



AN INSIDE LOOK AT JOYÀ, THE PEARL IN THE MANGROVE JUNGLE

THEATRE AND SITE

An oasis within an oasis – The Cirque du Soleil Theatre is perched above a massive lagoon overlooking the Mayan jungle on the Vidanta Riviera Maya property. It is an oasis within an oasis.

When guests step onto the gently sloped wooden walkway that winds them from the site entrance all the way to the *Cirque du Soleil* Theatre entrance 11 meters above, they gradually escape to another universe – a world of lush vegetation, waterfalls, and rich flora and fauna, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

When he imagined the theatre and site layout for *JOYÀ*, Grupo Vidanta architect Arturo Hernandez based his designs on three guiding principles: have the utmost respect for the jungle environment, conceal the theater among the mangroves, and play with sinuous lines and organic shapes.

A large cenote in the jungle – Abundant in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, *cenotes* (pronounced say-no-tays) are naturally occurring sinkholes resulting from the collapse of limestone bedrock that expose groundwater underneath. The Maya believed these pools were sacred gateways to the afterlife, their openings representing sacred portals to a mythical underworld, a place of awe. The architecture and esthetics of the *JOYÀ* site reflect and celebrate the Maya's reverential respect for nature and are inspired by the natural beauty of the surrounding jungle, which sits atop an intricate underground labyrinth of rivers and *cenotes*. In fact, the entire *JOYÀ* site concept is meant to give the impression one is stepping into a large *cenote* among the mangroves, complete with crystal-clear water pools, coral rocks, and a magnificent waterfall.

A deep respect for the environment – Construction in this ecologically rich part of Mexico is subject to stringent environmental controls and restrictions; it is prohibited, for example, to build anything above the 12-meter tree line of the lush, low-lying jungle that is not made of natural materials. During construction of the *JOYÀ* site, trees, rare

plants and animals were all displaced. To better preserve the natural habitat, a wooden walkway leading to the theatre was deliberately built above ground, allowing animals to pass freely underneath.

The leaning palm tree – At the end of the wooden walkway, the *Cirque du Soleil* Theatre evokes a palm tree leaning forward, like a giant flower gently brushing the water. The structure resembles a *palapa* (a Spanish word meaning “pulpous leaf”), a type of open-sided dwelling with a thatched roof made of dried palm leaves very common on Mexican beaches. Stepping inside the theatre is, once again, like walking into a *cenote*: with its high ceiling and organic feel, the volume seems to live and breathe.

SET DESIGN

The Naturalium – The theatre suggests a naturalium, a great library and a place of knowledge whose architecture blends with the natural environment. As Mexico is home to one of the largest universities in the world, a country in which the transfer of knowledge dates back to the ancient Mayan civilization, the naturalium is filled with old books collected over time by Zelig, an aging naturalist, and his assistants, the Masters. Certain parts of the set also evoke a vivarium (the plant world) and a terrarium (the mineral world).

To illustrate the idea of the transmission of knowledge, set designer Guillaume Lord decided to integrate two gigantic books upstage. High up above, the technical grid is hidden away behind a gigantic mechanism that represents a time machine created on the same scale as the books.

Blurred timeline – As Zelig’s naturalium is a place where knowledge has been collected over time, there is no set time period per se, but rather a collection of time periods: we see a radio from the 1920s, Renaissance patterns on the floor, clocks from the Victorian era, a preindustrial staircase, a large contemporary mural, etc.

A versatile space – Throughout the show, the space undergoes a series of transformations based on the narrative. Large scrimms are used to separate the stage from the audience in order to suggest an underwater world. Hordes of pirates emerge from a large book and take the stage – and the audience – by storm. The naturalium is turned into a jungle when a giant vine descends onto the stage around an 8.5-meter-tall flower. A huge mural in the style of Mexican fresco painter Diego Rivera appears on stage to represent the inner world of Zelig’s granddaughter, Joyà.

SUBTLE ALLUSIONS TO MEXICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

When imagining *JOYÀ*, show writer and director Martin Genest wanted to make a series of subtle allusions to the history and culture of Mexico, far from the usual clichés and stereotypes.

Migration of the monarch butterflies – One allusion, which represents a unique connection between Canada and Mexico, involves the migration of the monarch butterfly. Each year, when autumn arrives, millions of these butterflies make the long, 5,000-km journey from southern Canada to central Mexico where they hibernate for the winter. Only monarchs born in late summer or early fall undertake the round-trip migration. By the time the migration begins anew the following winter, several generations will have lived and died during the summer, and it is the grandchildren of the previous year's travelers that will set out on the long journey south.

The asteroid – It is said that the impact of a huge asteroid that fell in the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, 66 million years ago caused the mass extinction of the dinosaurs. It is an echo of this asteroid that wreaks havoc in the naturalium at the top of the show and brings in Joyà, Zelig's granddaughter. The dinosaur puppet that trots on stage also refers to this cataclysmic event.

The transmission of knowledge – In a nod to the fact that Mexico is home to one of the largest universities in the world and has a large anthropology museum, the show is set in a naturalium and a library.

Mexican art – In addition to the reference to Diego Rivera, the vines, giant flower and jungle are an oblique reference to artist Frida Kahlo.

There are many other allusions including **masked wrestlers, mariachis, pirate legends** (famous pirates took refuge on Isla Mujeres – the Island of Women – in the 17th and 18th centuries), **cucaracha marionettes**, horror films (in reference to master of horror **Guillermo del Toro**), and even the underwater sculptures of **Jason deCaires Taylor**.

COSTUMES

Mixing time periods – The time dimension of the show is meant to feel like a familiar past, but it is a past that corresponds to our future. For costume designer James Lavoie, it was important to show an evolution from the past to the future as Zelig passes on his mission to his granddaughter.

Zelig, the aging naturalist, is a mix of Don Quixote, Charles Darwin, Faust, Leonardo Da Vinci and other great men all brought together into a lovable character. He runs the naturalium and has made it his life's mission to collect all the knowledge of the world. His costume refers to a past mixed in with contemporary and even futurist elements.

Lavoie imagined what Zelig would be writing and drawing in his book of knowledge. The prints on his rich, multi-layered costume are inspired by scientific and naturalist drawings of different periods, from pre-Victorian to contemporary. A closer look reveals faded images of plants taken from old botanical volumes.

Clear patterns emerge – The prints on the costumes of the Masters are based on their specific areas of specialty:

- The prints on the Entomologist’s costume are inspired by old drawings of insects.
- The Master of Time features sundial and meridian images.
- The pleating on the side of the Archivist’s dress evokes the edge of a book.
- The Alchemist features invented alchemy symbols based on the Fibonacci spiral, which recalls the longhorn ram head he is wearing.

When looking at the five Masters, one can wonder if these characters are animals in weird costumes or humans whose heads have been taken over by animals wearing beaded amulets straight out of the Mayan codices (bark cloth folding books from the Maya civilization). Perhaps they are Zelig’s masked assistants, or a combination of all of these.

Material wonders – The best combinations of technology (such as laser cutting and printing) and hands-on, artisanal techniques (such as hand painting on textile fabric, sewing and lace) were sought out to support the artistic intention of the designs.

- To create the Master of Water character, the coral effect on the hand-balancing artist’s costume gives the impression that her body has gradually been taken over by sea whips and other types of coral. It is the result of a long and arduous process of hand sewing pieces of fabric to create textures that could well be found in the natural world.
- Sublimation on neoprene was used for the hood that Joyà wears, which recalls a cloak from the Victorian era with a slightly futurist look.
- The fabric used for the costumes of the creatures of the night is dipped in black silicone to create a stunning shine as if the costume had been dipped in darkness.

Some of the rich, textured costumes of *JOYÀ* speak to our organic, essential relationship with the natural world to which we are deeply connected. They contain the idea of oneness between humans and nature.

MUSIC

To create the music of *JOYÀ*, composers Bob & Bill used a cinematic approach to support the adventure-based narrative. The mood varies from festive, dance and Latin-tinged beats to percussion-based Mayan sonorities, soothing underwater sounds and driving rhythms during the pirate sword fighting scenes.

The music of *JOYÀ*, which mixes classic and contemporary sounds, is acoustic, warm and melodic. The trumpet – a staple instrument in Mexican jazz and Mariachi ensembles – is omnipresent, as are the acoustic guitar and percussion instruments. Some of Bob & Bill's catchy melodies have become the musical signature of the show.

After the performance, some of the spectators are bound to hum or whistle these uplifting melodies as they step back out onto the wooden walkway into the Mayan jungle.