



Fred Gallo

As a distinguished theatre technician and co-founder of Scenic Technologies (part of PRG), Fred Gallo has been an influential force on Broadway for more than 40 years. His technical expertise has ameliorated a number of Broadway productions from *The Producers* to *Wicked*. In February, The Broadway Technical Theatre History Project at Purchase College SUNY honored him with its third annual Backstage Legends and Masters Award.

Lighting&Sound America: How did you become interested in building scenery?

Fred Gallo: Well, I come from a theatrical family. My father was a production carpenter. My cousins and uncles were all stagehands. I always worked backstage. When my father used to build off-Broadway shows, we had a carpenter shop that we built in The Cherry Lane Theatre and a number of other Off Broadway theatres. I was 10 years old and could hammer a nail by then, and I was free labor. I was fascinated by it. Even though later on I went to school to become an architect, through architecture school, I worked in the scenic shops. When I finished school, I thought what do I want to be an architect for? This is what I want to do.

LSA: How did PRG Scenic Technologies start?

FG: There were four partners: myself, Jere Harris, Roy Sears, and John Wolf. I was working as a production carpenter on different shows and so was Jere Harris. Jere came around one day and said, "We're two young guys, we compete with each other. Why don't we combine our efforts, and we'll be much stronger?" That was the beginning of Harris Production Services. From that, we started East Coast Theatre Supply, but we changed the name to ECTS because people used to call us thinking they could buy popcorn for movie theatres. We started off slowly because, in those days, with a couple of tools, you could build scenery. The outlay of capital to start a shop today is drastic. We started by renting soft goods, chain motors, and bits and pieces we accumulated from shows we did. We changed our name again to Scenic Technologies, and the rest is history.

LSA: What is your favorite format to work in?

FG: I've worked in all areas of scenic construction and motorization. From Off Broadway, Broadway, and feature movies to commercials, industrials, and special effects. For awhile, when the movie industry came back to New York, I built movie sets. I did that for six straight years until I got a

little bit tired of it. I really wanted to build movies like *Star Wars*, but movies were coming to New York for New York exteriors like brownstones. I was looking to do something more exotic. I enjoyed the efforts and the complications of building scenery for Broadway shows. There's a combined effort there, a collaboration of shop, builder, designer, and production manager. That collaboration is what I enjoy, and so Broadway pulled me back in. Now, I'm in Melbourne [Australia] loading out *King Kong*. The show was built by PRG Scenic Technologies and shipped to Australia a year ago, and now it's coming to Broadway. It's not a Herculean effort like [*Spider-man: Turn Off the Dark*] was, but you're never going to see anything so visually extraordinary as this creature on stage. The most challenging shows in my life are the ones I'm doing now.

LSA: Do you have a favorite project you've worked on?

FG: If I went back to the movie days, it was building the house for *Sophie's Choice* or building the dream sequence in *All That Jazz*. There were exciting times that may not seem exciting now, like working out how we were going to drop the chandelier in *Phantom of the Opera*. Now when you drop it, it seems slow, but back then, it was extraordinary. Figuring out the mechanics for the helicopter in *Miss Saigon*, the barricades on *Les Miserables*, the flying sequence over the streets of NYC in *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. I just finished *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* this past summer in San Francisco. It was one of those shows that you could tell from the beginning had legs. It's not a large show scenery-wise, but the scene transitions are beautiful. That's what helps to make the show work so well.

LSA: What are you working on now?

FG: Many of the shows that have to open before the Tony deadline are already on Broadway, so this period becomes a slow time for the shops. Personally, I'm the production carpenter on *Velocity of Autumn*, and then I'll start the New York production of the musical *King Kong Live*. 📶