A fitting reward for stolen item: Three share $25,000:
Slippers will be centrepiece of fall exhibition

Toronto’s most famous footwear will prolong their 15 minutes of fame as the centrepiece of a Bata Shoe Museum exhibition this fall.

Museum founder Sonja Bata yesterday gave a $25,000 reward to three people who helped track down the 19th-century Indian slippers, toe ring and anklet stolen from the museum late last year. The items were turned in to police a month later.

Mrs. Bata also announced the Chronicle of Riches: Treasures of the Bata Shoe Museum exhibition, which starts on Sept. 27. The exhibition will include a pair of black silk socks worn by Napoleon just before he died.

“Many of you have asked us when are the shoes going to be back on view again,” Mrs. Bata said, “so we’re going to have a special exhibition.”

The slippers and jewellery, worn by Nizam Sikandar Jah of Hyderabad, were on display in a glass case for the news conference, but will not stay there.

Museum director Emanuele Lepri said staff are “working feverishly” to improve the museum’s security measures in anticipation of the coming exhibition and future attempts at theft.

The first sign of the stolen slippers’ whereabouts appeared when Renata Hamilton, daughter and employee of Tom Hamilton, who owns a photo lab near the museum, came across photos of the slippers at work one day. Ms. Hamilton showed them to her father, who said his “eyes popped out of his head” because he realized they were the stolen slippers from the Bata Shoe Museum.

With the help of employee Eduardo Ribeiro, they decided to plan a sting operation.

When the man who dropped the pictures off came to pick up his prints, Mr. Ribeiro pretended to be replacing the batteries in a camera while Mr. Hamilton dealt with him, but actually took a photo of the man. Ms. Hamilton also took a photo with her cellphone in case Mr. Ribeiro’s camera didn’t work out.
Police used the photos and arrested a man, who is out on bail on charges of possession of stolen property.

The three will split the $25,000 reward and use the money to pay off some bills and take a trip or two.

“I wasn’t expecting anything,” Mr. Ribeiro said, who will use the money to pay off his student debt and send his parents to Portugal to see his grandmother, who has Alzheimer’s disease, for the first time in 20 years. “So the fact that someone thought I should get something makes me feel really good,” he said.

Two women in another photo were identified and aided in finding the man caught on film in the photo lab. They are not being charged.

“We obviously have some very concerned citizens who are very keen to help,” Mrs. Bata said. “They are trying to make Toronto a better and a safer town.”

Detective Les Dunkley said police are investigating several suspects who he thinks are likely still in Toronto. The museum had no surveillance cameras at the time and no one witnessed the robbery. Det. Dunkley said that has made building a case very difficult, but he believes they are getting very close to pressing more charges.
One day after reporting to police that a pair of historic slippers appraised at $160,000 had been stolen from Toronto’s Bata Shoe Museum, employees had to make another call.

This time they realized that two more items with a combined value of $56,000 had been swiped from a jewelry display case.

The pieces, a toe ring priced at $11,000 and a $45,000 anklet, are 18th Century relics made of gold and set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

Museum officials first contacted police Sunday after the extravagant footwear worn by a prince of India in the 1790s had been lifted some time that day.

The stolen goods are a costly setback for the decade-old Bloor Street fixture.

Museum curator Elizabeth Semmelhack said that while the financial loss is steep, the historical value is far greater.

“It’s not a financial issue for us,” Semmelhack said. “These things are irreplaceable to us. We have lost something that is priceless.”

She said the museum didn’t immediately notice the pricey accessories had vanished because they had been preoccupied with the shoes.

How someone managed to walk out of the building with $216,000 worth of artifacts is what museum workers and investigators are trying to determine.

“We’ve certainly not had a Fort Knox attitude,” Semmelhack said. “And that’s been very successful for over 10 years. Our goal was to not make the public feel unwelcome.”

The vision of a leisurely experience for museum goers without the heavy presence of guards and excessive surveillance will likely change.

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Sole arrest in shoe theft

By JOE WARMINGTON

This story is a shoe-in to become a movie of the week.

You can’t slip anything by Toronto’s talented gumshoes. It sure didn’t take them long to pump enough information out of two well-heeled beauties to make a footprint in solving this crime of stolen footwear from the famous Bata Shoe Museum on Bloor St.

The attractive, well-dressed females, shown on the police website Thursday, shuffled their way into 52 Division yesterday — their tongues wagging with information. Soon after, the Case of the Missing Slippers was solved and the slippers returned to their rightful owner.

“It’s a miracle,” said an elated Sonja Bata last night in the police division’s lobby. “I don’t believe we could have got another pair like them. This is a good reason to come to the police station.”

“I am so happy for her,” said her husband, Thomas. “She was pretty worried.”

Stolen in January, the “historic” artifacts valued at $160,000, which included an anklet and toe-ring with gold and rubies embedded inside, were slippers from the year 1813, once owned by the Nizam Sikandar Jah of Hyderabad — a monarch in India.

The crime was right out of The Pink Panther and Inspector Clouseau. “We never dreamed anybody would ever steal shoes,” said Sonja Bata. “We are talking about our security right now.”

Step by step, police tightened the laces on the suspects. “There was some intensive police work,” said lead Det. Les Dunkley, who with partner Det. Peter Karpow, used leads of two women out for a night at the Drake Hotel to the trail of a suspect who is now in custody.

They knew the women had information. They just had to find them. A little spit, a little polish and a little fancy footwear, the coppers hit the pavement and just like that you have the first arrest in the Great Bata Shoe Museum Caper of 2006.

Got to love those Toronto flatfoots, who used the media and public to get their man.

Just how did the women react when they saw their mugs in the news? “Surprised would be a good word,” Karpow laughed.
The charged man and the ladies were “known to each other,” he said. Police were not revealing
the names of the women last night — or their phones numbers.

“You want them like everybody else,” teased one copper.

This story will be kicking around for years. The loose ends were tied up when someone got on
the horn and clandestinely told a Bata Shoe Museum employee the shoes were in a nearby
church — unharmed and ready to be picked up mysteriously in a white bag. Quickly a staffer
went to retrieve it.

“Let’s just say whoever had them returned them under duress,” chuckled Dunkley.

The investigation is still afoot and the cops could still put the boots to a couple of other suspects
and more charges.

“These shoes did change hands (or should that be feet?) several times since they were stolen,”
he said.

Any of those who walked a mile in them could face future charges — perhaps even the two
women in the picture.

“Anything is possible,” said Dunkley.

“Although they are now further down our radar screen,” Karpow said.

Meanwhile, sole suspect Filip Djukic, 35, who was in 101 bail court at Old City Hall yesterday, is
a “failed refugee claimant” from Montenegro in the former Yugoslavia who was wearing a white
Puma shoe T-shirt. He looked stunned as he stood in the shoebox of the prisoner’s section in
the tiny courtroom charged with possession of stolen property over $5,000.

But there was some levity in court. “Oh, the Bata shoe case,” said Justice Theresa Jewitt.

“He is charged in the theft of some shoes, your worship,” said Crown counsel Jeffrey
Zimmerman. “I believe they were size eight.”

There were some chuckles. Even the normally no-nonsense Jewitt cracked a smile. If the shoe
doesn’t fit you must acquit, or any other legal tap-dancing defence, will have to wait — Jewitt
held the bail hearing over until Monday.

Should be an interesting weekend in jail for the suspect since not many people have ever been
detained for allegedly possessing stolen slippers.

Move over, Thelma and Louise, and the Thunder Bay moms from the Mexico murder case.
Somebody get Hollywood director Joel Schumaker’s number. The great Toronto Shoe Heist
could be coming soon to a theatre near you.

You can call Joe Warmington at (416) 947-2392 or e-mail at joe.warmington@sunmedia.ca
Have a letter for the editor? E-mail it to torsun.editor@sunmedia.ca
Case of the stolen shoes

‘These shoes were signature pieces’; Museum hopes thieves will reconsider $160,000 artifacts worthless if worn.

They are historic artifacts that tell a story about Indian royalty in the early 1800s.

They are beautifully crafted with gold thread, heavy embroidery, diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

They are shoes, worn by a prince at lavish royal affairs.

On Sunday, they were stolen from the Bata Shoe Museum on Bloor St. W.

Despite their beauty, the $160,000 shoes are worth nothing if worn or picked apart.

“Their entire worth is in their history,” said museum curator Elizabeth Semmelhack. “We really don’t know who would steal these shoes. I don’t believe this was a crime of opportunity, I believe it was premeditated. My fear is that the people who stole them, stole them because they thought the gold and jewels themselves have value. Which they don’t.”

The museum attracts about 80,000 visitors annually. The shoes, on display in a glass case set in wood, were stolen between noon and 4:45 p.m. Sunday while the museum was open. The case was not broken, but opened with special tools. Two other pieces from the 18th century were also stolen a gold toe ring, valued at $11,000, and a gold anklet valued at $45,000.

Police have dusted the cases for fingerprints and are currently analyzing surveillance tapes. The museum has beefed up security since the heist.

Semmelhack speaks passionately about the stolen shoes, worn by the Nizam Sikandar Jah of Hyderabad during his rule from 1803 to 1829.

“They were part of royal wear. They were beautifully created and executed. Not only did these shoes talk about the individual, the Nizam, they talked about the royal shoemaker, exactly how important and wealthy the Nizams were at the time,” Semmelhack said in an interview beside the case where the shoes had been on display since June 2004.
Taking apart the shoes would destroy their value, she said, her voice shaking.

“It is the shoes, in their entirety in perfect condition, that make them worth anything,” said Semmelhack, her eyes filling with tears.

What has stumped the curator is who would want them.

“That’s what we’re scratching our heads about. There are other shoe museums in the world, but we know each other very well,” she said. “These shoes were signature pieces for us. I don’t believe any other museum would purchase them.”

If a private collector hired thieves, Semmelhack said, the collector has “done a real disservice.”

“It is very rare to find a pair of shoes, especially 200-year-old shoes, that we can link to the original wearer ... When the wearer turns out to be of historic importance in his own right, then that adds incredible value to the shoes.”

The museum acquired the shoes from a British dealer in 1999. Since the 1940s, Sonja Bata has scoured the world for shoes. Wanting to share history through footwear, she opened the Toronto museum 10 years ago. Currently it's home to 10,000 shoes.

The shoes are heavily embroidered with gold thread and the toe curls dramatically. The back of the shoe, made of velvet, is flattened “in keeping with Islamic tradition, because of the need to remove shoes five times a day for prayer,” said Semmelhack. Each shoe has a delicate ornament of diamonds, rubies and emeralds set in cloisonne.

“These gems were there for decorative purposes. They were really there to be eye-catching. But the quality of the gem is not jewellery quality. So if someone took them away from the shoes, they wouldn’t have any worth and they would destroy the real value of the shoes, which is their historic significance.”

Semmelhack is hoping the thief will reconsider and make arrangements to have them returned.

Two years ago, Toronto was home to another high-profile public theft when five ivory sculptures worth $1.5 million were stolen from the Art Gallery of Ontario. Owned by billionaire Ken Thomson, the pieces were turned over to a lawyer two weeks later and returned.

Semmelhack's advice to the thieves?

“They were royal shoes, they need to be treated like royalty. They need to be preserved, kept away from direct sunlight, not worn,” she emphasized. “What's important here is that the Nizam wore them 200 years ago, not somebody today. Anything that would detract from that historic presence, that imprint left in that shoe, would definitely degrade their value. Treat them royally.”


Credit: Toronto Star

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T.O. photo lab photographed Bata slipper thief

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CTV.ca News Staff

The owner of a downtown Toronto photo lab is hoping the Bata Shoe Museum considers him for a $25,000 reward after he and his staff craftily nabbed a picture of a thief who walked into his store last month.

On Feb. 7, a customer wearing sunglasses and a black toque walked into Korner Colour on the busy intersection of Bay and Bloor.

He worked on photos which he downloaded onto the shop’s digital-editing machine, and after choosing which images he wanted, walked up to the counter and asked for five eight-by-10-inch prints.

Store owner Tom Hamilton told CTV Toronto on Wednesday that he asked the man to come back in an hour. He said he didn’t suspect anything strange until he started packing the photos for the customer.

“The first photo I saw was the slippers, the toe ring and the bracelet, and immediately I knew exactly what it was,” he said in an interview with CTV Toronto’s Dana Levenson.

Hamilton said he was shocked to see images of the 19th-century golden rolled-toe slippers, a golden ruby anklet, and a toe ring -- once owned by an Indian monarch and with a combined worth of $205,000 -- that were stolen from the Bata Shoe Museum in a brazen daylight heist in January.

Hamilton said he knew he had to act fast, so he hatched a plan with his staff to take a photo of the man when he returned to pick up the pictures.

When the man returned, Hamilton distracted him at the front desk while his employee Ed Ribeiro snapped a picture using a digital camera.

“I was trying to find the best angle I could get him at,” Ribeiro told CTV Toronto, “but I couldn’t set up the aperture so I could get a clear shot of him.” The dark photo shows a side profile of a man at the counter wearing large dark glasses, a hat, and a dark coat.

When the man left, Hamilton’s daughter Renata phoned police and copies of the photos showing the stolen goods were given to the officers. The photos, along with one of two women who police considered “persons of interest” at the time, were distributed to the media -- and ended up helping to solve the case of the missing golden footwear. The women are no longer considered by police to be connected to the case.
Representatives from the Bata Shoe Museum said they’re very pleased the valuable goods were found, and indicated they will consider Hamilton for the $25,000 reward.

Last Friday, 35-year-old Filip Djukic surrendered to police and 12 hours later the museum received an anonymous call telling them the stolen material was in a bag across the street in front of a church.

Djukic, a native of Montenegro, was charged with one count of possession of property obtained by crime over $5,000. He was granted bail but remains in custody on an immigration matter.
Bata’s Stolen Riches

The Bata Shoe Museum recently lost a gem in their collection, a pair of jeweled slippers once owned by Nizam Sikandar Jah of Hyderabad, a monarch in India. Late on an afternoon in January the thieves walked out of the Bata with the shoes in hand, along with an anklet and toe ring. The total value of the theft was $316,000.

However, luckily for the Museum, the thieves were not the brightest lights on the Christmas tree. After stealing the shoes they also took pictures of them and on the same roll took pictures of a dinner party they attended at the Drake Hotel. Women in the pictures appeared to be trying on the stolen slippers in a Cinderella fashion. Stupidly, the thieves then took their film to a developer, Tom Hamilton, just down the street from the Bata Shoe Museum who recognized the famous stolen slippers and contacted the police.

The police then decided to post a picture of two lovely ladies found on the film on their website as they believed they had information about the theft. The women soon went to the police station and offered information about the men at the dinner party. The Toronto Police’s brilliant detective work led them closer to the stolen slippers.

Around the same time a European gentleman with a thick Slavic accent placed a call to the museum claiming the girls were innocent and the shoes were in a plastic bag at a church across the street. Two male staff members then set out to play gumshoe and discovered the bag with the slippers and other stolen jewelry intact.

The theft of these priceless slippers was a loss for the museum’s collection, however, luckily, with the help of the community and Toronto Police the golden slippers have found their perfect fit again as one of the museum’s treasures.