigging system behind it all, except of course, Richard Hartman, Aerial Effects Project Coordinator, and his team of 40.

The rigging was a triumph of ingenuity and innovation.

The stadium is all curves - not a straight line in the place, and it had never been properly surveyed. "We had to hand rig this thing from scratch," Hartman says, in his quiet American accent. "Because nothing was straight, we couldn't get up there with a tape measure. No one had ever done it before, not like this, not for theatre." The cross wires were ultimately slightly curved as well, as the span was so great.

The crew rigged nine motorised lines and two manual lines, taking the flying fox

of it. The Opening Ceremony show pushed the boundaries of the possible, and many departments, like rigging, brought in engineers and industrial techniques to solve problems. The flying fox rig has been used in areas such as mining, rescue, and elevators. One of the engineers who designed the stadium system was Bill Kellerman, who had worked on the Katoomba Railway.

"It's a very elaborate system we have here," Hartman says. "Nobody really recognises that - the fact that you've got all this motorisation up on the roof, and you're controlling things that are 45 metres below you, and trying to do it with absolute precision, and absolute safety."

The team used industrial techniques, combined with theatrical controllers. The winches, leased from APC in Adelaide, came from various big shows, such as Phantom.

They were incorporated into the drive mechanism; then the winch drums and transmissions were built.

The cross wires were smooth, anti-rotational wire, 16mm in diameter. A little car travelled across the wire, and from that, a block dropped down on a cable 4mm diameter. One winch controlled the east-west travel of the car, and the other winch controlled the elevation of the block. The two motors made it possible to put a person anywhere in the stadium air, but they could only travel along the path of their overhead wire. The choreography was so fluid, that it never looked like a series of parallel lines. The illusion was enhanced by the stadium itself, which has no straight lines.

The hardest part was flying the truss, which was supported by all nine lines. This picked up the G'Day drop, and the Eternity drop, and moved them from east to west. The crew had to fine tune all nine cross wires or catenaries to equal tautness, because they had to lift up a piece of truss, and float it over to the centre of the field. The G'Day drop was launched from a kabuki device made in Adelaide. The trick was to pick up the truss, and move it along the wires, without breaking its back. "As soon as you start to travel along the catenaries, you can snap the truss if it is not perfectly balanced. We spent several nights fine tuning that, with sandbags first, then the truss, adjusting cables and tensions. It's like tuning a violin. And then it was quite involved to coordinate it all through the electronics," Hartman explains.



Richard Hartman, Aerial Effects Project Coordinator with some of his apparatus

system between the roofs of the stadium. The lines, 42 metres above the ground, running east-west, were about 110m long.

Hartman had installed a similar system in the Dome in London, where the geometry was 45 metres high, and 45 metres wide, which made the job a lot simpler.

Because the stadium is more than twice as wide as high, they needed a flying fox rig - an overhead cradle with a block that drops out

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