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Sting arrives at the Palais Royale on Monday to play a private show for the birthday of Pierre Lassonde's wife. Lassonde is a mining bigwig and philanthropist who amassed his fortune in gold.

TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Amy Dempsey

Staff Reporter

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Forget flowers, chocolates and candlelit dinners. Pierre Lassonde has out-romanced just about every poor clod in the city and raised the bar for gift giving to outrageous heights.

The devoted husband brought in a special musical guest for his wife's 45th birthday party in Toronto Monday night.

Sting.



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“He happens to be her personal hero,” the mining bigwig and respected philanthropist said of his wife, Janelle Muntz Lassonde.

He would not discuss the party further, calling it “a very private family affair.”

The Lassondes, both dressed sharply for the occasion, arrived shortly before 7 p.m. in a chauffeured SUV.

They sat in the Palais Royale’s front lounge as guests began to trickle in late Monday evening.

A crew of uniformed valet drivers stood at the entrance, collecting cars — many of them luxury vehicles — from guests who were ushered to the red-carpeted entrance, where their names were checked off on a list of 190 people.

Inside, guests mingled and feasted on goat cheese and apple truffles, tuna tartar, crab cake lollipops and cedar-smoked duck breast.

One of the Royale waitstaff said Sting was also around for a “meet and greet” with guests prior to his performance.

The evening’s fashion ranged from smart casual to formal — some women arrived in blue jeans, while others wore high heels and chic dresses.

The details of such celebrity appearances are typically kept hush-hush, but booking agencies estimate pop stars like Cher, Mariah and Sting will show up for a price tag ranging from \$500,000 to \$1 million.

“If you’re talking about Sting, I wouldn’t be surprised if was \$1 million,” said Joshua Gair, CEO of Impact Entertainment Services.

Celebrities are increasingly supplementing their incomes with huge private party paycheques, industry experts say.

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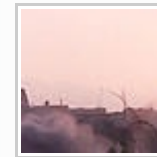
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Drake reportedly made \$250,000 performing at a New York bar mitzvah after organizers turned down Kanye West's \$1 million demand.

Nelly Furtado made \$1 million performing for the family of Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2007, a fee she later donated to Free the Children after several pop stars were outed and shamed for having done the same.

Christina Aguilera, Elton John and Kylie Minogue have all reportedly netted million-dollar paycheques for Halloween parties, weddings and other functions.

Sting's scheduled tour stops at Massey Hall on Tuesday and Wednesday so Lassonde may have gotten a discount on his show.

Lassonde, 64, is a legend in the mining industry who amassed his fortune investing in gold and minerals and as co-founder of the Franco-Nevada Mining Corp. and, later, president of Newmont Mining Corp.

In 2003, Lassonde received an Order of Canada and was dubbed one of the country's foremost experts in mining and precious metals whose "social commitment is as obvious as his business success."

At the University of Toronto, he is behind the Lassonde Mineral Engineering Program and the Lassonde Institute for Mining. Two years ago, Lassonde wrote a \$5 million cheque to help fund the school's Innovation Centre for the Canadian Mining Industry.

He has also funded academic buildings at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, established the Lassonde New Venture Development Center at the University of Utah and serves as Chairman of the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec.

Janelle Muntz Lassonde is a former investment banker in the mining industry who is now a freelance writer.

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