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Universal Virtual Stage 1 (USV1)

Photo credit: Gary Krueger

Studios and Stages

Bridge Global Production

By Dyana Carmella

In 1893, Thomas Edison built the first movie studio in the United States when he constructed Black Maria, a tar-paper-covered structure near his laboratories in West Orange, N.J. He then distributed the images he shot on film at vaudeville theaters, penny arcades, wax museums and various fairgrounds. By the mid-1920s, a few American production companies developed into wealthy film-industry conglomerates that owned their own studios, distribution divisions and theaters, along with contracts for performers and other filmmaking personnel. This dynamic eventually led to the studio system.

Today, there a multitude of studios and stages scattered around the planet, and modern-day film, TV, commercial and music video productions are after state-of-the-art equipment, production services, backlots and postproduction facilities. *P3 Update* takes a look at some of the 21st-century studios and stages that are leading the way.

NBC Universal Studios reconstructed their New York Street lot, which included building higher facades, in some cases up to 10 to 15 feet. Over 40 productions have used the newly renovated lot since its opening last May. "We took into account that productions really like to have free span and open space inside the facades, so they could be able to build particular sets on the interiors, and that way they could tie the camera

movements in from interior to exterior or exterior to interior," explains Dave Beanes, Universal Studios' SVP of production services. "The key was to give the production, directors and the cinematographers a lot more options on how they could use camera placement to enhance the shot that they needed."

The company also converted one of its stages into a full green-screen stage. "Universal Virtual Stage 1 (UVS1) opened at Universal Studios last December," says Aaron Rogers NBC Universal director, advertising & publicity. "The pre-rigged, pre-calibrated facility offers motion capture, camera tracking, editing bays, artist work stations and more." Beanes says that Universal is pushing to go green by using digital backgrounds, props and sets in order to keep waste out of landfills.

Warner Bros. is home to many top television shows, such as "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," "Lopez Tonight," "Conan" and the "The Mentalist." The studio has purchased Leavesden Studios, located about 20 miles northwest of central London. Boasting about 500,000 square feet and a 100-acre backlot, Leavesden has been the filming destination of the *Harry Potter* films, and two of the stages will be dedicated to tourists wanting to visit the film franchise's original sets. "We want to have the studio reopen in the spring of 2012 so that we can capture a lot of the

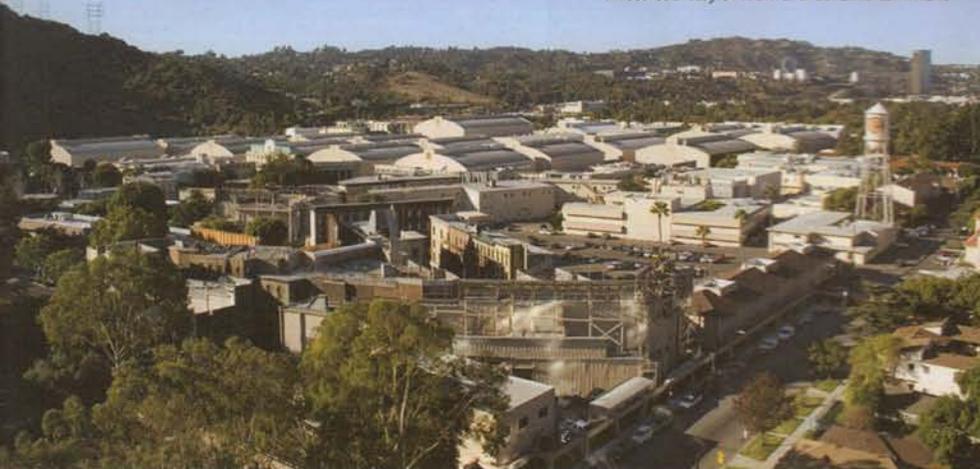
Olympic tourist travels that will be in London," says Perry Husman, VP of studio operations at Warner Bros. studio facilities.

G-Star Studios is based at G-Star School of the Arts for Motion Pictures and Broadcasting in Palm Springs, Fla., and it has recently announced the completion of its new soundstage. G-Star's motion-picture production complex has over 100,000 square feet, and the entire movie studio and new soundstage are offered to filmmakers at no charge. It was constructed and engineered as a soundstage for feature films, TV productions, commercials, music videos, and as a theater that will hold an audience of 1,150 for live performances, such as concerts, world premiere films and red carpet events.

Over 2,500 Czech and international films have chosen **Barrandov Studios** for their productions since 1931. One of the oldest and largest studios in Europe, with close proximity to the center of Prague and the Prague Ruzyně Airport (both about 15 minutes away by car), it currently runs a total of 14 soundstages and an extensive backlot (about 160,000 square meters). Barrandov continues to attract top film projects and recently hosted the productions of *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* (starring Tom Cruise and Jeremy Renner), the French film *Philibert* (with Jérémie Renier) and *Red Tails* (produced by George Lucas), just to name a

Warner Bros. in Burbank, Calif.

Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Entertainment



few. "2010 was a year of the big 'reanimation' for our company," says Jan Hlubek, marketing manager for Barrandov Studios. "In mid-2010, the Czech government and European Union have approved the Czech national Film Industry Support Program. Thus, the foreign productions can apply for the 20-percent rebate of their expenses spent in the Czech Republic — for Czech services, of course." Barrandov works with **Panavision** for the provision of cameras and motion technology, and, when it comes to visual

production, the studio offers telecine and optical special-effects services.

Village Roadshow Studios is just 20 minutes from Queensland's stunning Gold Coast in Australia. It is comprised of eight soundstages, three water tanks and 10 production offices. Additionally, it has editing suites, carpentry and paint shops and a main outdoor water tank that has a surface area of 12,915 square feet and holds six million liters of water. "Building the main tank for the Warner Bros. feature film

Fool's Gold then enabled us to attract the Walden Media feature film *Nim's Island*, a U.K. production of *Triangle*, [*The Chronicles of*] *Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and, more recently, *Sanctum*, which also required [us] to dig out the floors in two of our stages," reports Village Roadshow Studios President Lynne Benzie.

Silvercup Studios is home to the TV shows "30 Rock," "Gossip Girl," "White Collar," and "How to Make It in America," as well as the new HBO movie *Girls*. Recent feature films shot at Silvercup include *The Sitter* (starring Jonah Hill), *New Year's Day* (with Ashton Kutcher) and *Tower Heist* (starring Ben Stiller). The overall size of the facility is 420,000 square feet (in two locations) with a variety of stage sizes, and the lot is equipped with subway lines, parking and the ability to hail a yellow cab when needed. Silvercup also has a location lighting/grip/generator division called Silvertrucks Lighting.

On the east coast of the U.S., **Kaufman Astoria Studios (KAS)** is a full-service studio in New York. They offer 500,000 square feet of office and service space for long- or short-term usage for budgets large and small. KAS' versatility and emphasis on service has made it

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Mississippi Film Studios in Canton, Miss.

Photo courtesy of Mississippi Film Studios @ Canton

the studio of choice for countless productions, serving as the long-time home of PBS' "Sesame Street" and hosting recent productions like *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Stepford Wives* and the Emmy and Golden Globe winner *Angels in America*, as well as numerous independent films and smaller projects. At the core of Kaufman Astoria are six column-free stages, including a mammoth 26,000-square-foot stage. Also on the premises is the acclaimed **KAS Music & Sound**, a mixing and recording studio that features a stage large enough to accommodate a full 70-piece orchestra.

Mississippi Film Studios is the state's only purpose-built production facility capable of serving major television and feature film productions. At 36,000 square feet, clearing 40 feet to the ceilings, the studio is very accommodating

for filmmakers. "We are now ready and available to help grow this burgeoning business in Mississippi," says Jeremy Hariton, a partner at Road Town Enterprises, Ltd. "The great thing about Mississippi Film Studios is that our facility is priced more like a warehouse than a soundstage, but [it] affords all of the comforts, convenience and technology of any large Hollywood production facility. This means that independent filmmakers, low-budget features and commercials can utilize a soundstage facility while not busting their budgets."

The new crop of studios and stages being built all over the world are luring productions left and right. Indeed, we've come a long way since Edison's first vision while furthering the dreams and igniting the passions of many filmmakers. ☺

CONTACTS

Barrandov Studios:
www.barrandov.com

G-Star Studios:
www.gstarstudios.com

KAS Music & Sound:
www.kasmusic.com

Kaufman Astoria Studios:
www.kaufmanastoria.com

Mississippi Film Studios:
www.cantontourism.com

NBC Universal Studios: www.universalstudioshollywood.com

Panavision: www.panavision.com

Silvercup Studios:
www.silvercupstudios.com

Village Roadshow Studios:
www.movieworldstudios.com.au/resources.html

Warner Bros.: www.wbsf.com

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