



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

The Magic of Lanterns ***Presents Chinese Skies*** **Spotlight on Traditional Chinese Astronomy**

Montréal, September 11, 2009 – The 17th edition of *The Magic of Lanterns*, put on by Montréal's Nature Museums, is now open! This wonderful celebration of light will continue until November 1 in the Chinese Garden of the Botanical Garden, on the theme of *Chinese Skies*, in honour of the International Year of Astronomy and in reference to traditional Chinese astronomy. At the official opening ceremonies last night in the Chinese Garden, Helen Fotopulos, Executive Committee member responsible for Mount Royal, nature parks and major parks, the Nature Museums and the status of women, said she was “delighted to see this event light up. It has become an essential part of life in Montréal, helping us to understand nature and culture through a unique and fascinating experience that carries us off to other lands.”

Charles-Mathieu Brunelle, Director of Montréal's Nature Museums, invited everyone “to let themselves be moved by the Magic of Lanterns, to be whisked away by a unique experience that allows us to celebrate just as people mark the New Year in China. It is also an opportunity to think about the bonds between different cultures and the natural sciences, like astronomy and horticulture!”

Gilles Vincent, Director of the Botanical Garden, reminded everyone that this spring *The Magic of Lanterns* won the Ulysses Trophy from Tourisme Montréal in the *tourist attractions with 100,000 visitors* category, and the Gold medal in the Grands Prix du tourisme québécois, for the quality of the visitor experience, the event's international reputation and the improvements made to the lanterns' energy efficiency.

Chinese Skies

The lanterns created for the 2009 edition are inspired by classic images from Chinese astronomy and instruments from the Beijing Ancient Observatory. In days gone by, the Chinese Emperor was considered the Son of Heaven. Astronomical observations and their interpretation were crucial, since the Emperor depended on them to make the right decisions. The starry skies, seen through the eyes of the prolific astronomers of Imperial China, are quite different from our 88 Western constellations. There are 283 asterisms, or star patterns, in 31 groups: three enclosures and 28 lunar mansions, bands of varying width that allowed Chinese astronomers to follow the Moon as it moved among the stars. Groups containing seven mansions were associated with four totem animals, each corresponding to a season, an element and one of the cardinal points. The Azure Dragon, the Black Tortoise, the White Tiger and the Vermilion Bird will be appearing in a most unusual sky chart in *The Magic of Lanterns*.

Visitors will be able to explore the mythological and scientific dimensions of traditional Chinese astronomy and see how it compares with Western science. Every Thursday evening in the Botanical Garden, they will be invited to admire the sky's secrets, too, as amateur astronomers from the Montréal Planetarium will be setting up telescopes for them to gaze through.

More than a thousand years old

The Lantern Festival, still celebrated in China today, is a tradition that dates back to the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.). This evening celebration is held during the New Lunar Year cycle of festivities, as adults and children carrying lanterns stroll through the streets at dusk. Traditional motifs of plants, animals and mythical scenes, once fashioned from paper and silk, are now often made out of nylon and other modern materials. The sight of all these people out strolling with their own sources of light is splendidly festive.

A tradition at the Garden

The lanterns at the Botanical Garden are produced by skilful artists here and in China. They are designed in Montréal and handcrafted by a team of artisans in Shanghai. Then they are brought by ship to Montréal and painstakingly arranged at the Botanical Garden by a crew of electricians, carpenters, painters and welders. Imagine 700 traditional lanterns, along with theme lanterns, illuminating the fall sky every year in Montréal – like a cloud of stars lighting up the heavens!

The magic of energy conservation

The lighting for *The Magic of Lanterns* was modernized in 2008, with the new TFT LED Contactless System. The new system means a substantial reduction in energy use (nearly 10 times less) during the event, and is more reliable, even in poor weather.

The Magic of Lanterns 2009
From September 11 to November 1

The Botanical Garden and the Insectarium will be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

Montréal's Nature Museums – the Biodôme, Insectarium, Botanical Garden and Planetarium – helping people enjoy nature to the fullest.

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Visual available on request.