



News release
For immediate release

The 4th MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival: "A festival is like a crystal at the core of an apple ¹" - Robert Wilson

Montreal, Monday, Mar. 3, 2003 — The fourth edition of the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival, which wrapped up last evening, was an outstanding success. More than ever this year, the involvement of all the Festival's partners in the development of quality programming clearly showed. The general public enthusiastically participated, the firm Descarie & complices estimating the total number of persons who took part in the three segments of the Festival at around 400,000 despite a reduction in the number of evenings of free activities at the outdoor site.

Thanks to unprecedented media coverage, MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS has become a fixture on the festival calendar for residents of the Greater Montreal area. And the presence of numerous foreign journalists confirms Montreal's international status as "the city of festivals" and further strengthens its excellent reputation for fine dining and quality cultural events.

Highlights of the 4th edition:

- The Festival was a **great success** in spite of the extreme cold during the first weekend of activities and a snowstorm on the second Saturday (hence, fireworks had to be postponed until Saturday, Mar. 1). We salute all members of the **Hydro-Québec Celebration of Light** team who set up the site and provided entertainment while temperatures hovered around -30°C. Nevertheless, the nine free evenings of outdoor activities saw an average increase in attendance over last year, with an average crowd of more than 20,000.
- New attractions pleased a great number of festival visitors, who greatly appreciated – in the midst of a rigorous winter – the chance to warm themselves around braziers, dance to the music provided by the Stella Artois DJs, admire the lighting display of designer Alain Lortie, have a ball on the Le Lait slide, take in the *Fulgor* show and watch the Fireworks Canada presentation.

¹ During his Feb. 28 presentation-performance, Festival co-honorary president and internationally renowned artist Robert Wilson spoke of how, during his architecture studies, one professor asked students to lay out a city in three minutes. Wilson did this by drawing an apple with, at its centre, a crystal.

"The crystal represents the heart of the city, the place where people gather to exchange," he explained. "Exactly like a festival that brings together artists and citizens...People need this core. They need to get together, to share their ideas."

- The Festival was happy to do its small part in supporting over 100,000 peace marchers who crossed the site on a frigid Saturday, Feb. 15. **Many cups of hot chocolate** were distributed for free as *Give Peace a Chance*, recorded by John Lennon & Yoko Ono in Montreal, played on.
- The **Catalonian series**, part of the three segments of the Festival, delighted both the **public** and the **media**, serving as a main artistic, culinary and festive theme. Through his presence and involvement, Catalonian chef and SAQ Dining Experience honorary president **Santi Santamaria** added to the series' prestige while providing his valuable support in the promotion of the Festival.
- The **47 Finest Tables** making up the **SAQ Dining Experience** this year offered hundreds of activities. The extraordinary efforts of the Montreal chefs who graciously welcomed the Festival's invited chefs and winegrowers exceeded our expectations. There is no longer any doubt in our ability to make this segment of the Festival one of the most renowned gastronomic events in North America – indeed, the world.
- This year's **Sun Life Financial Arts series** brought us high-quality artistic productions, several of which could not have been presented if not for the Festival. Among its other activities, the Festival helped finance the creation (and presentation at the opening evening) of **Amelia**, the latest work of the series' co-honorary presidents, choreographer Edouard Lock and internationally renowned director Robert Wilson (whose marathon presentation-performance Feb. 28 delighted all who attended).
- A number of shows in the Sun Life Financial Arts series **sold out. Additional performances** of Cirque Éloize's **Nomade**, **L'Homme de la Mancha**, by Productions Libretto, and **Amelia**, by La La La Human Steps, among other productions, will be presented. The closing show of *Montréal brûle les planches* will be broadcast on ARTV and Radio-Canada for everyone to enjoy.
- The number of **tourists from the U.S. and elsewhere in Canada** is estimated to have increased this year. Business was up considerably at Montreal hotels, the majority of which were **full during the first two weekends of the Festival**. The event enabled visitors to experience the city's special vibrancy even in the midst of winter. Montreal is definitely THE city of festivals!
- The three **Via Rail gastronomic trains from Toronto** were **all huge successes**, selling out long in advance. These excursions were organized in cooperation with ITHQ (the Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec) and the Festival, with chef Jean-Paul Grappe on board.
- Several new joint initiatives of the theatre and museum communities involving Montreal's Finest Tables contributed to creating a most impressive cohesiveness between the gastronomic and artistic segments of the Festival. There were package evenings pairing the Museum of Fine Arts with Restaurant Les Halles and Restaurant Le Lutétia, as well as initiatives involving Le Lion d'Or with Au Petit Extra, La Gaudriole with Théâtre La Licorne, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde with Le Café du Nouveau Monde, and Le Petit Bonheur with Théâtre Corona.

On the downside...

- With the controversy surrounding the Canadian government's sponsorship program, the Festival experienced a major revenue loss, of \$800,000, principally owing to the backing out of co-presenter Via Rail Canada.
- The City of Montreal's contribution has also **declined**, from \$300,000 in 2001 to \$200,000 in 2002 and \$100,000 in 2003 (to which figure the borough of Ville-Marie added

an emergency contribution of \$35,000). This reduction is, of course, also detrimental to the Festival.

- In light of this situation, the Festival's administrative council made budget cuts of roughly \$450,000, notably by opening the free-admission outdoor site only three nights a week. The council also decided to fund a \$350,000 deficit in order to **maintain the overall quality of the Festival experience**.
- An amended budget was prepared in early January. The pro forma results indicate that the **anticipated deficit will be as budgeted**.
- However, given the Festival's growth, its popularity and the reputation it has earned over the past four years, the administrative council is confident that the accumulated deficit can be absorbed during the **next three editions of the event**, primarily with the savings to be made by scheduling the activities over 11 consecutive days, rather than three weekends.
- Furthermore, recent discussions, in particular with the municipal administration, indicate that solutions will be found for the Festival's fifth edition in 2004.
- The **consequences** of this year's drop in revenue and the resulting budget cuts were numerous. Besides the **free outdoor site being open** on only nine evenings, **cancellation** of the daily **waterfall lasers** show and the **free shows** at Complexe Desjardins left festival-goers without a steady supply of indoor-outdoor programming. In all, the Festival was **forced to cancel more than 30%** of the free activities planned on-site (the esplanade of Place des Arts and Complexe Desjardins).
- Nevertheless, as attendance figures show, Montrealers and tourists came to the event in great numbers. Making due allowance for the weather, attendance during "normal" winter evenings was up over last year. And what can we say about the final Saturday (Mar. 1), when nearly 10,000 festivalgoers accepted the invitation to come to the site and be photographed with sparklers in hand?

Looking ahead to the 5th edition of the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival:

- Next year's edition of the Festival will feature **11 straight days of activities**, from **Thursday, Feb. 19 to Sunday, Feb. 29, 2004**. This schedule, similar to those of the major Quebec and Montreal festivals, will enable organizers to concentrate programming, offer two weekends of exceptional events and keep expenses within the goals set by the administrative council.
- The **MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS site will thus be open to the general public every evening** (11, compared with nine this year) and a diverse program will be presented both outdoors, on the square in front of Place des Arts, and indoors at Complexe Desjardins.
- With regard to government sponsorships and partnerships, **Hydro-Québec** has already renewed its commitment as Festival presenter for **the next two years (2004 and 2005)**. The **Gouvernement du Québec**, through the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole and Tourisme Québec, has also confirmed its contribution for both 2004 and 2005. And the **Government of Canada**, through Economic Development Canada, has pledged its continuing support for the 2004 edition. **Tourisme Montréal**, a valued partner of the Festival since its inception, will finance the next two editions and intensively promote the event among its target tourist markets. In addition, in view of this year's success, we are confident of renewing agreements with our other partners and sponsors.
- The MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival, in collaboration with the City of Montreal, is currently in negotiations with the Lighting Urban Community International Association

- (LUCI)** regarding the staging of the association's next general meeting **in Montreal in February 2004 during the Festival**. LUCI, which comprises some 30 member-cities, including Glasgow, Shanghai, Turin, Quebec City and Lyon, is seeking to put together a communications and **international-exchange** network in the **field of lighting**, thus bringing together **specialists** and other people involved from the different **participating urban centres**.
- Following this year's highly successful Spotlight on Catalonia series, next year the Festival will again invite artists, chefs and lighting designers from another region. In preparation for the **2004 edition**, the MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival is holding talks with the **Rhône-Alpes** region.
 - As it did with San Francisco this year, in 2004, the Festival will again **salute an american city – Boston**. And – a first – we will invite the artists from this city to come and present their creations.
 - Two new projects are on the Festival's drawing board:
 - One concerns a participatory activity for the general public in Montreal's underground city, which is unique in the world and attests to one of the ways that Montrealers adapt to the rigours of winter.
 - The other project draws its inspiration from the Nuit Blanche event held in Paris, where citizens are invited to spend an entire night in the dens of the city – museums, theatres, restaurants and bars.
 - The Festival is now eagerly anticipated by Montrealers, who applaud this initiative designed to help them shake off the winter blues. And the slight advance we currently enjoy in terms of planning the 2004 program of events will enable us to provide our tourism partners with the necessary information for the design and marketing of package deals, thus contributing to making Montreal a four-season tourist destination.
 - From **Thursday, Feb. 19 through Sunday, Feb. 29, 2004** come celebrate the Festival's fifth anniversary with a **fifth edition** even more luminous, warming, comforting and stimulating than ever!

– 30 –

Source:

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Festival numbers

- More than **86,000 persons** took part in the SAQ Dining Experience activities. Of this number, **22,000** participated in the 100 free events during Flavour Weeks, presented by MAPAQ, and the Gaz Métropolitain Great Chefs workshops. Some 11,000 participated in no fewer than **300 fee-charging activities especially designed for the Festival** by the various chefs and the ITHQ. And **53,000 persons dined** at one of Montreal's 47 Finest Tables.
- The event benefitted from the support of no less than **175 associate partners** (list appended). This support not only demonstrates how much this group project contributes to the boosting of the Montreal winter tourist season, it also attests to the collective will to position culture and the arts at the centre of Montreal's continuing development and to the concerted effort to make the city North America's gastronomic capital.
- Attendance for the **Sun Life Financial Arts series** this year surpassed **45,000 concert-hall spectators**, double the figures of past years. And this doesn't include the **6000** tickets already sold for additional performances.
- The participation figures for the three segments of the Festival are as follows:
 - **251,226** for the Hydro-Québec Celebration of Light,
 - **86,192** for the SAQ Dining Experience and
 - **45,359** for the Sun Life Financial Arts series.
 - In all, more than **382,777 festivalgoers took part** in at least one of the Festival's activities.
- The Festival's 2003 receipts budget totals \$5.5 million, while the expenses budget stands at \$5.85 million. Ten per cent of revenues came from the box offices² and the sale of derivative products, 30% from the contributions of the three levels of government, and 60% from sponsorships in the form of money or services plus the sale of advertising and the official products of the Festival, which is a non-profit organization.

² It should be noted that, on the whole, revenues from ticket sales for the Sun Life Financial Arts and SAQ Dining Experience series are collected directly by the Festival's different partners (restaurants, hotels and cultural organizations) and therefore do not appear in the event's financial results.

2003 quotes

“When it comes to festivals, Montreal knows the ropes [...] In winter, the city takes the darkness out of the season with Hydro-Quebec’s Festival Montréal en lumière.” — Jan Shepard, *Boston Sunday Globe*, Jan. 12, 2003

“High Lights, hot city! World-class chefs and world-beat music help the Montreal High Lights Festival warm up the coldest time of the year.” — Jacqueline Swartz, *The Globe & Mail*, Feb. 12, 2003

“After tomorrow, there’s only one weekend left to the 2003 High Lights Festival. But the way it’s gone so far, this is another Montreal festival that’s going to be around for many years to come” — Mary K. Nolan, *The Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 22, 2003

“ [...] among the best dishes I’ve ever had. [...] Now Montreal plans for its fourth annual High Lights event, a three-week celebration that has matured into another of the city’s fabled festivals. [...] This is a city that knows how to get out and party. There’s no reason we shouldn’t take the easy one-hour drive north and join them.” — Richard Frost, *Press-Republican*, Feb. 2, 2003

“For three weeks, in the coldest days of winter, thanks to the High Lights Festival, Montreal becomes the most exciting culinary destination on the planet.” — Lesly Chesterman, *The Gazette*, Dec. 21, 2003

“The mid-winter happening [...] allows residents and tourists to come out of hibernation and party.” — Alan Hustak, *The Gazette*, Feb. 5, 2003

“In February, Montreal is the place to be [...] a month-long extravaganza that appeals to all senses.” — Lysiane Gagnon, *The Globe & Mail*, Feb. 3, 2003

“Party Time! Even in the midst of dreary winter, Montreal lives up to its reputation as a party town.” — *Le Guide Prestige*, Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 2003

**Media outside Quebec that covered the 4th edition of the
MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival**

UNITED STATES

Albany Times Union (daily)
Arizona Republic (daily)
Boston Globe (daily)
Boston Herald (daily)
Businessweek Magazine (monthly)
Charleston's Free Time (weekly)
Chicago Tribune (daily)
Dining Around with Gene (KGO-AM Radio Newstalk 810 /ABC network affiliate)
Esquire/Wine Spectator (magazine)
Gourmet Magazine (monthly)
Middletown Press (daily)
Newsday (daily)
New York Post (daily)
Ocean Drive/Miami (weekly)
Plattsburgh Press-Republican (daily)
San Francisco Chronicle (daily)
The Sunday Telegraph (weekly)
Travel Agent Magazine (monthly)
Washington Post (daily)
Wisconsin State Journal (daily)

EUROPE

Air France Magazine (France) (quarterly)
AVUI (Spain) (daily)
Best Magazine (UK) (monthly)
Canadian Affair (UK) (quarterly)
Catalunya Ràdio (Spain)
Cigares & Co (France) (monthly)
COM Ràdio (Spain)
Corriere della Serra (Italy) (daily)
El Periódico (Spain) (monthly)
El País (Spain)
El Punt (Spain)
Europa Press (Spain)
EFE (Spain)
FODOR Guides Touristiques (Europe)
France Inter (France) (radio)
La Vanguardia (Spain) (daily)
Le Nouvel Observateur (France) (weekly)
L'express (France) (weekly)
TV3 (Espagne)

ENGLISH CANADA

Freelance tourism journalists (2)
AirMiles Magazine
Canada Scope Magazine
Canadian Living Magazine
Dreamscapes Magazine
Elle Magazine
Gaiety Magazine
Globe & Mail
Go Media Canada
Hamilton Spectator
L'Express de Toronto
Maclean's
National Post
Outta Here Travel Magazine
The Toronto Star
www.thedancecurrent.com