

MONACO MURMURS

with Molly Brown

The Christmas lights are on, Santa's bell is ringing and it's shopping time again. "O come all ye faithful" call the boutique owners and a-shopping we all go, thoughts of New Year credit card bills drowned in another glass of champagne. As the season's festivities switch into high gear, higher prices and lower interest rates have affected the average person's spending power. Even Monaco's government-owned company, **Société des Bains de Mer**, announced lower dividends after net profits were down from 13.4m euros in 2002/03 to 8.4m in 2003/04, with an 8% decrease in hotel profits; but continued their expansion programme by spending 47.2m on the mammoth hotel complex under construction near the *Sporting d'Eté*, which already blocks the view of Cap Martin for residents with beachfront apartments at Larvotto.

Restoration of the *Salle Garnier*, the charming little theatre inside the Casino, is nearing completion; the elaborate ceiling decorations are being regilded and the firm in Lyons which made the original curtain fabric is recreating them in all the glorious extravagance of their 19th century originals, ready for opening night at next year's *Fête Nationale*, in November 2005. The *Opéra Monte Carlo* is presenting Rossini's *La Pietra del Paragone* to celebrate this year's *Fête Nationale* at the **Grimaldi Forum**.

HEUREUSE ANNIVERSAIRE

The **Fondation Princess Grace**, a charitable organisation created in 1964 which supports children and the arts, giving scholarships to assist young dancers and music students in their studies and aiding sick children in hospitals here and abroad, celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. The foundation supports the **Académie de Danse Princess Grace**, the **Academy of Music** and the **Monaco Dance Forum**, where dancers and choreographers gather to celebrate the international language of dance at the **Grimaldi Forum** (Dec 14/18) with performances by dance companies from around the world.

The **Princess Grace Irish Library**, celebrates 20 years of Irish culture in the Principality this year. Opened in November 1984 to house Princess Grace's personal collection of Irish books and sheet music, the library promotes Irish literature with conferences, lectures and readings. Its website is financed by the **Ireland Fund of Monaco**, who also created a Bursary which enables Irish writers and academics to pursue their writing and research at the library. This year, the Fund also awarded the first **Princess Grace Humanitarian Award** to author and Chairman of the **Irish Youth Foundation**, Bill Cullen, for his enormous contribution to underprivileged children in Ireland.

Even in Monaco there are dangers for young children and Prince Albert is personally sponsoring a warning to children using the chatlines on the Internet, which is shown before each film at the **Sporting Club Cinema**, where the **International Film Festival of Non-Violent Films** (Dec 2-5) will show films from around the world, including the South African film *Beat the Drum*, in English with French sub-titles. The best film, selected by a jury which includes Omar Sharif and film director, Francine Pellegrino, will receive an **Angel Award**.

The tourist industry creates not only income but employment in the Principality, which provides jobs for 50,000 people. Providing good food and entertainment for the tourists is therefore very important. Consequently, residents enjoy a varied and high quality of life, with a wide variety of entertainment within walking distance of their home. A unique exhibition of 16th to 18th century paintings at the **Grimaldi Forum**, *Exposition Cuzco* (Nov 13-Dec 5) shows baroque Peruvian art of the Cuzco School, some of which have never been seen outside Peru; and local artists are showing their paintings at the **Union des Syndicats de Monaco**, located in the new station building (Nov 22-Dec 3).

JOYEUX NOËL

'Fifty Balalaikas from Saint Petersburg', and gospel songs by the **Sensational Nightingales**, bring music to the **Princess Grace Theatre** in December and Gianluigi Gelmetti directs the *Orchestre Philharmonique* in a concert of music by Debussy, Ravel and Saint-Saens at the **Auditorium Rainier III** (Dec 5).

At Christmas, the **Monte Carlo Ballet** presents 'In Memoriam', a new creation by talented young choreographer, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and will dance in the New Year with Maillot's inspirational production of Prokofiev's 'Romeo et Juliette', which has received rave reviews around the world (Dec 31-Jan 4).

BONNE ANNÉE

On New Year's Eve, the spectacular Christmas tree and decorations in **Place du Casino** bring crowds of people to celebrate the end of another year with music and laughter; at midnight, champagne corks pop and fireworks explode to frighten off any loitering demons.

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to everybody! ♥

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