

CNN Interview with Penny Jones

INSIDE AFRICA

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CNN's Paul Tilsley went behind the scenes to see how South Africa prepared for this big night.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

PAUL TILSLEY, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Five thousand volunteers rehearsed for eight months for Africa's big night.

Veteran amateur performers got down in a gentele and elegant fashion, while school kids got down (UNINTELLIGIBLE).

The choreographer of this sumptuous spectacle of human fishes and animals is Doug Jack, who's been in charge of seven Super Bowls and almost as many Olympic ceremonies, winning an Emmy for his work at the Salt Lake City Olympics.

DOUG JACK, CHOREOGRAPHER: It brought me back to my roots back to Barcelona. I kept comparing the show to Barcelona. It's the same size, 5,000 people in the cast, a young country looking for, you know, a place in the world market. And with that kind of heart, it's really taken this show to a level that I hadn't expected to come out of South Africa so soon.

TILSLEY: South Africa lost the bid to host the Olympics in 2004 and the Soccer World Cup in 2006. Now, with a 26-camera digital TV production, the country is out to strut out with pride.

MARK WEST, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: This has been an incredible challenge for us, and we have to convince the world that we are capable of doing this. And we lost the soccer bid, we lost the Olympic bid, we got the cricket bid. Now, we need to show them what we can do. We need to show them that yes, this is what Africa can deliver if we put our minds to it.

TILSLEY: Twelve thousand animals and other creations were out on the pitch time after time in rehearsals, ready for the continent's moment in the global spotlight.

(on camera): The motivational slogan used by the production team here is "teamwork makes the African dream work."

(voice-over): And in a tough economy, this is dream work for local people. They made some 70 percent of the props and costumes for the opening ceremony.

The show's producer, Sydney Olympic veteran Penny Jones, says the ceremony is stadium theater, African-style.

PENNY JONES, PRODUCER: Some of the materials that are being used are like local plastic (UNINTELLIGIBLE) have a local (UNINTELLIGIBLE) here, you can see the really incredible amount of handiwork that's gone into this. Absolutely beautiful stuff. We're really, really proud of a lot of the African touches that takes place in each of the scenes. And we're planning an African story, and as you go through the seven scenes, we're introducing you to sights and sounds and experiences of Africa, South Africa, and ending up in the beautiful city of Cape Town.

TILSLEY: This weekend marks the climax of so much effort, so much dedication, much of it voluntary. Now, it's up to television viewers around the world to judge whether South Africa is winning the battle to prove it can host a multinational sports event. Millions of people are expected to tune in for the opening ceremony, and they should see something spectacular.

Paul Tilsley, INSIDE AFRICA, Newlands Stadium, Cape Town.

(END VIDEOTAPE)