

For Immediate Release
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The New York Botanical Garden Lifts the Curtain on Auricula Theater April 13 Through May 13, 2007

The New York Botanical Garden will present a new auricula theater amidst the herbs and flowers of the Nancy Bryan Luce Herb Garden from April 13 through May 13. This charming traditional display of magnificent auricula primroses will be designed by the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury (Lady Salisbury), the renowned horticulturist who restored her legendary garden at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, England in the spirit of its original 17th-century design.

An auricula theater is an arrangement of tiered staging used to showcase these rare and choice primroses when they are in flower. Auricula primroses, velvety flowers in numerous stunning—even startling—color combinations and patterns, derive from two species native to the mountains of Europe. The combination of *Primula auricula*, a delicate alpine species with yellow flowers, and *Primula hirsute*, with red and blue flowers, has produced a kaleidoscope of amazing and highly collectible cultivars.

The tradition of building auricula theaters began in France and Belgium, perhaps as early as the 17th century. The earliest versions, built to protect the exquisite flowers from rain and wind, ranged from shallow, open-fronted boxes, with simple shelves, to more elaborate forms ornamented with ormolu, an alloy resembling gold in appearance.

The practice of building auricula theaters was raised to an art form in 19th-century England, where many estates with fine gardens included an auricula theater, the most elaborate of which evoked grand stages, with faux-painted curtains and proscenium arches adding drama to the composition. At the same time, the cultivation and display of auricula primroses became popular among coal miners in England and Wales, who took delight in the beautiful flowers and the elaborate stages.

Dozens of auricula primroses, grown from seed and divisions by the horticulturists in the Botanical Garden's Nolen Greenhouses for Living Collections, will be showcased in this beautiful and engaging theater designed by the Lady Salisbury. Interpretative panels will introduce Garden visitors to the history of auricula primrose cultivation and display.

While the new auricula theater adorns the Herb Garden, visitors can also enjoy *Primrose Palette*, an exhibition at the Bourke-Sullivan Display House in the Nolen Greenhouses for Living Collections, which features some dozen primula species, including more auriculas, along with classic Victorian glasshouse plants such as fuchsias, roses, gardenias, and ferns. Concurrently in the Arthur and Janet Ross Gallery, *A Company of Pleasures: Garden Renaissance at Hatfield House*, fascinating photographs, diagrams, and audio celebrate Lady Salisbury's accomplishments in her historic garden at one of England's grandest estates.

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. The Botanical Garden is open Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. April through October. PRICING: \$18, Seniors/Students \$16, Children \$5. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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