

LYON'S SHARE

LYON VIRGIN SAM NEUMAN OF NDYLIGHT REPORTS FROM HIS VERY FIRST FETES DES LUMIERES

Every year, focused around December 8th, the City of Lyon hosts a four night lighting spectacular that transforms all its districts into a fantastic show of luminosity and colour. Attracting over 4 million visitors shrugging off the dark and cold of the mid winter nights the town comes to life to celebrate the Fetes des Lumieres.

The origins of the festival date back to 1643 when Lyon was spared from the Plague and as a tribute to the Virgin Mary who saved them, the Lyonnaise had a procession from the town Cathedral with candles and offerings to her. The Festival really took on popularity in 1852 when a long anticipated inauguration festival for a new statue of the Virgin can-

celled by authorities took place spontaneously when the Lyonnaise people took proceedings into their own hands lighting candles in windows, flares and fires works to celebrate the Virgin Mary. To this day the event is still remembered by lighting candles in windows. Fetes Des Lumieres took on its modern form in 1999 when the festival was extended taking place over four days. Lyon's reputation as the city of light has been growing ever since.

Now organised by the council with backing from many sponsors, the Lyon Fetes Des Lumieres is a professionally managed event implemented on a city-wide scale, where old meets new, as candles and flares flicker next to state of

the art whizzy lighting installations.

The festival is an opportunity for both the famous practitioner and the undiscovered enthusiast to express themselves with light. In 2007 there were no less than 80 different officially recognised lighting events with countless other unofficial interventions in shop windows, on walls and in all the nooks and crannies around Lyon.

The backdrop to this event is special even before the lights are switched on. Historic buildings, magnificent town squares, important cathedrals, bridges crossing the Saone and Rhone all play host to the schemes lending themselves as canvases to the artists to

be transformed.

For the Lyon novice, discovering the festival was made easy by following the 'lighting trails'. These are marked routes around the city defined by fitting street lights, lanterns and building floodlights with red filters. The organisers also offered detailed guides translated into several different languages with maps to help visitors to find the artwork and understand the ideas behind them.

The range and scale of the lighting was truly impressive, from the grand blanket lighting projections changing the character of buildings accompanied by sound and music to medium size creations in streets and alleys where artists challenged the audience to



Light Sphere, developed by Sky Light with Jean-Yves Orcel, consists of a translucent sphere using 360 faces mounted with coloured gels. 21 x Syncrolite SXB-5/2 projects mixed colours on to the walls of the four large facades and also on the ground terrace where the audience is situated