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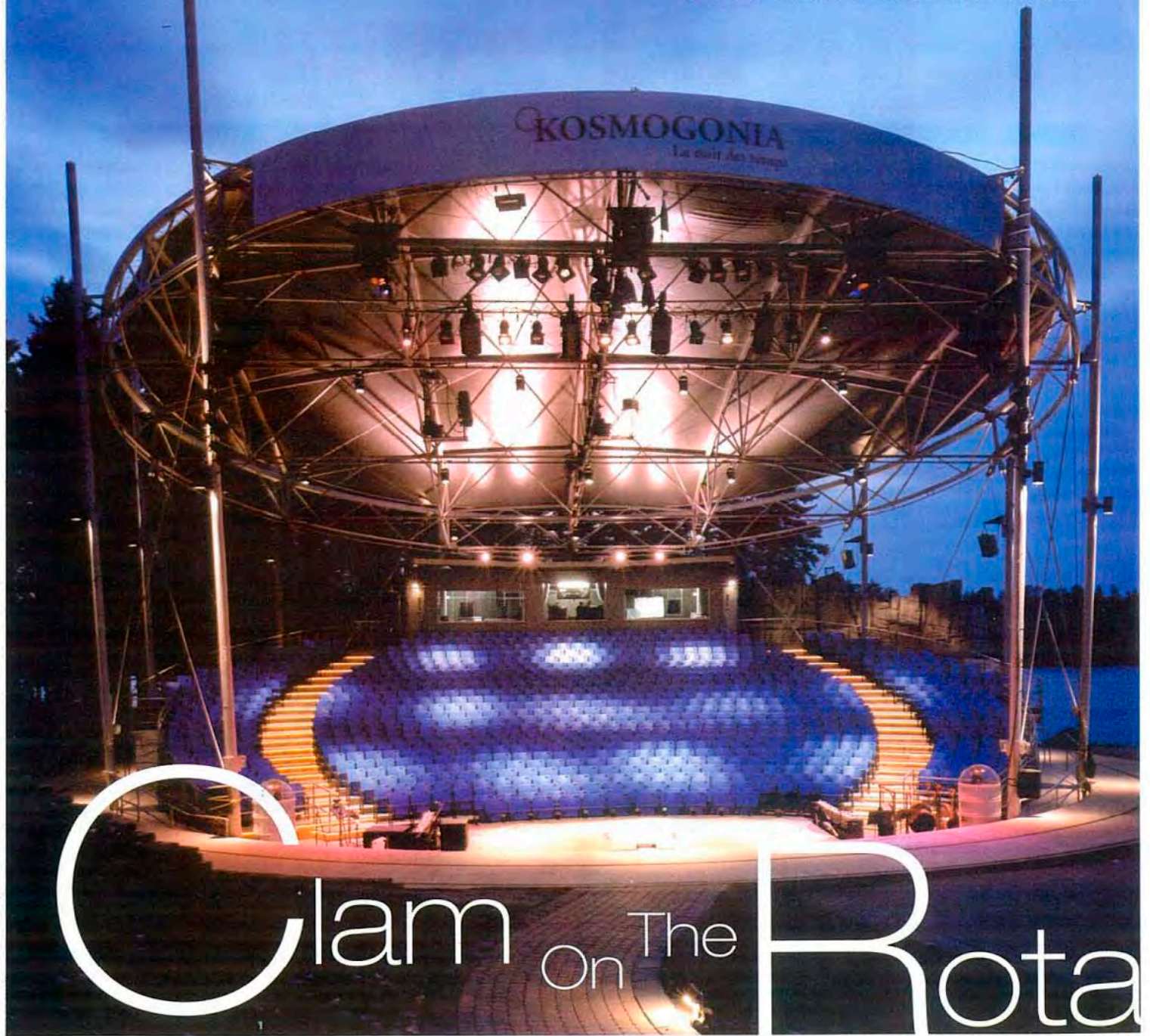
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The Cité de l'Énergie Amphitheater, located on the banks of the St. Maurice River, is home to the theatrical event *Kosmogonia*.



Glam On The Rota

An unusually-shaped

At Québec's popular tourist attraction, Cité de l'Énergie, the multimedia theatrical event *Kosmogonia* is a mesmerizing spectacle, featuring acrobats, actors, musicians and dancers. The real stars of the show, though, are the strikingly unusual venue that plays host to the show and the pristine beauty of the surrounding park that offsets it.

Shawinigan, the site of the "City of Energy" park, is known in Canada as the Niagara of the East. The park, which invites people to "explore time" and discover the innovation behind Canada's industrial undertakings, is built within proximity to a majestic waterfall, the St. Maurice River and a dense forest. One of the park's most popular features is a 385-foot-tall observation tower,

which affords visitors a unique perspective on its stunning views.

Kosmogonia audiences can see these majestic views during the show itself from the rotating outdoor amphitheater, which allows the local vistas to serve as backdrops for the show's fantastical story. "We wanted a theater and an event to take advantage of the wonderful land here—the river, the for-

est and the plains," explains Cité de l'Énergie General Manager Michel Trudel. "It plays at night, so we even use the sunset. It was important to us to invent a show that is unique. Using the rotating stage with the local surroundings was a brand new experience for the park's visitors."

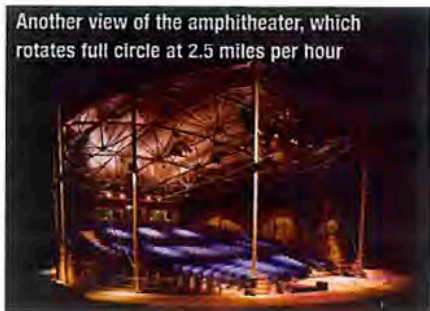
Kosmogonia is a new experience indeed. Its story blends well with the park's imaginative theme, envisioning a world before time existed. The multimedia show presents a creation story about the sun and the moon, incorporating dance, acrobatics, projections and light displays in an old-fashioned tale where mythology and technology create a dazzling extravaganza.

Built by Montréal's Scéno Plus, an architecture and theater consulting firm, the venue is 85 feet wide and seats 912 spectators. It rotates full circle at the leisurely speed of 2.5 miles per hour. Elegant and ultra-high-tech, the Cité de l'Énergie Amphitheater is shaped like a clam shell, with a roof that covers the audience but opens out to the natural scenery, allowing the outdoor environment to take center stage.

Like many Scéno Plus projects, the amphitheater for *Kosmogonia* was a show-specific design. Scéno Plus is well known around the world for its work in "architainment," a discipline that merges architecture, technology and entertainment. The firm has designed several one-of-a-kind venues around the world, including the theater for Cirque du Soleil's aquatic show *O*, which is housed at Las Vegas' Bellagio

patron from Dion will be a scant 119 feet away.

In practice, Scéno Plus acts as a conduit of sorts between the producers and the creative teams of the shows and venues they design for. Architect Claude Roy, who led the Cité de l'Énergie project, explains his firm's singular work: "We are concerned not just with the space; anyone can design a touring house. We are designing the entire experience. My background is in theater, not in architecture, so I am not as interested in the steel and concrete. I am not creating a monument. Instead, I am interested in creating the best space for the audience and the artist to be put in contact."



Another view of the amphitheater, which rotates full circle at 2.5 miles per hour

In January 1999, the Cité de l'Énergie brass asked the Scéno Plus team for a feasibility study to examine how best to produce an event that would encourage the park's visitors to stay on site into the evening hours. "We looked all over the world, to see what people were doing," recounts Trudel. "We wanted a totally unique production—some-

which is standard in the industry. The venue was outfitted with modern, readily available components." (See sidebar.)

Of course, with a design as complex as *Kosmogonia*, engineering becomes a significant element of designing the artistic experience. The amphitheater's unique rotating mechanism was a challenge to design, not only because of the great weight it had to support (it boasts a resistance of 100,000 vertical pounds), but because its core had to be hollow in order to accommodate electrical cables. The design of the electrical network and cabling was quite a feat as well, considering that the platform can rotate over a 720-degree angle.

Though the planning for the amphitheater started as soon as Scéno Plus returned its feasibility study in early 1999, the team actually built the venue in a surprisingly short six-month period, from January to July 2001. How did they manage such an undertaking? It's all in the planning, according to Roy. "We designed it so that it's easy to build," he says. "We have engineers monitoring the design process, so that it goes smoothly, and we were able to do some pre-work. Part of the platform was modular, so we could build it in a shop and bring it on site and assemble it."

Ultimately, Cité de l'Énergie spent \$5 million Canadian (\$3.2 million American) on the project, including \$2 million on construction, \$1.5 million on projectors, lighting and sound equipment, and \$1.5 million on the production itself. The park plans to keep *Kos-*

ting Half Shell

By Carolyn Petrie

Quebec amphitheater rivets visitors.

Hotel and features an immense basin containing 1.5 million gallons of water (see *SD* January 2001). Currently, the firm is wrapping up its work on the Colosseum at Caesars Palace, also in Las Vegas, which will allow pop superstar Celine Dion to connect with an audience of 4,000 in a surprisingly intimate setting. The Colosseum's unique design ensures that the furthest

thing no one had ever seen before. With Scéno Plus, we knew we could do it."

While Scéno Plus designed the infrastructure of the lighting and sound plots, the equipment was provided separately by Solotech and Action d'Québec. According to Roy, the venue has state-of-the-art equipment. "It's all pretty straightforward equipment. It's high-tech and very high-quality,

mogonia running for 10 straight seasons before reevaluating the project. Judging from the show's first season, which played to over 40,000 patrons (that's 92 percent capacity), that shouldn't be a problem. After all, with this unique venue, the sky's the limit. **SD**

Carolyn Petrie is a freelance writer based in Minneapolis.