

Luminato: A Brief History

Luminato, Toronto's Festival of Arts & Creativity, was born of the cultural and creative ferment of the city of Toronto. Luminato celebrates all the arts and is dedicated to showcasing the best of Canada and the best of the world in one place, and at one time, every year.

Toronto has long been home to a rich tapestry of writers, composers, musicians, actors, filmmakers, dancers, choreographers, painters, sculptors, architects, designers, and other artists. In the last five years, Toronto has witnessed an unprecedented creative building boom with major remakes of the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Gardiner Museum, as well as construction of brand new buildings such as the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, the National Ballet School, and the Young Centre for the Performing Arts.

The Inspiration

In 2003, Tony Gagliano, Executive Chairman and CEO of St. Joseph Communications and Board member of the AGO, was inspired by the cultural buildings being raised in Toronto, and saw an unprecedented opportunity to cast the city in a new light – to its citizens and to the world. Gagliano commissioned a study on international festivals that was seminal to the Festival's future development. The city needed a celebration specific to Toronto that would welcome the world; a festival that could unite the artistic talents of the city with artists from around the globe.

At the same time, David Pecaut, Senior Partner at the Boston Consulting Group and Chair of the Toronto City Summit Alliance, had concluded from his civic work that the arts were one of the most powerful means available to engage the many immigrant cultures converging in Toronto in a common project of city-building. He also believed that the arts and culture sector could be a major driver of tourism and future economic prosperity.

As Gagliano discussed his vision of a festival and sought partners, ROM Director and CEO, William Thorsell and others suggested that he meet Pecaut. Roberto Martella invited Pecaut and Gagliano for lunch at his restaurant, Grano, on a Saturday afternoon in early 2004. Over calamari, pasta, and wine, the two passionate city-builders found their mutual beliefs in the transformative power of the arts irresistible and their personal talents complementary. Luminato is the result of that partnership.

From that day forward, Gagliano and Pecaut met with leaders of the artistic community to solicit their ideas and shape a vision that would truly reflect the talents and aspirations of the community. The Festival would reflect the authentic richness of the arts in Toronto, would take its vitality from the diversity of the city's cultural communities, and would touch everyone who lives in and visits the city.

A Festival Advisory Committee was born - a group of arts leaders prepared to work together to define the festival and to bring it to life. They developed a vision for Luminato centred on "celebrating the creative spirit", and defined three "pillars" to anchor the festival programming: accessibility, collaboration, and diversity. Luminato would fill not only traditional cultural venues, but would inhabit public spaces throughout the city. The city would be the canvas, and the Festival would be the paint.

“What made Toronto a truly special place to host an arts festival was the opportunity to draw upon the producing capacity of our local arts organizations. We knew that one of the greatest advantages for Toronto would be leveraging the creativity, depth, and breadth of our artistic community,” Pecaut recounts. “To make that happen, the Festival Advisory Committee members and other arts leaders in Toronto were asked to become producing partners for many of the Festival events.”

Searching for Support

Just as critical as the artistic vision was the funding plan. Tony Gagliano remembers, “so many people immediately embraced the importance of the initiative even though, early on, there was nothing but a vision. David and I visited literally hundreds of community leaders, senior executives, government leaders, and members of the artistic community to share the idea with them and to ask for their ideas and support. This is where so many people really stepped up and supported Luminato and this is when we found what we now call our Founding Luminaries - the invaluable founding patrons of Luminato - nearly 30 extraordinary private donors plus a few corporations who have been an inspiration to all of us. Government support is predicated on community support.”

In December 2005, the Ontario Government became Luminato’s founding government partner by committing \$1 million in seed funding. This was the catalyst that moved the project forward from positive discussions to intensive preparations for the first festival.

That same month, Lucille Joseph became the first employee, as Interim Director, with the role of creating the organization and planning for the Festival’s debut.

Contributions of pro bono services and financial support were sought and many organizations responded immediately. Julia Deans, Executive Director of the Toronto City Summit Alliance did the corporate and governance work. Stikeman Elliott LLP provided comprehensive legal services. The Boston Consulting Group developed the Festival business plan and their accounting department kept the books for the first eight months. CIBC provided office space. Searchlight Recruitment undertook a CEO search. All of these services were donated free of charge, enabling the start-up money raised to go toward securing the early programming commitments and hiring staff.

A top priority for the new organization was translating the overall vision of the Festival into a distinctive brand with a unique name and visual identity. Seven advertising agencies responded to a pro bono creative competition with MacLaren McCann winning the opportunity to develop the brand of the Festival. By the summer of 2006, the name “LuminaTO”, the phrase “celebrating the creative spirit” and the colourful corporate branding had been finalized and adopted.

By June 2006, a launch decision had to be made. Pecaut, Gagliano, Joseph and the Artistic Committee agreed that three requirements must be met in order to proceed: core programming of significant scale and excellence must be finalized; a Festival CEO must be selected; and sufficient funding to feel confident of success must be secured. Once all three rather notable items were resolved, “we could push the button” as Festival Advisory Committee member, William Boyle, said.

The CEO Search Committee selected Janice Price, a Toronto-born arts producer who was running the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, to be Luminato’s CEO. Excited about the opportunity to return to Toronto and build Luminato into one of the great arts festivals in the world, Price accepted the job. With her hiring all the pieces came together and in July 2006 Luminato was

announced to the world. With that, the dates were finalized, venues confirmed, and it was time to make the Festival happen.

Price quickly pulled together an outstanding team of professionals that including a number of local hires and some repatriated Canadians working in arts positions abroad. The Board of Directors was finalized. Corporate and foundation fundraising shifted into high gear, and the remaining programming took shape. Another major milestone was reached with the securing of a lead sponsor – L’Oreal. The company was a perfect partner for a festival founded on celebrating the beauty of creativity, and in February 2007 they made a multi-year commitment to Luminato’s success.

Luminato Moving Forward

In the inaugural year of Luminato, over 1,000 artists from Canada and abroad delighted over 1 million Festival-goers at over 100 events across the city. There were eight world premieres and numerous small gems scattered among the major galas. Throughout the city there were “accidental encounters with art” as Toronto’s citizens and visitors alike bumped into the unexpected, tried new things, and together discovered the fun and shared creativity that can come from a festival.

Luminato is itself a new work being born. It will draw its own energy and shape from the contributions of the thousands who take part each year. Like the city that is its namesake, one cannot know what Luminato may become over time. But you can be sure that the possibilities are endless when the people of Toronto celebrate the creative spirit. One thing we do know for certain: June in Toronto will never be the same again, and Toronto will indeed take its place among the most creative cities in the world.