

# The artistry of Spain

Dazzling, imaginative show will be a fond farewell to renowned 'master of pyrotechnics'

BY JENNIFER CAMPBELL

According to his friends, he was to pyrotechnics what Pablo Picasso was to modern art. And, it just so happens, he shared his name. Pedro Garcia Picazo, known among his artistic community as a "master of pyrotechnics," a man with rare passion and a spark in his eyes, died a month ago in a car crash in Spain at the age of 35.

Word of his death hit organizers of Les Grands Feux du Casino de Hull hard. Mr. Picazo had become a friend and played an important role in their show over the previous three years. Benson & Hedges Symphony of Fire Hall of Mer, crowd-pleaser and the chief designer for a Spanish team called Fuegos Artificiales Antonio Caballer, he won the show's grand prize in 2007. Last year, he won the gold for both the Vancouver and Toronto Benson and Hedges Symphonies of Fire.

His death was a shock and a disappointment for Canadians who had seen his work. But like a namesake Pablo, his art will live on this week in Hull.

He had already put the finishing touches on a show planned for Hull before the car accident, which occurred when he was on his way

home for a shower before an evening show. For Hull though, the bombs were already built, and the show was set to music. Now, the other members of his pyrotechnics team have the daunting task of setting off his swan song.

Spain's show on July 31 — the first of four to be presented — is called *Caractere Latin*. True to its name, it will include upbeat music, sensational effects and flamboyant colours. For music, the program lists *Out of Africa*, *Seduccione* by Rondo Veneziano, and *We are the Champions* by Queen.

Paule Genest, general manager of the show and a close personal friend of Mr. Picazo, said the Hull show will be dedicated to him.

"Pedro is like the spirit of the show and the spirit will live on," she said.

She calls him the spirit of the show because he

was there from the beginning and he saw it grow. The production struggled to get off the ground — it lost money the first two years. Some claimed that was because people were resistant to paying admission to see fireworks; others attributed the loss to traffic jams and parking nightmares. Organizers ironed out the bumps and in the second year, Mr. Picazo apparently put on a show that guaranteed a return audience.

"There aren't many people who know it like that," said Michel Tremblay, technical director for the show. "A big part of what our show here is, comes from that guy."

Claude Hamelin, the Hull show's producer, said he was so good at blending the music, often classical, and the displays, that people would leave feeling as though the music was "meant to be played with fireworks."

Mr. Picazo was especially known for his imaginative use of sky and water as canvasses for his art. "I started to call him a painter of the sky," Ms. Genest said. "You know when you see a painting and you think 'Oh, I can see some talent there,' but then you see a Picasso and there's just something special about it? A Picasso will always be a Picasso. He was the same with fireworks. It just happens his name is Picazo too."

Ms. Genest said these fireworks displays always produce tearful emotional overdrive in her and Mr. Picazo's were no exception.

But she said he was most lauded for his *saluts* or finales — the powerful climax of the display.

"He lived a full life but I think if he had one regret, it would be that he didn't have an opportunity to give a *salut* to the ones he loved. There's no one who could *salut* like he did."

Mr. Picazo was born and raised in a pyrotechnic family. And this week, when they fire off his final *salut*, three of his dearest friends will be



Pedro Garcia Picazo, who died a month ago in a car crash in Spain, is shown holding two giant fireworks. The dazzling display on the front cover of this supplement is typical of his work.



## Spain, July 31

- 20th Century Fox
- *Danza del fuego* (Manuel Defalla)
- *March Pomp and Circumstance* (Elgar)
- *Seduccione* by Rondo Veneziano
- *Rose* (James Horner) — Original soundtrack from the movie *Titanic*
- *Out of Africa* (John Barry)
- *Carmina Burana* (C. Orff)
- *We are the Champions* (Queen)

## Fireworks master: 'It's an adrenalin trip'

28-year-old who will oversee Les Grands Feux has always been fascinated with fire

BY JENNIFER CAMPBELL

How do you know you want to be a pyrotechnician when you grow up?

For Alain Carbonneau, it was easy. Even as a youngster fire fascinated him. "I always liked fire and to control fire," said the 28-year-old who is in charge of seeing that the show, Les Grands Feux du Casino de Hull, literally goes off without a hitch. He's the one who organizes and oversees the firing booth and barge for each of the four competitors involved in the two-week event. He'll also oversee the grand finale.

With a laugh, he said he wouldn't elaborate on his early affinity for fire but he will discuss what led him to a 10-year career in pyrotechnics.

"Right away when I did my first show, I realized it was something very special," he said. "It's an adrenalin trip. You have to live it to now. I had a motorcycle for seven years and sometimes that came close but not quite." He started working with these pretty bombs

when a friend asked him to come to work for his family's fireworks company known as Fiat Lux. He was 18 at the time. For five years, he worked as a "mesher", intricately organizing the bombs so that there are delays between each explosion. He soon started working on finales for shows in Toronto and Vancouver. That's where he learned to read the plans for shows.

"Every designer has their own language," he said.

It's a bit like reading sheet music. To set off a choreographed show, you must be able to read the plans specified by the designer. But of course in this profession, which sees companies from all over the world competing for international pyrotechnic titles, you must also read different languages.

"Because lots of designs came from the Spaniards, I learned to speak Spanish," he said.



Alain Carbonneau

He learned the language and many of his skills from the late pyrotechnic master Pedro Garcia Picazo. Mr. Picazo, designer for the Spanish team Fuegos Artificiales Antonio Caballer, also coming to Hull, died last month in a car accident at the age of 35. This week, Mr. Carbonneau will help set off Mr. Picazo's final show — something he had prepared before his death.

Studying under Mr. Picazo, the Spanish language came to him rather easily since the pair would tour for months at a time. "I was with this guy who didn't speak anything but Spanish," he said.

Pyrotechnics is not a modern art. The Chinese date it back to ancient times. Like older arts and trades, it isn't something you can learn from a book or study in school, Mr. Carbonneau said, adding that it's more an apprentice art. Mr. Picazo was his mentor.

"He was my master," Mr. Carbonneau said. "He knew everything — everything about it. I was his student, a guy he would trust."

For this particular show, Mr. Carbonneau will be behind the scenes making sure all the bombs go off perfectly. He'll also help build the barge before the shows and make sure all bombs being used by the teams coming this

there to do it.

Expect to see an array of roman candles, shells which change colour, golden palm trees, mines, and "firefalls" (which produce an effect like a waterfall).

year — China, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain — meet strict Canadian regulations.

"I have to make sure the public is always safe," he said.

Clearly, there's an element of danger that comes with the job description that requires such close work with explosives. Chuckling a little, he admits he doesn't tell his mother about the more perilous details of his job.

And he shares about the same level of detail with his six-year-old son, who lives in Quebec City.

"For him to tell his friends 'My father sets off fireworks' is fun," he said, adding that he sees the boy when he can.

His homebase is in Montreal, but his job takes him all over the world. He works intensively — moving from contract to contract — during the six-month summer show season and spends the rest of his time training and learning.

"There's a lot to learn and it's always changing," he said.

Change as it might, the job itself is not something that will change anytime soon for Mr. Carbonneau. Asked if he plans to do it forever, he answered simply: "I'm afraid so. That's the reality. It's hard to explain."