

# Discover what makes this show 'spectacular'

By Kristine McKenzie  
Vegas.com

When the Venetian resort announced it was spending \$40 million to design a custom-built theater for "Phantom of the Opera" and renaming the show "Phantom – The Las Vegas Spectacular," audiences knew they were going to be getting a little something extra in this version of the popular Broadway musical.

Even though the Las Vegas production has been enhanced, fans of the original will not be disappointed. Creator Andrew Lloyd Webber, director Hal Prince, choreographer Gillian Lynne and others from the show's original creative team helped develop "Phantom – The Las Vegas Spectacular" and pared the show from its original two and a half hours down to one hour 35 minutes. Some dialogue and the intermission have been cut from the original, but all of Webber's well-known songs remain intact.

The things that distinguish the Las Vegas version of "Phantom" from its Broadway counterpart are elaborate new sets and special effects and the 1,800-seat theater, which is itself a spectacle.

## Welcome to 19th century Paris

The Venetian employed renowned architect David Rockwell to design the Phantom Theatre, which took 11 months to build. Rockwell's work includes the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood and Nobu restaurant in Las Vegas. The site, which is located in a space formerly occupied by the Guggenheim Museum, had to be completely excavated and the theater was built from the ground up.

Designed to closely resemble the Opera Garnier in Paris, the lavish Phantom Theatre features plush red seats and curtains, gold statues and carvings, a hand-painted ceiling topped with an 80-foot wide dome and opera boxes lining the sides. The opera boxes are inhabited by 70 colorful mannequins, which were built in Belgium. No two are alike and each one is completely outfitted in an authentic period costume.

Those wishing to see the extravagant venue can now go in and view it free of charge every Tuesday - Friday from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

The centerpiece of the theater (and major plot point of the show) is the chandelier, which weighs 2,100 pounds and cost \$4.5



Photo by Joan Marcus

Brent Barrett stars in "Phantom — The Las Vegas Spectacular," 7 p.m. Mon.-Sat. with additional shows at 9:30 p.m. Mon. and Sat.

million to create. The shimmering chandelier is comprised of 29,444 individual crystals that were hand strung.

In this version of "Phantom," the chandelier hangs in four pieces, which assemble in dramatic fashion during the beginning of the show. The spokes of the ceiling's dome support 32 cables that guide the chandelier into place and it takes 40 individual computers, complete with navigational software, to run the chandelier. During the show's climactic scene, the chandelier falls 45 feet in three seconds and stops only 10 feet above those seated beneath it – an effect that always causes a stir in the audience.

"The people sitting underneath feel the wind rush and some people scream ... and I don't blame them," said Production Stage Manager Ray Gin.

In addition to the customized theater, the Las Vegas production of "Phantom" differs from the original with new sets, state-of-the-art technology and special effects. This is a show where what goes on

behind the scenes is almost as incredible as what happens onstage.

Enhancement and modernization of the illusions throughout the show were developed in part by Jim Steinmeyer, who has also worked with David Copperfield.

One of the new sets includes a beautiful opera house façade not seen in other productions of "Phantom." Gin said the lights on the set run on car batteries that must be recharged each night. During the scene that features the façade, fireworks explode above the opera house – another effect seen only in Las Vegas. "Phantom – The Las Vegas Spectacular" employs two pyrotechnicians to oversee the fireworks and other fire illusions in the show.

Everything in the Phantom Theatre is state-of-the-art including the sound. Gin said the entire theater is filled with surround sound speakers -- there is even sound coming up from the stage, immersing the performers in the music, which is provided by a live 19-piece orchestra.

The stage measures 60 by 50 feet – mammoth by Broadway standards. A special CO2 fog machine spreads dry ice 360 degrees around the stage to fill it quickly during the lake scenes.

Besides the 43 actors working onstage, there are 70 crew members behind the scenes making the magic happen and making sure everything runs smoothly including stunt people, wardrobe, makeup and wig assistants.

One crew member drives the Phantom's boat with a joystick controller, maneuvering around a maze of candles on stage and another drives the huge staircase set seen in the "Masquerade" number.

A day crew is specifically assigned to do things like dust the mannequins, hand-paint shoes, check the intricate beading on all the costumes and repair even the most minor flaws.

"Our credo is that it's got to look like it's opening night," said Gin.

## 'Phantom' by the numbers

**\$40 million:** How much theater cost  
**1,800:** Number of seats in theater  
**1 ton:** Weight of the chandelier  
**29,444:** Number of individual crystals hand-strung to create the chandelier  
**80 feet:** Width of the dome at the top of the theater  
**45 feet:** How far the chandelier falls  
**3 seconds:** How long it takes the chandelier to fall  
**100 million:** Number of people estimated to have seen Phantom of the Opera worldwide  
**40:** Number of computers it takes to run the chandelier  
**70:** Number of crew members who work backstage

## The Music of the Night

"Phantom" recently celebrated its one-year anniversary in Las Vegas and Gin said the audience reception has been very positive. "I think these audiences are great. They go in expecting one thing and they're astounded... They're very appreciative. They're loud."

They're loud because "Phantom - The Las Vegas Spectacular" features an incredibly talented Broadway-caliber cast. Brent Barrett and Anthony Crivello alternate as the Phantom, Kristi Holden plays Christine Daaé and Ryan Silverman appears as Raoul.

The show, a tale of unrequited love, is based on Gaston Leroux's famous novel about a ghost haunting the Paris Opera House. Christine Daaé, an aspiring opera singer is being tutored by a mysterious man she believes is her "angel of music," sent to her by the spirit of her dead father.

In reality, her angel is the Phantom of the Opera, a lonely, disfigured man who hides behind a mask and lives in an eerie lair beneath the opera house. Not only does the Phantom fall in love with Christine's magical voice, he becomes obsessed with her as well.

It doesn't bode well for anyone when Christine becomes engaged to her childhood sweetheart, Raoul. The Phantom is thrown into a jealous rage, causing mayhem around the opera house and ultimately forcing Christine to choose between the two.

"Phantom - The Las Vegas Spectacular" definitely lives up to its new name. Whether you're a longtime fan of the show or it's a first-time experience, you'll leave the theater wishing the music of the night would never end.