

MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS FESTIVAL

Tracking In on Montreal!

Montreal, Sunday, March 5, 2000 -- In its 23 days of activities, the first edition of the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival, in collaboration with VIA Rail Canada, will have managed to capture the attention of Montrealers and visitors alike, starting with bringing them to the downtown area, and focusing their attention on the very best the city has to offer: an innovative way of tasting and seeing the urban winter scene. This first step forward with the goal of breathing new dynamism into Montreal in the heart of the winter season, with the simultaneous presentation of three festivals, was much appreciated by all its participants, and has already aroused the curiosity of several foreign participants, setting the stage for many new development ideas and projects for the future.

In the events directly produced or co-produced by the Festival, be it in the Performing Arts and Museums component or the SAQ Table Arts component, especially the Tasting Events and Great Chef Workshops presented by Gaz Métropolitain, an attendance exceeding 25,000 participants has been evaluated for the indoor programming. And in regard to the free Hydro-Québec Lighting Arts component, that included 34 performances of the urban tale *This Is a Sphere* by Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon, presented on a daily basis by Hydro-Québec; or the six installations of the International Symposium on Lighting of Canada, presented in collaboration with Le Lait and the government of Canada, in which some 6,000 ballots were cast by festival-goers in the Time to be dazzled! competition to determine the winner of the Public's Prize; as well as the Symphonies portuaires at Pointe-à-Callière and the Torchlight Ascent of Mount Royal that boasted record crowds; and finally the Flavour Week hosted by Soeur Angèle, also presented free of charge at Complexe Desjardins in the SAQ Table Arts component, the organisers of the Festival estimate the number of persons in attendance at these free activities and events at more than 50,000.

If one also takes into account the 100,000 or so spectators to the various performances presented as part of the official programming of the Festival, or who visited the establishments identified with the colours of the Festival for the occasion, as well as the increased clientele in some 50 restaurants and 15 hotels, close to 200,000 people directly or indirectly had their first taste of this first winter rendezvous in Montreal! Which is an unprecedented attendance number for any first edition of a festival in Montreal, considering that the attendance of future MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festivals will increase over the years thanks to the real appreciation demonstrated by the public for this year's events. In comparison, the first edition of the Montreal International Jazz Festival had attracted only 12,000 spectators...

The first spark of a major-reaching event

The organisers and private and governmental partners of the Festival gave themselves three years to fully confer on this event an international status that will contribute to the tourist and economic development of the downtown area during this traditionally low point of the year. Thanks to the number and quality of its partners, the event has managed to make a difference this year, reaching out to the population, consistently doing what it had set out to do in its first

edition. Definitely a step in the right direction, one that augurs well for the future!

Understandably, the public was presented with quite a challenge: to experience, in the midst of winter, the entire scope and flavours of a totally new event with its many components presented in a great number of different sites. But this first learning experience will have permitted us to learn a lot and to hone certain aspects of the Festival in order to create a «festival soul» by offering rendezvous more adapted to this time of year. In any case, the first edition of the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival will have managed to crystallise the public's attention on the extraordinary cultural activities that abound in Montreal during the month of February. At the same time convincing Montrealers to get out of doors in greater numbers, taking in the downtown sights. The success of the event is also important in view of the fact that this was a first edition, with all the contingencies that accompany the inception of a new festival, but also a first experience that had reunited, from the very start, a great number of expectations, most of which were met by the Festival.

The setting up of information tools for the public had a major impact on the Festival's success. As witness the Info Lumière Bell Brigade that brought its unusual contribution to focusing the attention of the public on the Festival, the publishing of a complete program as well as of a Guide to the SAQ Table Arts component, and the very high quality of the Internet website where one could find, in both languages, all the information about the Festival's programming, complete with hyperlinks to each of the partners, an essential tool for the tourist development of the event.

The great interest of this important event for Montreal is readily evident. The Festival was covered extensively by the metropolitan as well as the national media. Already, interesting articles on the Festival have been published by foreign reporters in Toronto, in The Toronto Star, Boston and Chicago, as well as positive reports in The New York Times and even Paris, where a half-page singing the praises of the Festival appeared in Le Figaro. Also, the Festival's closing week-end was covered, in Montreal, by The Boston Herald, The New York Post, Food & Wine, Country Living Magazine, and the PBS network. Because of the great interest expressed for this first edition as well as the extensive press coverage of the event, the organisers, in collaboration with the tourism industry, have already started to develop foreign travel packages that will strive to exploit the potential of this event that is the reflection of the very best Montreal has to offer.

All in all, the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival has demonstrated that it corresponds to a real need in the community, and that everyone involved in its presentation, from its partners to the participating public, wishes to extend yet further its development in upcoming years. So we're off to a very good start indeed! We hope that the Festival will grow in sync with the dynamism of the City of Montreal and its creative artists, and its quality of life. We wish to extend our many thanks to the members of our staff, to the three levels of government, to our four major sponsors and associated sponsors, as well as to the one-hundred-strong programming partners with whom we will continue to develop the event, wiser from the learning experiences of this first edition.

Performing Arts and Museums component

Finally, the Performing Arts and Museums component, like the other two components, was a Festival unto itself, even if initially, it may have seemed to be lacking in original content, as some of the productions of our partners from the cultural milieu of Montreal had already been programmed for February prior to joining the ranks of the Festival, as was scheduled, a little like

the Festival d'Automne in Paris.

But in its very first edition, the Festival was responsible for bringing to Montreal the likes of Philip Glass, A Sei Voci, Radu Lupu and, of course, Jessye Norman with Michel Legrand; as well as the revival of La Vie qui bat with O'Vertigo and the SMCQ, the premiere presentation of the Baroque Fantasies at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Musique Défilé with the NEM; or still, the Bach Event -- Portrait of a Genius, presented at Centre Pierre-Péladeau in collaboration with the Chaîne culturelle de Radio-Canada; and finally, the homage-concert to the music of The Red Violin, an original concept presented last evening during the closing concert of the event.

This cultural component in the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival is earmarked for greatness in upcoming editions, thanks to multiple partnerships to be developed that will favour complex programming events that, who knows, may compete one day with the likes of the great festivals like the one in Edinburgh.

SAQ Table Arts component

The inception and presentation of the SAQ Table Arts component is certainly the best initiative of its kind in the first MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival. Its great success is due in great part to the participation of the 50 Finest Tables, the scrumptious Tasting Events organised by hotels and presented in a large price range, from the exciting Great Chef Workshops, in collaboration with the culinary schools of Montreal and presented by Gaz Métropolitain, as well as the Flavour Week at Complexe Desjardins that welcomed an attentive public all through the second week of the Festival.

The emission of a Table Arts Passport and its 15% rebate on regular wine and alcohol prices was instrumental in bringing new clients. The grand table to which the Festival had invited such culinary luminaries as Bocuse, Puisais, Laprise, Vié, Trotter, Curtat, Jung, and more than 15 other chefs, held its tantalising promise of revealing flavours and culinary tips through popular activities whose goal was to initiate the general public to this art form, as well as adding to the training of professionals.

Thanks to the invaluable assistance of the Société des Alcools du Québec, and the enthusiasm and complicity of restaurateurs and hotels taking part in the event, -- already, the chefs of Montreal and their guests are busily preparing new tasty concoctions for next year's Festival! -- this component of the Festival has all the elements required to become, in the next five years, one of the greatest-ever wine and dine adventures in North America!

The Hydro-Québec Lighting Arts component

The Hydro-Québec Lighting Arts component is promised to a brilliant future (pun intended), as its capacity for growth is inherent in its uniqueness. This unifying and transporting theme that is light is rich in its promise of future luminous projects, such as giant film projections on buildings that will permit us to rediscover the hidden charms of our architecture, the illumination of stained glass windows in churches, competitions between lighted downtown shop windows, and many other initiatives from private and corporate citizens alike, to name but a few.

Over the years and thanks to Hydro-Québec's know how, the Festival should develop into a more pleasurable and sparkling personality, while playing with light in a more heart-warming fashion! This free component of the Festival is slated to be re-evaluated. The 32 kW/h limit imposed on the designers taking part in the International Symposium on Lighting of Canada,

presented in collaboration with Le Lait and the government of Canada, (the equivalent of the power needed for a single family home) will also be re-evaluated.

The number of installations will increase as of next year, and are already positioned inside a smaller perimeter linked by a warm and illuminated course, readily accessible by Montreal's underground network. One thing for sure, this first urban space illumination experience has stoked quite a lot of interest and curiosity on the part of the public, especially the audacious urban tale *This Is a Sphere* presented twice each evening by Hydro-Québec on the esplanade of Place des Arts, as well as the Torchlight Ascent of Mount Royal and the illumination of City Hall.