

INSIDE VIEW:

PROGRAMMING A VIBRANT SILHOUETTE

**A conversation with Paul Baya,
Cruise Director on Celebrity Silhouette**

by

Richard H. Wagner

Celebrity Silhouette's programming is part of what the cruise line calls "Celebrity Life." This term encompasses a wide expanse of activities involving the ship's culinary operation, the spa and other ship-board operations beyond the entertainment. All of these are intended to interrelate, creating an overall atmosphere of sophisticated luxury.

Cruise director Paul Baya is in charge of the entertainment on Silhouette and explains that its programming seeks to "maintain an element of fun [while] catering toward an intellectual demographic."

His work involves presenting offerings that Celebrity's sophisticated clientele would regard as "cool." From these, "the guest can choose what type of cruise experience they want to have."

Although the whole is designed to be greater than the sum of the parts, it is illustrative to talk about some of the highlights of Silhouette's entertainment offerings.

Evening Entertainment

The cornerstone of evening entertainment on any cruise ship is the shows in the ship's main theater.

"We have three main production shows. Tomorrow, we have 'Broadway Nights.' That is songs from Broadway and London's West End - - Le Mis, Phantom of the Opera, Cats, Mama Mia. In the high energy show - - 'Velocity' - - the theater becomes the performance arena with the bungee jumping over the audience maybe ten or twelve seats out into the theater. There is also a Cirque du Soleil-style show, that is 'Silhouette The Show.'"

"Each of the [Celebrity] ships will have that type of Cirque show, Broadway show and the high energy one. But they are not all the same show. There may be some of the same elements but it is more or less a drastically different show."

Indeed, woven into the shows are performances by specialty performers such as acrobats, jugglers, and unicyclists who have their own unique skills. Thus, not only are the shows different in that respect from ship to ship but each show changes when an individual specialty performer leaves and a new performer comes to take his or her place.

"For the most part, the choreography by the ensemble cast remains the same but now you can interject a brand new [specialty] routine. There is that flexibility within the show - - we have the ensemble cast performing but here is a [new] specialty act. It is not a gymnastics routine where at this point [the performer has] to turn and point." Consequently, the show becomes a new experience even for passengers who have traveled on Silhouette before.

In addition to the production shows, the Silhouette Theater is used for shows by visiting guest performers. "We have a nice variety. Celebrity is very good with the cabaret entertainers that they send out here. They have a good track record. I have worked with many of them before."

The acts are selected keeping in mind the type of passenger who sails on Celebrity. "It is: 'what can you breathe in that is something that is classified as cool - - something different without being off the wall.' I think that they are looking to have those acts that have some type of new vibrancy to them and not just your old school."

"Although we do have comedians, with the international clientele that we have on this ship, maybe a stand-up comic is not best suited for the main theater. But an action comic or a comedy magician who can support their comedy with some visuals, you can still enjoy regardless of what language you speak. Let the stunts and the novelty performance speak for itself. Straight stand up is very difficult across an international clientele."



Cruise Director Paul Baya

"You also see a lot of shows that are family friendly. Even for the late night comedy shows, I say you can be suggestive without being offensive. I let them push the envelope sometimes. But the last thing I want to hear is that someone was offended by a late night comic. I want guests to go see a comedy show and not be afraid to sit in the front row."

Mr. Baya believes it is important to follow-up on any concerns guests express about the entertainment. "If a few guests get offended, I want to acknowledge their concern, erase the tension and follow up. I think this is what drives the cruise industry - you get this one-on-one attention and follow up. You don't see

that in a lot of hospitality areas. We would love for them to have a good experience and book again with Celebrity Cruises. I like that attention to detail."

Nighttime entertainment on Celebrity Silhouette is not limited to the shows in the Silhouette Theater. One type of event featured on all the Solstice class ships is interactive theme parties. These events are held in various venues around the ships and feature performances by the production casts in which the guests can join. As with the production shows, the interactive theme parties vary across the fleet. "The Solstice has 'Sizzle,' the Latin one, and 'Grove', the 60s interactive party. The Eclipse has their Motown party and a show called 'Mask'"

"On this vessel we have the 70s interactive party involving the dancers and the DJ but still there is that production value to it. The dancers are all in costume and stick around to show you some of the dances."

"The 'Celebrity Rocks' event speaks for itself. I consider that a 35 to 40 minute, miniature production show. It involves the singers and the dancers, formal choreographed routines. It is just not in the main theater. Ideally, it is out poolside weather permitting or inside in the Grand Foyer. It is a nice full-on production. Afterwards the guests are all fired-up and can join in on the dance floor."

Silhouette also has the traditional evening game shows such as a game inspired by the old television show 'The Newly Wed Game.' However, using new digital technology, it is also able to have new games in which the entire audience can participate.

"It is called ARS - - audience response system. It allows us to put some stuff up on the screen, ask the question and you have ten seconds to answer. Everyone is sitting there with a controller in their hand and they are able to chime in with the answers. We can have a game show set up where we separate the men from the women or these three sections [of the audience] or however we want to do it. You see the results - - who is the quickest responder; who had the most questions right; who had the most wrong. That is one unique feature."

"Also, we have a game show media system similar to that of Jeopardy. Chris of our activities staff has really grown into that. I'm laughing a lot with his banter and I am looking to speak with our broadcast technicians to see if we can record some of those and share those on the T.V. for more guests to see. There are some unique opportunities beyond a normal trivia. We are able to make it more cool with the technology that is available."

Daytime Activities

Consistent with its more intellectually demanding clientele, lectures are an important component of the

programming onboard Silhouette. "Those are usually affiliated with Smithsonian Journeys, our Beyond the Podium speakers. Certainly, it is a nice component to our program. People seem to thoroughly enjoy it."

The speakers change from cruise to cruise. "You will probably have a destination speaker [on each cruise]."

But other than that, the speakers cover a wide variety of topics. "Pirates of the Caribbean, the real pirates, seems to be a common theme. I just walked by and saw that Tim Calvert's presentation on ocean liners of the past had packed Celebrity Central [Silhouette's cinema]. Next cruise, [we have speakers talking about] anthropology and astronomy."

"We had a really great presenter on our transatlantic crossing on the Solstice. This gentleman, Nigel West from the UK, spoke on espionage, the CIA and the real James Bond. He was up there and did not have any slides to back up his presentation, no notes. He just had this engaging way about him that just packed the place. You were there listening to the stories and it was easy to imagine what he was describing. You are just wrapped into this gentleman presenting authentic stories of what goes on behind the scenes."

The ship's officers also contribute to the lecture program. "The officers conduct their Oceans Ahead presentations. [For example,] our environmental officer does a presentation on recycling. The Captain has really stepped up, volunteering to do a navigational presentation. He had a roaring standing ovation last cruise."

Another sophisticated component of the programming takes place in the iLounge. Celebrity has partnered with Apple Computers and the iLounge is equipped with Apple computers, which guests can use to access the internet. They can also attend classes on using the computers and purchase Apple products. The iLounge managers are trained in and well-versed in Apple technology.

"It is not just your computer room [where you] check through the internet. It is a nice partnership that Celebrity has. It really fits the brand. That is pretty cool."

A new feature on Celebrity Silhouette is the Art Studio where guests can attend art classes. As with the iLounge, the classes are not taught by whatever member of the activities staff happens to be available but rather by master artists.

"Our other previous Solstice class ships had the Hot Glass Studio and the Corning Museum of Glass. This is the first one where that has been replaced by the Lawn Club Grill. So it's a new concept to have that arts area that is not locked into glass."

"Two master artists are up there. It is a limit-

ed space. They can open the doors [to the outside] and have 25 or 30 people scattered away."

The idea is to go beyond the traditional cruise ship arts and crafts class and to have classes such as jewelry making. "We are just seeing what different classes can be offered. They are also getting the kids involved and do some classes with the kids."

Both the Art Studio and the iLounge have some free classes and some classes where a fee applies. One reason for the fees is to cover the cost of materials used by the guests in classes such as jewelry making. Another reason is to limit the number of participants to a manageable number. "It is just an option for the guest. There is a lot going on for the guest to choose what they want to get out of the cruise."

Silhouette also has some less cerebral daytime activities such as a poolside air guitar contest where the contestants mime playing the guitar while a recording of a rock and roll song plays. "The winner actually gets an authentic Jack Daniels electric guitar sent to their home. Jack Daniels is sponsoring the event and there are some drink specials that night. You see our cruise staff wearing Jack Daniels shirts. It is a nice collaboration and kind of adds a little more cool value to a rock and roll night."

The fact that the contest involves giving away a unique guitar takes it from being a fun-in-the-sun cruise ship activity and brings it into a realm that Celebrity's sophisticated passengers find acceptable. Such mass market cruise ship staples as "the traditional belly flop contest, sexy legs or hairy chest competition - - is that what we consider modern luxury? Is that what we want to be identified with? Obviously not. We want to maintain an element of fun but you want people to say: 'Hey the poolside experience was a bit different, a little more to our inclination of what we consider to be tasteful without being stuffy.'"

Another example is "the officers versus guests water volleyball challenge where the officers in uniform go into the pool and play volleyball against the guests." The guests can also interact with the ship's officers during croquet and bocce contests, Texas Hold'em poker tournaments, and during dance contests. Not only are these events fun but the removal of the wall that often separates the guests from the people who run the ship makes these events unique cruising experiences.

These examples only scratch the surface of Silhouette's offerings. Indeed, even in the cabin the guest has the option of watching broadcast television channels, free movies, pay-for-view movies, an array of documentaries, and programming produced onboard. Furthermore, the films on the television are different than those shown in the ship's movie theater

"I never want to have a situation where the guest says: 'the movie in the cinema, I saw that in my stateroom last night.' I want to keep that differentiation. The company wants to make sure that people are enjoying the TV but it is not saying: 'Go to your room to have the entertainment tonight.' We want to see them on the floor, in the theater and in the lounges. I like to see the guests get involved, something which is a tangible experience, we are just the catalyst for this."

* * *

The entertainment programming on Celebrity Silhouette is dynamic. Yes, there are numerous things that Silhouette does that are done throughout the Celebrity fleet. But "they are not cookie-cutter cruises." For example, as noted earlier, the shows on Silhouette are different and the theme parties are different from those on her fleetmates.

This dynamism promotes innovation. "What is the next cool thing we can do? How can we be the ones who are continuing what has been thought of in the home office? I like being a cruise director who Celebrity can turn to and say 'let's try this out.'"

As a result, the brand remains vital. Celebrity cruisers know the type of cruise experience to expect. However, it will never be the same old thing