

COMING AT YOU

# Watch for the next dimension of visual entertainment

More 3D games and movies heading your way — funny glasses and theatres not necessarily required

**RAJU MUDHAR**  
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

There is a wave of 3D coming at you. Now, while most of you have probably just recently made the switch to HD, the film, gaming and graphics industries are already committed to an attempt to move us all up to the next level — adding depth, literally, to every kind of visual entertainment.

It's not far off. In the past month, I

have seen movies, commercials, music videos, concert footage, sports, played video games, seen it on an iPhone and even shot a 3D picture with a digital camera. There have been wow-gee-whiz moments, and some "that looks a bit like a moving cardboard cutout" disappointments, but no matter where you look, the biggest names in entertainment are betting big that it's going to become the norm

— that much of what you watch on any screen will soon be 3D.

The next big thing — 3D-Day — that everyone is looking forward to is the Dec. 16 launch of Canadian film director James Cameron's new sci-fi epic *Avatar*. That film's arrival, many believe, could signal the true tipping point that this technology needs to become the new mainstream — and diehards would say, it's about time. There have been plenty of tests and attempts recently to improve the 3D experience by companies all over the world. Many in the entertainment industry have

seen them all, creating a kind of global 3D club that is singing the praises of what's about to hit all of your various screens.

Among them are plenty of local folks that are hoping to cash in on the third dimension's rise. James Stewart is a member of that 3D club, and a local video producer/director specializing in commercials and music videos. His Liberty Village-based company, Geneva Films, is capitalizing on the coming wave. "I keep telling people we've got to shoot stuff in 3D, so I've ended up on this kind of evangelizing circuit

at conferences speaking about it," he says. "It's been an amazing business decision for my company, because it has really separated us. There are many projects we can't talk about, but we shot an A-list concert in 3D a week ago." Amid a serious recession, he notes, "we're basically booked until Christmas doing 3D projects."

**GOLDMINE VS. GIMMICK**  
It's obvious why 3D is seen as the next gold mine for big entertain-

3D REVOLUTION continued on E3

## Avatar film could change everything

3D REVOLUTION from E1

ment companies. It's a way to keep people coming to theatres, and as of now, it's piracy proof. As well, despite its use in mostly animated movies so far, experts see the real growth in broadcasting live concerts and sporting events. Just this past week, Televisa, the largest media company in the Spanish-speaking world, broadcast the América versus Guadalajara soccer match last Sunday in 3D to theatres in Mexico. College football and the NBA have also tried 3D broadcasts in U.S. theatres.

Stewart says that much of the 3D editing software was developed for *U2 3D*, a breathtaking 2008 concert film that premiered at Sundance.

"My favourite thing to see when I look at something that's been shot in 3D is when you're in the crowd. You can see actually see that depth and the stage in the background, and you can really feel, like you're immersed and present in that field," says Al Lopez, chief of operations at Spatial View, a Toronto-based company that is specializing in glasses-free viewing and created the iPhone 3D effect.

As for the naysayers who feel it is a gimmick, Stewart doesn't disagree.

"Everything that we do as filmmakers is a storytelling gimmick," he says. "It's a tool that filmmakers can use to tell stories in the same way that you use surround sound and go 'boom' in an action film.

"None of this is reality, whereas 3D lets you see things as you really do, with an image for each eye."

### 3D AS IT IS NOW:

Stewart likes to say, "3D has 50 years of bad PR." Today's technology solves many of the problems that have plagued it as a mainstream acceptance. It's not particularly important to know all the finer points — many of the players are using different approaches and each tout their own, and Stewart notes even insiders still get confused.

The real breakthrough has been the move to digital, which has transformed the entire process — allowing quality control throughout production, and ensuring that the images are synched when broadcast, which was one of the biggest problems in the past.

"I've kept up with 3D since it started. I'm old enough to have seen the '50s movies in 3D. And then the '80s revival, which was kind of a disaster and then the current version. The current version is far better tech-



New 3D editing software was developed for *U2 3D*, a breathtaking 2008 concert film that premiered at Sundance. Last week, a Mexican soccer match was broadcast to fans in 3D. Football teams have done the same in the U.S.

nically the other versions and easier to project," says Joe Dante, veteran director of films like *Gremlins*. He's touting the upcoming kid-friendly 3D horror, *The Hole*, which had its North American premiere at TIFF.

"In the '50s (3D movies) fell apart because of bad presentation. In the '80s, same thing. People got bored; people got annoyed or got headaches due to how you project it. Again, the current version of 3D is far superior, but it still needs to be maintained. And if a person has a bad experience in 3D, they're not going to want to see 3D, and if you add that up with percentage of people who can't see 3D... you've got to keep your audience base happy."

(Nobody knows exactly what share of the moviegoing public is physically unable to see projected images in 3D. But as Stewart put it, "There are people that are colour blind, does that stop us from making film in colour?")

### GLASSES-FREE VIEWING AND OTHER TRENDS

So far the big moves toward 3D's emergence have been in the theatres, but it's the in-home, glasses-

free experience that's considered the Holy Grail. It's the goal for the guys at Toronto's Spatial View. The company's current product is a lenticular lens, (remember those cards you could bend in the light and get a 3D effect?) which overlays on a computer monitor and combines with eye-tracking software to create an impressive 3D effect.

Spatial View also has a miniature device, similar to its overlay for computers, with a lens that slides over the iPhone screen. Then user then has to move it to find the 'sweet spot' to get the effect. The company is in talks with major PC manufacturers to incorporate their technology, although they can't say who.

Another big trend is what's called non-gratuitous 3D — depth into the screen as opposed to the punching out.

"It's the immersion factor that I prefer in 3D, rather than the breaking-the-frame part," says Dante.

"I'm a big believer that 3D is an underrated medium, I think it's wrongly categorized as only for horror films and only for gimmicks," the director says. "For me,

the film's enriched because that you can actually watch the movie and get the impression that you're on the set with the actors that these things are happening to."

*The Hole* does have some erupting-out-of-the-screen moments, but as the title implies, it has plenty of others that play with the sense of depth.

While there are many projects in the pipeline, beyond its horror typecasting, 3D has been mostly used for animation. Stewart has seen 15 minutes of *Avatar*, and he's impressed enough to believe that it will live up to the hype and turn adults on to the technology.

But Stewart doesn't think the recent limited rerun of kiddie hits *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* in 3D, (with more likely to come) makes sense from a marketing perspective.

"For a kid growing up today, they are going to grow up with 3D as their normal. A kid today has already seen five digital 3D films. Why would they want to see a 2D film? When they get older and move over to dramas, they're going to say, 'of course it's 3D. Why wouldn't it be 3D?'"

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**JAMES STEWART,**  
3D Director

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