



May 24, 2009

As Luminato floods Toronto with creativity, you can take your pick

Ingrid Sapona

When Luminato debuted in 2007, it was described as Toronto's 10-day festival of arts and creativity. Its lofty goal was to bring Toronto's light to the world, and the world's light to Toronto. The end result for those attending Luminato events, according to festival organizers, is "accidental encounters with art."

I thought the descriptions were a bit over the top, until I went to some events those first couple of years. Having enjoyed Luminato in the past, I'd say it's a unique opportunity to see creativity manifested in a wide variety of forms, from the traditional to the avant-garde.

During the festival, Toronto's stages, streets and public spaces come to life with theater, dance, classical and contemporary music, film, literature, visual arts and design. With more than 140 events this year — including a number of world premieres and one-time happenings — there's bound to be something to capture your imagination. That's the whole point of Luminato.

To ensure the festival is enjoyed by as many as possible, most events are free. (And those that are ticketed are pretty reasonably priced.)

A few thematic strands run through this year's festival: a celebration of the guitar, the 200th anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe's birth, and contemporary communication methods and their effect on human relationships. The closing weekend event features Cirque du Soleil, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

The key to making the most of Luminato is planning ahead but going with the flow. Sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. Review the event descriptions, noting all you are interested in or just curious about. The easiest way is to use the "My Luminato" function on the festival's Web site, www.luminato.com.

If there are ticketed events you want to see, or limited-engagement performances, that will determine when you attend. (Be sure to order the tickets in advance to avoid disappointment.) Otherwise, just pick a day and choose a couple events. Note their time and location, keeping in mind that some things, such as the slide guitar festival and the Cirque du Soleil performances, are all-day events — when and how long you attend them is up to you.

In addition to the specific events you choose, allow yourself time to stop in at some visual art installations, many of them commissioned for Luminato. For example, I'm especially intrigued by Kurt Perschke's RedBall Project Toronto. This installation will feature a 15-foot inflatable ball that changes its shape and the space it occupies and is intended to reflect our own experience of metropolitan density.

Alternatively, if you're open to anything but perhaps are a bit pressed for time, you can just spend a

few hours sampling whatever Luminato events are going on in and around a given neighborhood. On the closing weekend, for example, at the central waterfront you could take in Cirque du Soleil and 1,000 Tastes of Toronto. From there it's just a short walk to the installations Broken Arrow, long wave and Binary Waves.

Or you could choose one location. For example, on June 6 at Yonge-Dundas Square, you can see the Shadow Notes photography exhibit, pop into the Hard Rock Café and hear the creator of the RedBall, see whether Toronto sets the Guinness World Record for the largest guitar ensemble and then stick around for a salsa lesson as part of Light on Your Feet.

Enjoying Luminato isn't so much a function of what performances or events you attend. All you have to do is open yourself to new and different ways of experiencing art and culture.

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Additional Facts

If you go

What: Luminato.

When: June 5-14.

Where: Venues throughout Toronto.

A sampling of this year's themed events:

- **A Celebration of the Guitar:** How do you celebrate one of the world's most popular instruments? Concerts, of course, but that's not all. There's a daylong slide guitar celebration; a Brazilian guitar marathon; an exhibit called Shadow Notes featuring well-known photographers obsessed with music, including Andy Summers' photos of the Police; and *5 O'Clock Bells*, a one-man play about jazz legend Lenny Breau. Luminato will even take a run at the world record for largest guitar ensemble.
- **Celebrating Edgar Allan Poe's Birth:** Luminato honors Poe by taking a playful look at horror, fantasy and the gothic genre. There's a gothic fiction reading featuring award-winning authors; *Dream Within a Dream*, a cabaret featuring Poe-inspired compositions, including an opera titled *The Tell-Tale Heart*; *Writing the City Macabre*, a reading by six of Toronto's best-known authors commissioned to create stories that paint Toronto in a ghoulish hue; and *Nevermore*, a musical-gothic fairy tale for adults.
- **Contemporary Communication Methods and Human Relationships:** This theme comes to life through visual art installations. There's long wave, an installation composed of 64 spheres suspended in a modified sine wave, the basic structure of modern wireless communication; an interactive work called Binary Waves stretching along Bay Street that will visually respond to unseen electromagnetic communications signals; and Broken Arrow, a work that uses technology to detect Bluetooth devices and transforms the signals into a symphony of sound and visual elements.

Attending Luminato:

- **Package deals:** Available at a number of hotels. Go to www.luminato.com/2009/visitor.
- **Parking in Toronto:** Street parking, where available, is normally metered with a 2- or 3-hour limit and you must display meter-machine receipts on your dashboard. Surface lots, available in many areas, are your best bet for longer-term parking, but be prepared to pay big-city prices. On evenings and weekends, many parking lots and garages offer discounted flat rates.
- **Public transportation:** The Toronto Transit Commission is one of the best ways of getting around town. Day Passes allow individuals unlimited travel on weekdays and are available for families on weekends. For details on rates, routes and schedules, go to www.ttc.ca.

For more information, go to www.luminato.com.
