

MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS FESTIVAL

Sustained public and media interest, high praise and the enthusiasm of partners and participants Nearly a half million festival-goers took part in the third edition of The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival

Montréal, March 4, 2002 — The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival has just concluded an important chapter in its short history, by attaining the organizers' objective of becoming a popular success in the event's first three years. Enjoying the impromptu support of Mother Nature this year, the Festival has, thanks to its varied, accessible and enchanting programming as well as the support of its numerous public and private partners, become somewhat of a tradition. The organizers estimate that some 492,500 people participated in this year's Festival, which represents an increase of about 50% from last year (some 327,798 people had participated in one or the other of the three segments of the Festival's 2001 edition). This belies current trendy thinking decrying an individualist, cocooning society, and clearly shows that citizens of the third millennium are, in fact, experiencing a need to reach out, to gather together and to celebrate, even in winter... as long as they have access to pleasant and welcoming occasions to do so.

Obviously, Festival organizers are delighted with the public's passion for this great celebration of urban life. Montréalers have clearly taken their winter festival to heart. They also seem to have grasped the festival's essence, its special features, aims and scope. This one-of-a-kind festival takes place in winter, and indeed, triumphs over the season. A similar passion can be spoken of when considering the enthusiasm shown time and again by guest artists and chefs, the renewed creativity and commitment demonstrated by the 150 or so hotel partners, restaurants, cultural institutions and participating specialists, artists and designers, as well as the keen interest of local, national and international media. Bolstered by such overwhelming success, the Festival, presented by Hydro-Québec in collaboration with VIA Rail Canada, can now confidently undertake the second phase of its development. With the support of all its partners, first among them Hydro-Québec, which has just renewed its partnership agreement for the next three years as main sponsor and presenter of the event, the Festival plans to further diversify new events and activities, as part of this great festival of flavors, artistic creation and festive, dazzling gatherings.

Organizers plan to make the Festival an event of major international stature that will, by the fifth edition, generate significant spin-offs for the tourism sector, consolidating Montréal as a premier venue for culture and the culinary arts, in addition to reaffirming its status as North America's first "City of Festivals". Hotel owners observed a positive effect among U.S. clients mainly traveling by car, who were seen happily strolling on The Hydro-Québec Celebration of Light site and taking part in The SAQ Dining Experience activities. Moreover, the long-term impact of the Festival is already being felt in terms of the planning of future conventions, since Montréal has so much to offer during the winter season.

The three featured segments

Of the Festival's three segments, The Hydro-Québec Celebration of Light proved to be the biggest surprise, as much for the public as for the organizers! In fact, according to Descaries & complices's figures, more than 396,768 people—that's more than double last year's number—strolled, celebrated and danced on the outdoor site designed by Alain Lortie, surpassing the Festival team's most optimistic expectations. Among the many free activities for families offered continuously on a daily basis, Le Feu du Froid, created by the Zakouski company and presented at the Hydro-Québec Main Stage, is undoubtedly the one that drew the biggest crowds, as did the urban fireworks show Fireworks Canada, presented later each evening by the Government of Canada on the Place des Arts site.

Numerous festival-goers ventured out to appreciate the photography exhibit White Nights in Montréal, an initiative of Productions de l'Oeil, before attending the VIA Rail Canada Free Concerts series, particularly the performances of Angèle Dubeau and La Pietà and Natalie Choquette. Fans were also many to succumb to the magic of The Enchanted Kingdom's Fountains, presented in collaboration with La Fabuleuse Histoire d'un Royaume, at the Grande-Place du Complexe Desjardins. During the 5 à 7 SAQ Happy Hours, the highly successful performances of street artists and the late evenings with live music of The Stella Artois DJ Series on the Place des Arts esplanade, transformed into an altogether unique, open-air dance floor for the event, the atmosphere was such, especially on Saturday evenings, that one literally felt as though transported in the very midst of the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal. Compared with last year, the undeniable proof of this year's outstanding attendance lies in a tripling of sales, at the site's Bar des braseros and at the Bistro Hydro-Québec. The same held true for off-site activities, such as the inauguration of the permanent illumination of Place d'Armes by the City of Montréal, the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, the Chinese New Year celebrations (the Year of the Horse), organized in collaboration with the Chambre de commerce chinoise de Montréal, and Fireworks Canada, the special major fireworks display over the Bonsecours Basin Skating Rink, which astounded tens of thousands of people. Bolstered by this resounding success, the Festival plans to set up, in collaboration with the Old Port of Montréal, an annual fireworks program of four winter fireworks displays.

In addition, the Festival wishes to promote more lighting projects, such as the illumination of buildings and commercial arteries. Montréal has committed itself to the creation of an international network of Illuminated Cities that includes Lyon, Birmingham, Havana, Liège, Saint-Petersburg, Shanghai, Turin and Québec City. As announced last year, the Festival, which is closely involved in this undertaking, confirmed its twin partnership with the city of Lyon. For this reason, Montréal municipal officials will attend the next edition of the Festival Lyon lumière, slated for December 6, 7 and 8, 2002, in order to take part in a symposium on international light festivals.

A festival, however, calls for a banquet! And thousands of festival-goers answered the call, by participating in the three popular Convivial Meals, events which were sold out even before the Festival got underway, and by gathering in small groups to taste the secrets of the thirty or so internationally renowned chefs invited to come devise special menus alongside a number of great Montréal chefs. Of course, increasingly diversified and accessible, The SAQ Dining Experience segment didn't lag behind, what with the 250 activities that drew the participation of specialists, culinary aficionados and fans of all ages. Crowds were ever-present, whether at the Tasting Events, Gaz Métropolitain Conferences and Great Chefs Workshops, or at the event's 48 Fine Tables and the numerous culinary activities making up this year's Flavour Week, hosted by Sœur Angèle at Complexe

Desjardins! So much so that many of the activities held in hotels and culinary institutions quickly sold out, once again confirming the strong demand for this type of activity.

Thus, the Festival plans to continue to expand this popular segment, which in and of itself is on its way to putting Montréal on the map! Recent visits to our city by renowned chefs, including, among others, Quebec-Australian chef Serge Dansereau, Honorary President of this festival's segment, New York chef Rocco DiSpirito, European stars Antoine Westermann, Jean-Michel Lorain and Gabriel Paillason and the founder of the slow food movement, Piero Sardo, have only served to confirm Montréal as the culinary and wine capital of North America.

This will undoubtedly prove to be the case again next year, with the arrival of chefs and specialists invited to participate in series devoted to San Francisco and Europe, as well as Canadian and Québec series, which, held for the first time this year, pay tribute to the very best local culinary talent. As part of The Stella Artois Special Events, the Festival brought to Montréal such major international stars as Barbara Hendricks and José Carreras, Honorary Co-Presidents of this segment, which featured the vocal musical arts as its theme. The Festival also presented such creative endeavors as the Montréal premier performance of the spectacular Cirque Orchestra by Cirque Éloize, with the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Orchestra, masterfully conducted by Gilles Bellemare, and the closing gala of Montréal en voix, a tribute to our own greatest artists, with Richard Turp as artistic director with the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Orchestra conducted by Jacques Lacombe. This latter performance will serve to produce a special television broadcast to be aired by the Société Radio-Canada, the CBC, ARTV and distributed around the world. Also recorded for repeat broadcasts are the magnificent evenings we shared with the famous Corsican singer Petru Guelfucci, counter tenors James Bowman and Daniel Taylor, as well as the exceptional repeat performances of La Dame de Pique by Les Grands Ballets canadiens de Montréal and the 24 Préludes de Chopin and Cri du monde, by the Compagnie Marie Chouinard.

Having featured music in 2000, dance in 2001 and the vocal arts this year, the theme of The Stella Artois Special Events next year will be drama and theatre. The public will be able to enjoy a number of creations, from both here and abroad, including the Montréal premiere of René Richard Cyr's new adaptation of the musical, L'Homme de la Mancha. In addition, this adaptation of Jacques Brel will coincide with the 25th anniversary of his death, and will prove a perfect fit for the main theme of the Festival's fourth edition: Spain, the country of Don Quichotte. And, for the first time in its short history, the Festival made a financial contribution to the coproduction of La La La Human Steps' next new work, choreographed by Édouard Lock, to be presented during the Festival's fourth edition.

Straight ahead... (2003-2004-2005)

Organizers had originally forecast that the Festival would not be recognized as a full-fledged event until its 5th anniversary or attain full maturity before its 10th edition. Now however, the reception from the Montréal public, already confirmed from a tourist perspective, leads them to believe that as of its fifth edition, the Festival will be ranked among the grand festivals of North America, making Montréal a prized urban destination even in the coldest of winter months. Reaching this objective will depend on the results for the next three years, which will be critical ones. This explains why the Festival's development plan for 2003–2005 has, among its priorities:

Increase the population's participation in the Festival's three segments by offering a greater number of festive and mouth-watering free activities on the Complexe Desjardins site. More elaborate and better coordinated programming of indoor concerts and outdoor events should definitely result in more people dropping by the Festival site... and returning again over the course of the remaining 17 days;

Giving home-loving urban dwellers even better reasons for leaving their nest and coming to (or staying in) downtown Montréal and savouring a romantic dinner for two, enjoying a new theatre production or simply taking part in "the event";

Offering tourists all-inclusive week-end packages, or itineraries custom-built to their specifications;

Offering, in collaboration with our partners, unique and spectacular events that will interest specialized media and incite music lovers and gourmets to get on a train or plane and come to Montréal;

Developing series and themes in collaboration with various cities, regions or countries, by inviting them to come and share their culinary, artistic and fireworks talents. In this regard, we can, in fact, already announce that a first initiative will be presented in 2003, when the Festival shines the spotlight on Catalonia. It will be the focus of the three segments, namely cultural, food-wine and luminous, of the Festival. The agreement was reached this past February 22, with Mr. Jordi Vilajoana, Minister of Culture for the Generalitat de Catalunya, while he was in Montréal. This agreement will allow the public to discover the diversity and treasures of Catalan culture and gastronomy, as well as the many affinities between this region and Quebec.

This will drive the partners' creativity and stimulate the population's participation, making Montréal a must for all those who enjoy being moved by the most recent work of a great artist, unearthing delightful secrets from the world of food and wine or, just gathering with friends and family to celebrate city life... in winter. Encouraging budget results Ahead of the budget plan announced last year, the budget for this third edition of the Festival is a balanced one (about \$6 million in revenue and expenses). This is partly due to the fact that there were no unexpected surprises this year. Also, the snow-removal budget was not spent in its entirety and revenue from tickets sales and the Bistro Hydro-Québec surpassed the forecast. Consequently, and given the success of this third edition, organizers anticipate that the next two editions of the Festival should generate slight surpluses, which would allow for paying off the accumulated \$200,000 deficit, a figure which, it should be noted, corresponds to the normal implementation cycle for a major international festival. This deficit came about as a result of unanticipated expenses last year (namely, the wind storm on February 9 and 10, 2001, as well as losses incurred by a potential labour dispute at Place des Arts and the spectacular rollout of the outdoor site).

Many thanks

The Festival extends a warm thank you to the Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec and the City of Montréal, as well as to all of its sponsors for their support. We would like to mention, in particular, Hydro-Québec, VIA Rail Canada, the Société des Alcools du Québec, Stella Artois and Bell. The huge task of informing the Montréal public as well as tourists, a joint effort on the part of the Festival and Bell Info High Lights, resulted in better knowledge and understanding of the hundreds of activities presented, in one or the other of the three segments and in over 60 different locations. Thanks also to our media partners, who contributed to publicizing the event. The Festival also wishes to highlight the unwavering support of the members of its board of patrons and its board of directors as well as that of Tourisme Montréal, one of the event's very first partners and encourages every one of The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival's 150 partners to continue supporting our efforts. Lastly, a warm thank you to the entire Festival team, for its passionate and unflagging work as well as to the public—individuals and families who turned out in droves—for their enthusiastic participation in the Festival's

many offerings. We invite you to immediately open your calendar (or your Palm Pilot) and jot down the dates of the fourth edition of The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival, which will be held from Thursday, February 13 to Saturday, March 1st, 2003.

Media from outside Quebec who covered the 3rd edition of The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival

UNITED STATES

National Geographic Adventure (magazine)
AAA Car & Travel (magazine)
New Hampshire Telegraph (daily newspaper)
Saveur Magazine USA (magazine)
Middleton Press (daily newspaper)
Woman's Day Magazine (magazine)
Bridal Guide Magazine (magazine)
forbes.com (Internet media)
winespectator.com (Internet media)
Charleston's Free Time (weekly publication)
Plattsburgh Press Republican (daily newspaper)

MEXICO

Travel Guide (magazine)
Bon Vivant (magazine)
Periodico Reforma (magazine)

BRAZIL

Estado de Sao Paulo (daily newspaper)
A Folha de Sao Paulo (daily newspaper)
STB Brésil (electronic media - television)

EUROPE

Corriere della Serra (Italy) (daily newspaper)
Saveurs Magazine (France) (magazine)
L'Écho de Bruxelles (Belgium) (weekly publication)

ASIA

Japanese TV crew (electronic media - television)

ENGLISH CANADA

Canadian Living (magazine)
National Post (daily newspaper)
Toronto Star (daily newspaper)
Fab Magazine (magazine)
L'Express de Toronto (weekly publication)