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Fashion King Heading North; Oscar de la Renta to stage fundraising runway show for Sick Kids Hospital in April

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In a shop lit up like a firefly on New York's Madison Avenue, Oscar de la Renta sat magnanimously, talking to me about time's strange dimensions.

"Time is not the same thing when you have a passion," he burred, his voice full of Latin fine-ness. This to a question I'd asked the 77-year-old fashion icon about how much he works and why.

Giving me a what-would-I-do-if-I-didn't-work? raise of a brow, the picture of male refinement explained he comes in every day to the office, shortly after 9 a.m., and usually stays after 7. No early-bird specials here! And all through this uncommon display of passion? Toronto's social queen Suzanne Rogers cooed right along with me. She knew, and I knew, we were in the presence of couturier magic.

"I'll take you to a Blue Jays game," she'd joked just minutes before to Mr. de la Renta, attempting to go charm-to-charm with her host.

We'll hold her to it! This reception, held some nights ago, was an excuse, after all, to announce Oscar's Big Trip to Canada. Coming soon, soon, soon! April, to be exact. "It's his first major Canadian runway show in more than 10 years," is how Suzanne, the mastermind behind the event, summed it up. Billed as a fundraiser -- with all the benefits going to HealthyKids International, an initiative of the Sick Kids Hospital -- this evening's kick-off featured border-crossing fashionistas such as Lisa Tant, Caryn Lerner and Jeanne Beker.

As images of runway frocks meshed nicely with thoughts of future mitts and bats, the man who's dressed everyone from Nancy to Hillary to New York's own kinda-First Lady, Sarah Jessica Parker, told me he's sincerely excited about coming to Toronto. "There is so much going on there," he said. "It's time I saw it for myself."

THIS! THAT!

- Man-about-the-screen Don McKellar, when asked when he's "loneliest" by torontolife.com, gave up this confession: "When I go to L.A., I'm almost lonely within an hour of arriving. The fact that everyone is in the film industry makes me feel lonely."

- It's 25 years for Blue Rodeo -- and only now is the band's frontman, Jim Cuddy, getting around to his first fashion shoot. Marking his sartorial debut for Harry Rosen, the singer-songwriter admits that he's a burgeoning clotheshorse. "The kind of guy," he tells *Harry mag*, "that had no fashion sense to actually being quite interested in it."

ALSO, I SEE, I HEAR:

- That here to do a "behind-the-scenes" later this week is that stagey dynamo Robert Lepage, in Toronto talking up his new opera creation, *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*. Together with opera chief Alexander Neef he'll be sneak-peeking this one on Front Street to press-types.

- That Jane Goodall had the crowd rapt during a stop the other day at the Indigo in the Manulife -- particularly when she said hello in chimp-lese! Promoting her new book *Hope for Animals and their World*, the silver-haired do-gooder welcomed her fans by imitating the sound of a primate greeting the dawn.

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Illustration:

• Black & White Photo: Keith Bedford, Reuters / Singer/actress Jennifer Lopez hugs fashion designer Oscar De La Renta after a showing of his Spring 2009 collection in New York this month.