

MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS FESTIVAL

Over 300 000 Montrealers adopt their new winter festival

Montreal, Monday, February 26, 2001 - Only in its second year, the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival has met the challenge of organizing a quality event that was clearer, more varied, daring, convivial and accessible. In short this event is now closer to what Montrealers imagine a "festival" could be, while arousing a huge public participation. The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival has arrived in leaps and bounds.

According to preliminary estimates, around 320 000 people participated in the Festival's various activities and of those present 10 to 15% were from outside Montreal. We can indeed call this year's event an immense popular success that surpassed the organizers expectations. This was true for the festival's new exterior site as well as for its cultural segment, whose new integrated theme for this year was that of dance. The delicacies of the Americas was the theme for this year's gastronomy and wine segment of the Festival. This Dining Experience segment which had found favour with the Montreal public, proved to be even more accessible and successful this year .

The Montreal public, who is a discerning and demanding one when it comes to festivals has in all evidence greatly appreciated what this festival had to offer, as well as having grasped its scope and significance. Montrealers displayed their propensity to celebrate and embrace new experiences once again, even in the dead of winter. Having made a grand entrance, with strong support from the three levels of government and from Hydro-Quebec its main sponsor and official host, in collaboration with VIA Rail Canada and its numerous other partners including Bell for its High Lights public information, the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival looks straight ahead to a promising future.

Thousands of ideas for the future

In its second year of existence, the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival is definitely well on its way. Those responsible for its three main segments are unanimous in declaring that the festival has found its path and was able to be more tangible in its ambitions. They also agreed that the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival will be an occasion to cherish that which encourages Montrealers to get out and discover new flavours, to be taken by new experiences and to discover new art forms. This latest success can guarantee a promising future for Montreal's youngest festival. The large presence of foreign press was also a good and encouraging sign for the Festival whose other goal is to attract more tourists to the city during the winter months.

The accumulated deficit after this second year of the Festival totals 300 000\$. Of this amount, 200 000\$ had been foreseen by the administrative council as a strategic investment in the laying out of the new exterior site. On the other hand, the extra 100 000\$ was unexpected and due to costs ensued from the wind storm of Friday the 9th and Saturday the 10th of February and of the uncertainties relating to the labour dispute between the Société de la Place des Arts and its technicians who are members of the IATSE union. Considering the success of this second year, the Festival will be in a position to balance its budget during the next three years, which is in the normal cycle of starting and setting up a festival.

The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival will continue to be bold and creative in order to make this festival more accessible to a wider range of artistic creations in all their forms, be they theatre, music, plastic, gastronomical or luminous. And more notably by pursuing even further the concept of urban animation and by proposing new themes for the performing arts, which next year will be devoted to vocal art. It's in this context that the festival will consolidate, sometime this year its twinning with the city of Lyon, who has also in the last two years , produced during the month of December, its very own light festival; le Festival Lyon Lumière. Montreal's third year of the HIGH LIGHTS Festival, with its programming of special events, surprising flavours and an urban animation segment that promises to be even more dazzling, will take place from Thursday, February the 14th to Sunday, March 3rd 2002. Happy season's end Montreal !

Premieres and new creations thanks to the Loto-Quebec Special Events

By its creations and the premiering of shows that otherwise, would not have been presented to a Montreal audience, the Festival has shown all the possibilities that it has to offer the city's cultural milieu. Over 25 000 spectators attended the Loto-Quebec Special Events (for an 80% attendance rate), of those over 16 500 tickets were for the Festival's new integrated theme for this year, which is dance (quite a feat indeed !). The programming of the Loto-Quebec Special Events managed to win over the public and the critics alike.

Numbers aside, it is still exceptional to have received from the onset of this second year, renowned artists such as Maurice Béjart, who has come as the honorary chairman of the Loto-Quebec Special Events series. This master presented the North American premiere of the spectacular « Ballet for Life » with the Béjart Ballet Lausanne. The Montreal public also got the chance to enjoy numerous premieres such as those offered to us by: Les Ballets Monte-Carlo in collaboration with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal, the French Baroque dance company, L'Éventail, accompanied by the musical ensemble Les Idées Heureuses, the Théâtre Talipot from Reunion Island and to crown the festivities the exceptional "Montreal Leads the Dance", with some of the best known Montreal dance companies.

This last show was filmed for television and will be seen throughout the world. The Montreal public also got the chance to enjoy the presence of prestigious artists such as Vakarelis and Midori, as well as premieres from local artists such as "Violons d'enfer", Angèle Dubeau and La Pietà, "Lylatov", Alain Lefèvre, and the fabulous Diane Dufresne with the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec and the Music Festival for Young People at the McCord Museum, as well as the gastronomic comedy "Food/Bouffe" specially created for this Festival by Infinithéâtre, for which two extra shows were added!

118 175 people take part in the SAQ Dining Experience

The public eagerly responded to invitations by restaurateurs, hotel owners, guest speakers and gastronomic specialists, who had concocted within the framework of the SAQ Dining Experience a substantial and varied menu of activities, of evenings and conferences that was palatable for all and affordable to every budget.

The total attendance for the gastronomic and wine activities offered this year, was estimated at 118 175 people. The participation at the Tasting Events, at the Great Chef workshops and conferences was 5 725 people. Many of these activities have achieved such a great level of

success that some of the partners had to add additional activities because many had sold out even before the Festival began. This was also the case with two of the Grand convivial feasts, "Delicacies of the Americas" with Argentinean chef Martin Carrera at the Bonsecours Market and the "Pot Luck" at Complexe Desjardins with the illustrious chef from Lyon, Paul Bocuse, who was honorary chairman of the Dining Experience segment of the first edition of the Festival. Over 10 000 people participated in the Week of Flavours, 500 were children who took part in activities that were designed for them. A good number of these initiatives by our gastronomical partners, who contribute to the richness of this event, had no shortage of enthusiasm from the public.

What this segment of the Festival primarily enabled was the showcasing of some of Montreal's best chefs. Participating restaurants enjoyed a 27% increase in customers, compared to a similar time frame before the existence of the Festival. Over 90 000 people went to the 48 Finest Tables of Montreal during the event (where 18 700 festival menus were sold). This was made possible by the overflowing enthusiasm and the imaginative spirit of many of the participating establishments, where our most renowned chefs officiate, and also by the presence of foreign chefs who came to share their passions with the public and suggest delicious menus with their hosts.

We can cite as an example, the honorary chairman of the gastronomic segment of this second year of the Festival, the prestigious American chef Charlie Trotter, who was so delighted by his experience here that he has expressed a strong desire to return next year with new ideas, and after having spread "the good word" to other chefs. The same applies to the mass majority of chefs both foreign and local who have stated that they were extremely happy to have had the opportunity to (re)experience this event.

The Hydro-Quebec Celebration of Light: a radiantly dazzling success!

Of the Festival's three segments to which the public was invited, The Hydro-Quebec Celebration of Light was definitely the most popular. Some 184 623 people of all ages congregated on Hydro-Quebec new Light Celebration site over a 13 day period. These figures were provided by the Descaries & complices firm. This success is all the more brilliant when one takes into account how the first weekend's activities were severely disrupted by winds of up to 120 km/h and temperatures that fluctuated between +4 oC and -18 oC in the evenings.

The public's response to this Festival greatly surpassed even the most optimistic predictions. The organizers are clearly overjoyed . How could they not be satisfied when every night numerous city dwellers gathered on a site previously dedicated to summer festivities. With both feet on the snow filled ground and rosy cheeks, Montrealers came to see strange luminous beings, talk amongst friends around the fire of the braseros and be enchanted by installations in an open-air museum. The last evening of the Festival was celebrated with the festival goers dancing to the sounds of a DJ around the fiery warmth of the braseros, enhanced by a wintry night's pyrotechnical show.

Festival goers were invited to vote for one of the artists of the 6 light installations, created within the framework of the Second International Lighting Symposium of Canada. Following the suggestions of last year's public, the organizers have reunited all the works of the Symposium on one site. Visitors have awarded this year's VIA Rail Public Prize to Nicholas Reeves ("La Sixieme diffractale"). Although prepared and confident that the new exterior site would generate great excitement, the organizers of the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival were nonetheless

caught off guard on the first night when faced with a marshmallow shortage! The popularity of the braseros was maintained throughout the Festival.

The organizers were certainly delighted when 9 000 people of all ages and cultures confronted a harsh winter storm to come and stand in an intriguing silence, immersing themselves in a wonderful classical performance provided by the renowned chamber orchestra I Musici de Montréal accompanied by the acrobats of the Cirque Éloize. The crowd rejoiced over excerpts from the spectacular "Cirque Orchestra", presented on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Complexe Desjardins. A week later, a crowd of 11 000 came to be seduced by the extraordinary troupe of giant puppets of the Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur accompanied by la Chorale Musikus Vivace de Saint-Jérôme.

This appetite for celebrating despite the wintry weather was also seen in activities off site, most notably for the Torchlight Ascent and the lighting designs of the second phase of the Light Plan of the City of Montreal such as; the unique illuminations at the Hydro-Quebec Headquarters and Complexe Desjardins. These set the mood for possible future initiatives that could be put forth gradually by hotels, office buildings, stores and individuals.