

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

WITH THE KIDS

He bubbles over in a mix of theater, science

Fan Yang's new show at the Discovery Science Center in Santa Ana is a multimedia, high-tech, laser-and-light exploration into the vastly scientific world of ... soap and water.

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

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Yes, the common bubble gets its day in the sun, courtesy of the consummate bubble artist-scientist Fan Yang, who brings an updated show to the Southland beginning Saturday as part of the center's BubbleFest XI.

With four shows daily, Yang will be blowing his lungs out with demonstrations of bubbles within bubbles, smoking bubbles, bubble walls, spinning, bouncing and floating bubbles of all colors, shapes and sizes. After the show, get the camera and kids ready when Yang encases guests in a giant bubble for a nominal fee.

"I like coming to the Bubble Fest," says Yang, who makes his fourth appearance at the center. "It's close and intimate. Children can get really close and see what's happening."

The center's Showcase Gallery is one of the smallest venues (seating 350) for Yang, who has performed in much larger arenas in Moscow, Singapore, Berlin and Paris. The Canadian citizen also has appeared on numerous television talk and variety shows around the world in his 22 years as bubble man extraordinaire.

This year, Yang's bubble show gets very theatrical. Colored lights, lasers, timed music and a little fog will create an otherworldly environment where mystical floating spheres rule. (Vegas is certainly knocking at his door.)

Despite all the added paraphernalia, Yang insists his show is really a quiet meditation on the science of bubbles. The audience can observe mathematical elements with connecting bubbles (they always form 120-degree angles), check out the physics of surface area (bubbles demonstrate economics of space) and learn about the principles of light and color.

Indeed, the "rainbow segments" of Yang's show vividly illustrate how bubbles reflect and absorb light. By combining different colors of light sources — including diffused and neon — Yang creates complex colors of bubbles, spheres you wouldn't see with just that old white sunlight.

Later, with a room full of tiny flying bubbles, Yang fires off five colored lasers to produce, as he says, "a phenomenal dance of color in the air."

After catching Yang's eye-popping show, kids will no doubt want to try their hand at bubble making, compete with others in bubble contests and invent their own bubble toys.

"That's the difference between my show and, say, a magic show," says Yang. "Kids can actually go home and do bubbles. They can take what they've learned and experiment. This gets them thinking and doing."

Yang's own fascination with bubbles began when he was a child growing up poor in Yugoslavia in the 1940s. With only eight years of grammar school, there were hardships but also the simple joys of childhood, Yang remembers.

"When I was little, I loved nature and the beautiful things I found there," he says. "I remember seeing bubbles and thinking that I too wanted to create artificial rainbows."

Urged on by his natural curiosity, Yang as a teenager experimented with soap and liquids, creating special formulas that he eventually used for his first bubble shows performed on the streets of Switzerland, Italy and Greece.

Today, Yang has about 12 top-secret formulas — and the bubble train shows no sign of bursting.

With offices in four countries, Yang continues to tour as he works on a new line of bubble toys and plots his next entry into the Guinness Book of World Records. Yang holds nine records — just last week, he broke the world's record for the number of people inside a bubble (18).

All in all, soapy water has been very good for Yang. "I love what I do, and it's never tiring to see how bubbles float and change shape in the sky," he says. "It's still thrilling after all these years."

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BubbleFest XI

When: Saturday through April 16. Laser-and-light bubble show times are 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. daily.

Where: Discovery Science Center, 2500 N. Main St., Santa Ana.

Price: Bubble show tickets are \$3 in addition to Science Center admission: \$11 for adults, \$8.50 for seniors and children. Children younger than 2 get in free.

Info: (714) 542-2823