

Date: April 9, 2009



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Consultant Award for 2009 Ghost Train and Bright Nights in Stanley Park Events

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board award the consultant's contract for Artistic Director of the 2009 Stanley Park Hallowe'en Ghost Train and Bright Nights in Stanley Park to Mortal Coil Performance Society for a total consulting fee of \$32,000 plus GST and disbursements of a maximum of \$120,000 plus GST, as set out in this report.*
- B. THAT no legal rights shall arise hereby, and none shall arise until execution of the contemplated contract. The Board may rescind this resolution at any time up to the execution of the contemplated contract.*

POLICY

Consultants' contracts over \$30,000 must be approved by the Board.

BACKGROUND

Every December since 1998, the Board, in partnership with the BC Professional Fire Fighters' Burn Fund, has presented "Bright Nights in Stanley Park" at the Miniature Railway and Children's Farmyard. Since 1999, during the month of October, the Board has operated the Stanley Park Hallowe'en Ghost Train.

Mortal Coil Performance Society was contracted as the Artistic Director of both events in 2000, and since then has created and managed their artistic elements.

For each of these events, the Board pays a consulting fee to the Artistic Director. In addition, the Board approves a disbursements budget for the Artistic Director to manage and use to pay for the creative and artistic elements. This covers all aspects of hiring, directing, scheduling and paying the performers, the production and technical management, and creation of costumes, installations, visuals and sound. The Artistic Director makes purchases, and contracts directly with performers, artists, suppliers etc., up to the approved amount of this budget and the Board reimburses the Artistic Director for these costs.

DISCUSSION

Mortal Coil Performance Society

In its own words, "Mortal Coil is a non-profit Vancouver performance company dedicated to creating imaginative theatre and spectacle through the use of stilts, masks

and fantastic costuming. The company performs in theatres, at festivals and at site-specific events locally, nationally and internationally. The company also empowers communities to celebrate their creativity through classes, workshops and lecture / demonstrations for professional performers, educators, the general public and at risk street youth”. Mortal Coil works with a large pool of performers, musicians, technicians, production specialists and artists and involves many of them in these train events. It has mentored theatre and dance students and street-involved youth at the Ghost Train.

Ghost Train

Each year the event management team, consisting of staff, an Event Manager and the Artistic Director, discuss and agree on a theme, which the Artistic Director then develops into the final production. To date, the Ghost Train has had such diverse themes as Scary Fairy Tales, Shakespeare, Space Aliens, Day of the Dead, B Horror Movies and Pirates.

Over the years, staff and Mortal Coil have developed the Ghost Train together. Mortal Coil has an understanding of the challenges of the outdoor environment at the train, and has developed a good working relationship with staff. The vision, and the artistic and administrative management provided by Mortal Coil ensures that the event is unique and creative. It is a family focused event, but is designed to also appeal to adults.

Other activities for patrons of the Ghost Train have included storytelling, and crafts such as mask and hat making. The Children’s Farmyard is open and is decorated by staff as a Haunted Farmyard. The Stanley Park Ecology Society runs “Creatures of the Night” walks at the Ghost Train and sells popcorn as a fundraiser at both events.

Bright Nights

The focus at Bright Nights is on the lights and displays, created by Board staff and the Burn Fund, with only limited performance elements. As a result, the Artistic Director’s role at this event is considerably less than at the Ghost Train. The Artistic Director works with the event organizers to create, schedule and supervise several performers, in addition to arranging for Santa, musicians and the many community choirs who come to the event. The Artistic Director also works with staff on displays in the train area.

Contract Fee and Disbursements

The amounts to be paid to Mortal Coil pursuant to this contract in 2009 are:

	<u>Ghost Train</u>	<u>Bright Nights</u>	<u>Total</u>
Artistic Director Fee	\$ 25,000	\$ 7,000	\$ 32,000
Artistic Disbursements (max.)	<u>\$ 80,000</u>	<u>\$40,000</u>	<u>\$120,000</u>
Total	<u>\$105,000</u>	<u>\$47,000</u>	<u>\$152,000</u>

Event results and revenues to the Board

As outdoor events, attendance at, and revenues from, the Ghost Train and Bright Nights are highly influenced by weather conditions and it is relatively common for one of the events to have to close for at least one night each year due to high winds or snow. A closure on just one peak night can cost the Board up to \$20,000 in lost net revenue.

Ghost Train

Attendance at the 2008 Ghost Train was 35,000. Gross revenues were \$250,000 and the financial results were break even. Break even is fairly typical for this event. From a revenue point of view, it is more challenging than Bright Nights, as there are fewer nights, the hours are shorter, overall attendance is lower and, because the event is so heavily performer based, nightly costs (mainly staff and performer costs) are higher. For 2009, more sponsorships are being sought and there will be an increased emphasis on marketing to improve attendance.

The 2009 Ghost Train will run for 24 nights. Ticket prices are \$10 adult, \$6 discount. This is a price increase over 2008 of \$1 adult / \$0.50 discount, which should also help with the goal of increasing revenues. The discount rate applies to children, youth & seniors. Group and Leisure Access rates are available. Up to 50% of the tickets for each night are sold in advance by Ticketmaster, the remaining ones are sold onsite, on the same day only.

Bright Nights

Bright Nights is always highly popular. Over 85,000 people rode the train at the 2008 event, despite challenging conditions due to heavy snow in December, when access was often difficult and the event had to close down for two nights. Gross revenues to the Board, after paying the Burn Fund its 13% share, were \$460,000 and net revenues were \$150,000. 2009 attendance and net revenues are both expected to be higher, assuming no significant period of adverse weather conditions.

The 2009 Bright Nights will run for 38 nights. Ticket prices are \$8 adult, \$5 discount (same as in 2008). Similar ticket arrangements apply as noted above for the Ghost Train.

Future Artistic Direction at these events

Both the Ghost Train and the artistic elements of Bright Nights are products of a long relationship between the Board and Mortal Coil. However, both events have been running in similar formats since 2000. From time to time, other artists and production companies have expressed interest in being involved and it is felt that it is time to review future artistic options for these events. There is insufficient lead time prior to the 2009 Ghost Train and Bright Nights; however, staff plan to issue a Request for Proposals for an Artistic Director for both of these events for 2010.

SUMMARY

Mortal Coil has provided a creative and professional service to these events for the past nine years. It has the resources, the vision and the ability to work to enhance the artistic experience for visitors. The proposed fees and disbursements are reasonable for the scope and nature of the projects.

Prepared by:
Stanley District
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC
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