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Playland at the Conservatory:
A Garden Railway Celebrating San Francisco's West End

Take a trip down memory lane as a bygone era of seaside amusement comes to miniature life in this season's Conservatory of Flowers garden railway exhibition

November 18, 2011 through April 15, 2012

SAN FRANCISCO -- Step right up for a ride back in time as the Conservatory of Flowers presents an all new garden railway celebrating the legendary Playland at the Beach and a bygone era of seaside amusement that was located on San Francisco's West End. In this year's dazzling display, model trains and trolleys wend their way past the famed Sutro Baths, zip around a replica of the Victorian-era Cliff House and whiz through a fantastic mini version of San Francisco's beloved amusement park, Playland at the Beach. It's a trip down memory lane for anyone who remembers flying down the 5-story slide in the Fun House or eating Playland's own ice cream invention, the It's It, while strolling the midway.

Playland at the Conservatory, the historic conservatory's 4th Annual Garden Railway, is an entirely new layout that resurrects the heyday of San Francisco's west end, an area that flourished as a destination for fun and thrills after a new railroad built in 1884 made travel out to the ocean affordable. A dozen San Francisco landmarks, now mostly lost to time, are recreated in miniature and set in a landscape of hundreds of dwarf plants that bring the rocky cliffs and sandy shores of the area to life. Sutro Baths, the fantastical 7-pool swimming complex built in 1896 by eccentric mayor Adolph Sutro, nestles under Sutro's other attraction, the Cliff House, which he transformed in that same year into a 7-story Victorian chateau that some called "the Gingerbread Palace."

No doubt the recreated Playland at the Beach will be the star of the garden railway. What started in 1913 as a loose collection of rides and shooting galleries owned separately by various

concessionaires officially became known as Playland at the Beach in 1926. Young and old alike will marvel at the sight of Playland's most famous attractions in miniature, all in swirling motion and bright with twinkling carnival lights. Wee rollercoaster cars climb the steep tracks of the Big Dipper, Playland's biggest thrill ride from the 1920s to the 1950s, while a mini Airplane Ride spins and spins in circles. Other attractions include the treacherous Diving Bell, the Fun House and Playland's famed food arcade where hungry revelers could grab an enchilada at the Hot House or a sweet at the Candy Factory.

As in past years, these replicas are all creatively crafted in miniature from recycled and repurposed materials. San Francisco artist James Sellier, back for his third year as a Garden Railway model maker, created Playland's historic 1906 carousel from a discarded light fixture, a slide carousel and a record player. The individual cages of the Rock-O-Plane are made from old pencil sharpeners.

Also back this year is sound designer Andrew Roth who fills the gallery with echoes of the arcade from Laffing Sal's boisterous voice to snippets of original carousel music to the screams of terrified rollercoaster riders. Roth's incredible track of found and collected sounds is sure to transport nostalgic visitors right back to the midway.

The exhibit also includes real memorabilia and photographs from Playland and beyond in a fascinating display that tells the story of San Francisco's lost oceanfront treasures. Original wool bathing suits from Sutro Baths, the toothpick amusement park made by San Quentin inmate Jack Harrington that was displayed in the museum at the Baths, a Dodger bumper car, an original Playland sign and more provide visitors with an engaging way to experience and learn about San Francisco's past. Period arcade games offer a hands-on history lesson with a chance to get your future from Zoltar, step into a vintage 1960s photo booth or goof around in the fun house mirrors, while a special scavenger hunt spinning wheel is a great, interactive way for young children to explore the exhibit. Portions of the popular documentary "Remembering Playland" will also be showing in the gallery.

Media sponsors for *Playland at the Conservatory* include KFOG 104.5/97.7 World Class Rock and The San Francisco Examiner.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

Green and Gold Gala: A Playland Fantasy
Thursday, November 17, 2011
7 - 11 PM
Tickets: $95-250

Playland's gilded Art Deco era comes alive with live swing jazz, dancing, delectable food, local artisan speakeasies, a grand auto display and Playland-inspired arcade games. It will be an opening night jubilee where gala guests will be the first to see *Playland at the Conservatory* and have the rare chance to experience the magic of the Conservatory at night. The event raises funds for the Conservatory's youth environmental education programs. Tickets can be purchased at www.greenandgoldgala.org.

San Francisco's Playland at the Beach: The Early Years of 1914-1945
Tuesday, February 7, 2012
7-8 PM (doors open at 6 PM for viewing the exhibition and galleries)
$5 general

Join us after closing for an in-depth peek into Playland. Get exclusive access to the exhibit, and then enjoy a fascinating talk by James R. Smith, author of the definitive *San Francisco's Playland at the Beach: The Early Years*. Smith will explore the phenomenon of Playland through World War II. Tickets can be purchased at www.conservatoryofflowers.org/events/specialevents.

California historian James R. Smith is the author of the books *San Francisco's Playland at the Beach: The Early Years*, covering 1914-1945, *San Francisco's Lost Landmarks* and co-author of *The California Snatch Racket: Kidnappings in the Prohibition and Depression Eras*, as well as of a number of historical articles written for San Francisco City Guides' magazine, *Guidelines*. A well-respected authority on San Francisco history, he has spent many years researching and chronicling the stories of San Francisco and California. He is currently writing *San Francisco's*

Playland at the Beach: The Golden Years, covering 1940-1972 and *Sutro's Baths: San Francisco's Glass Palace*.

Conductor of the Day

All aboard!!! The Conservatory offers children the opportunity to be Conductor of the Day during the run of *Playland at the Conservatory*. Conductors receive a whistle and engineer's hat, get the chance to start the trains that day and can try their hand at the arcade games in the exhibition. A $50 donation to the Conservatory is required. For more information, contact the Development Associate at eedelson@sfcof.org or 415-577-2584.

***Playland at the Conservatory* is open Tuesdays – Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm and is included with admission to the Conservatory. Admission for San Francisco residents (with proof of residency) is $5 general; $3 youth 12-17, seniors and students with ID; $1.50 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. Admission for non-residents is $7 general, $5 youth 12-17, seniors and students with ID; $2 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. The public should call (415) 831-2090 or visit www.conservatoryofflowers.org for more information.**

Background

The Conservatory of Flowers is a spectacular living museum of rare and beautiful tropical plants under glass. From Borneo to Bolivia, the 1,750 species of plants at the Conservatory represent unusual flora from more than 50 countries around the world. Immersive displays in five galleries include the lowland tropics, highland tropics, aquatic plants, potted plants and special exhibits. Opened in 1879, the wood and glass greenhouse is the oldest existing conservatory in North America and has attracted millions of visitors to Golden Gate Park since it first opened its doors. It is designated as a city, state and national historic landmark and was one of the 100 most endangered sites of the World Monuments Fund.

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