



# I-MOUVANCE

DANCE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

A THEMATIC ISSUE PREPARED AND WRITTEN  
BY FABIENNE CABADO

REGROUPEMENT  
QUÉBÉCOIS DE  
LA DANSE



# PREFACE

A friend once told me he discovered a new world on becoming a father. A world with its own rhythms, realities, demands, games, dramas and emotions . . . A world that might be uninteresting to some, but that is just as important as our adult world. I have chosen this image to introduce this thematic issue on dance for young audiences because, after spending some 150 hours reading, talking, thinking and writing about the topic, I keep coming back to one fundamental question: the value our society attaches to children and to art. On a more visceral than intellectual level, I feel we are sadly cut off from that which is essential: our relationship with ourselves and others, with our environment, and with that invisible and indescribable part of a work that can make us bigger and better, allowing us to access another dimension of our humanity.

Our initial objective was to preserve and build on the ideas that came out of discussions I led at the first Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, held in Montreal in September 2014. So much was shared during the two-day event and so much remained to be explored, that we decided to expand our research and focus. “We” includes Lorraine Hébert, Executive Director of the Regroupement québécois de la danse, who wanted to emphasize the importance of this topic by publishing *I-Mouvance* as a follow-up to the symposium. It also includes Ginette Ferland, a tireless advocate of dance for young audiences who helmed the company Bouge de là up until June 2015, and who continues to be an invaluable source of information. Finally, there is Hélène Duval, a passionate and devoted teacher, who gave me several fascinating articles to read.

This thematic issue organizes copious notes taken at the symposium as well as knowledge gleaned from some 20 articles and reports, interviews with 26 individuals (references are included in the attached appendix) and countless informal conversations. I was given the task of compiling and presenting—through the lens of my subjective objectivity—this information culled from the vast and complex field of dance for young audiences. I hope I have succeeded in giving voice to all who generously shared their time and expertise with me. I also hope this publication sparks readers’ interest in dance for young audiences and encourages decision-makers to promote its development at home and abroad.

**Fabienne Cabado**  
Communicator and cultural mediator



Photo by Dominique Chartrand

# FOREWORD

It is no small challenge for youth dance companies to carve out a niche in the performing arts economy and, more importantly, to develop a loyal following among young audiences. A growing number of emerging choreographers are drawn to the world of children—an inexhaustible source of inspiration and questions about how we relate to the world. Yet, given the current state of affairs, how long will these choreographers persist on this difficult journey, with so little in the way of social, artistic and even symbolic recognition?

In addition to saluting the proud artists and pioneers committed to dance for young audiences, this thematic issue of *I-Mouvance* offers a wealth of ideas for reflection, exploration and experimentation. It also paves the way for contemporary dance to finally shake off its reputation as an elitist art form. This little understood discipline truly has the power to change how we see the world, whatever our age, culture or language.

Fabienne Cabado, the author of this issue of *I-Mouvance*, focuses on how children relate to dance performances. Exploring this topic with both an affectionate and critical eye, she has interviewed close to 30 actors in the field—choreographers, dancers, teachers, workshop facilitators, researchers and psychologists. The point of departure for this ambitious project was the first Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, held in the fall of 2014. This symposium, which Fabienne helped to prepare and facilitate, was initiated by dance companies, in close collaboration with UQAM's dance department. It was attended by more than 80 individuals from the dance and educational milieus.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In **Chapter 1, Taking children to dance shows**, Fabienne states her premises: dance shows contribute, in a unique way, to children’s emotional, sensorial and cognitive development. Children are active, demanding spectators, who are quite capable of finding meaning and value in what they see on stage. They can appreciate even abstract dance performances, provided they have the freedom and means to engage with the work.

In **Chapter 2, creating for young audiences**, the author explores a wide variety of answers to the question “How can choreographers engage young audiences while staying true to their artistic vision?” The task is challenging at several levels: technical, aesthetic and ethical. Choreographers must also be careful to avoid falling into the trap of didacticism or pure entertainment, out of fear of boring the children or not meeting the requirements of schools in terms of rules, learning objectives, stereotypes and taboos (inevitable with an art form focused on the body).

Recognizing the wide variety of choreographic approaches in dance for young audiences—and the fact that some choreographers refuse to be limited to this category—UQAM instructor Geneviève Dussault conducted a preliminary analysis of movement in four youth-oriented dance shows by four choreographers. Her analysis reveals the place children hold in the creative process, their role as wise spectators of the evolving work. Extending this idea, we can see children as guides who allow choreographers to revisit their childhood and make fleeting contact with that which is lost. Pierre Péju, in *Enfance obscure* (Gallimard, 2011), develops a concept he refers to as the “childlike”—the impressions in our first years of life that shape our understanding of the world and forge our unique identity and style.

Shouldn't works created for children be sufficient in and of themselves? Apparently not, judging by the many teaching and cultural mediation activities on offer. In **Chapter 3, Before and after the show**, Fabienne Cabado (herself a cultural mediator in dance) weighs the pros and cons. Cultural mediation activities enhance children's appreciation of the show and help them take ownership of the content. On a more mundane level, they add value for teachers and supplement the low fees paid to dance companies in this sector. Some choreographers and presenters see these activities as a necessary chore, while for others, they are essential to establish a meaningful relationship with audiences. In many cases, they are also an integral part of the creative process. There are strong arguments in favour of carrying out cultural mediation activities after the show. They allow children to talk about what they have seen, heard, felt, imagined and understood. This process of reinvestment, preferably guided by teachers, significantly contributes to the development of the child's identity.

In **Chapter 4, Dance for young audiences in Quebec**, Fabienne Cabado traces some of the milestones in the development of dance for young audiences in Quebec, as we understand it today and wish it to be recognized: an artistic practice with its own requirements in terms of research, creation, presentation and dissemination.

Fabienne then examines a critical component of the dance cycle: presentation. Presenting networks for youth-oriented dance are well established in Quebec, particularly in Montreal. In the rest of Canada, however, these networks are dominated by theatre, with an abundant variety of quality works. Over the past few decades, youth theatre companies have successfully raised awareness and built a loyal following among students and teachers. Youth dance companies intend to do the same. If companies are unable to book shows, they have a hard time obtaining grants for creation and production—not to mention the many presenters they need to convince in order to cover their touring and production costs. These costs are the same as those charged to companies targeting adult audiences.

However, companies offering performances for young audiences are paid half as much. If funding agencies could at least take into account the economic and organizational realities of youth dance companies, this sector would be much better off, and a greater variety and number of works would be produced. Breaking into the international market is a necessary and sometimes challenging step for dance companies in general. It is especially difficult for companies specialized in dance for young audiences—an evolving art form with insufficient management resources, considering the number of activities these companies have to carry out in order to survive.

In this chapter, presenters describe their expectations vis-à-vis dance companies, as well as the strategies they use to develop audiences and promote performances for youth. While their commitment is cause for optimism, there are clearly many challenges involved in raising the profile of dance for young audiences. These presenters are enthusiastic, but they also lack resources.

To conclude, Fabienne Cabado restates her belief in the exceptional experiences dance performances may offer to children. Her conviction is contagious. In the **5th and final chapter, Dreams and future possibilities**, she invites us to dream big and work together with all stakeholders, starting with all members of the dance community, regardless of style and practice. Funding agencies and governments are also an essential part of the equation. For all who are truly interested in the future of our children and who believe in the emancipatory power of art, dance for young audiences is a cause to be championed.

Lorraine Hébert  
Executive Director, Regroupement québécois de la danse



Photo by Andrea de Keizjer

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## CHAPTER 1

# TAKING CHILDREN TO DANCE SHOWS

There is little doubt that dance has a positive impact on children's psychomotor and social development. However, some may not see the value in taking children to dance shows. This is to underestimate the power of art and children's tremendous capacity to appreciate and benefit from artistic performances. It also reflects a desire to keep learning within the confines of our educational system.



*The Nutcracker,*  
Les Grands Ballets  
Canadiens de Montréal  
Photo by John Hall

Art is a gateway to understanding. It is a way of representing, thinking about, questioning, transforming and discovering the world. This is especially true for children whose minds have not yet been moulded and whose creativity is at its peak. For young children (and for some artists as well), the sky is the limit! Children's capacity for wonderment and openness to the unknown allows them to take in a work of art without expectations or preconceived ideas. While adults might become



*La Tribu Hurluberlu,  
Bouge de là  
With Nathalie Blanchet,  
Pierre-André Côté,  
Stéphane Deligny,  
Catherine Viau  
and Siônéd Watkins  
Photo by Rolline Laporte*

frustrated in trying to understand the meaning of an abstract choreography, children are likely to respond freely with their senses and imagination. Creating meaning according to their own logic, they take full advantage of this fertile ground to discover the world in a unique way, through both their body and mind. Candid and spontaneous, children are also the most honest critics: if the performance doesn't interest them, they will immediately disengage. They have no filters, no pretense.

## THE BODY AS A PATHWAY

A sensory art par excellence, dance is primarily appreciated through the body—through sight, hearing, touch (if possible), through our kinesthetic sense and the multitude of chemical reactions triggered by the movements on stage or poetry of the moment. UQAM psychology professor Florence Vinit states that, “From the perspective of humanistic psychology, when you watch a performance you are also participating in it. Children participate with their own bodies as they watch the dancers perform. Their gaze completes the work.”



*Les chaises,*  
PPS Danse  
With Heather Ma  
and Sylvain Lafortune  
Photo by Rolline Laporte

Sounds that remind children of the pleasure of babbling at the preverbal stage are a source of great pleasure and learning. As they encounter different rhythms, types of music, languages, colours and objects in a performance, children invent new worlds, give form to new realities. They create themselves. In the bodies of the dancers moving before them, they discover their own mobile, energetic and exploratory bodies.



Symposium on Dance for  
Young Audiences,  
Montreal,  
September 2014

According to Dr. Vinit, “The child closely identifies with the performer on stage as if he himself were dancing. In opening up to other bodies, he shows his desire to discover the world. The body is a whole, in connection with its environment, and movement is an act of communication. A relationship is established.”



Dance is therefore not superfluous in our education curriculum; it is an essential component that offers a unique way of being in and understanding the world. According to Dr. Vinit, meaning is also created through sensory, spatial and motor skills, which enhance the child's cognitive capacity: "Neuroscience today is providing scientific proof for the postulates of philosophy and phenomenology: it is through our bodies that we give meaning to the world. Research on creativity is validating the idea of diverse forms of intelligence and the need to look beyond academic and linguistic intelligence. Children learn in an experiential way. Whether the experience is aesthetic or emotional, it is fundamental in the child's learning and development. For example, the pleasure of establishing a bond with another person, even a performer on stage, helps to develop a sense of security and build self-esteem."



Workshop held in Baotou, China, after the show *À la nuit tombante, Sursaut*  
Photo courtesy of Sursaut

Neuroscientists describe the simultaneous involvement of the body and mind in learning processes as the body-mind connection. They state that exposure to rich sensory content promotes neural development and learning more effectively than reading books. Acquiring experiential knowledge can be as simple as going on an outing to the theatre. Children not only participate in the world and in dance through their body; when the experience of a performance is shared with a parent, it can also be an opportunity for both to hug, laugh, catch their breath and strengthen their intimate bond. Dance connects people to themselves and to others.

## FEEDING THE IMAGINATION, CONFRONTING TABOOS

**A**t the first Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, held in Montreal in 2014, playwright Suzanne Lebeau talked about the constitutive function of art. Stating that we become what we consume, she reminded those present of artists' risk-taking role and their responsibility to show children both the positive and darker sides of reality. Psychologist and art therapist Pierre Plante described the imagination and creativity as motors of development, pointing to the fragility of children's imaginary space and the need to nurture and protect it. To what extent should children be protected when it comes to artistic expression? Are there boundaries that shouldn't be crossed?

For a number of the Quebec choreographers we spoke to, nudity and sexuality are the biggest taboos. Some specified that teenagers are particularly sensitive to issues related to homosexuality. They also talked about violence and vulgarity. But artists, teachers, presenters and psychologists all agreed that it is parents and teachers who create taboos and transmit them to children. A priori no subjects are off limits; it all depends on how they are expressed.



*EMMAC Terre marine,  
Emmanuelle Calvé  
Photo by Frédérick  
Duchesne*

For example, depending on the audience's age, two people jumping on a mattress could evoke a fun game or a sexual act. Similarly, adults might see a performer biting into a tomato as symbolic of Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother, while a young child might think it's fun to eat like that, without worrying about making a mess.

"We should have more confidence in children," states psychoanalyst David Pressault. "They function very well at the psychic level; it's their environment that is problematic. Watching shows allows their unconscious to engage with elements other than those they encounter in their daily life at home or school. What touches them and holds their attention in a show reflects who they are. It's important to let them play freely with the ideas and feelings that emerge. In adolescence, young people form their identity by differentiating themselves from their parents and developing their own way of thinking. Imagination and magic are replaced by ideals."



*Ô lit !, Bouge de là*  
With Julie Tymchuk  
Photo by Rolline Laporte

"Art is a transitional, symbolic and safe space for expression," observes Florence Vinit. "Even if a performance depicts a difficult reality, it makes it easier for audiences to appreciate the mystery of our existence. Through identification, we are able to construct our subjectivity and our understanding of this mystery." In the French periodical *Regards*, clinical psychologist Cécile El Mehdi reinforces this idea: "Danced movements free us from our daily conditioning, giving us a sense of the ineffable. In redefining movement, dance becomes a poetic metaphorization of the body."



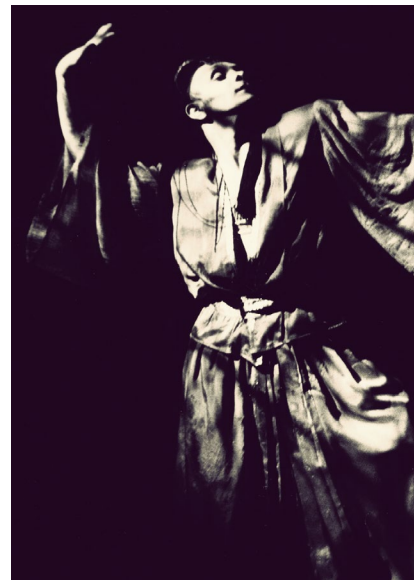
## LETTING ART DO ITS WORK

Learning to accept the indescribable, to see its magic and to find meaning in it. Tasting the joy of a poetic moment, experiencing feelings of ecstasy and grace. Understanding that the spirit is not bound by a Cartesian framework, that the world is also made up of sensory impressions and emotions, that the body does not need words to convey ideas . . . These are some of the benefits young audiences may derive from watching a choreographic work, abstract or not. It is up to artists to find ways to create meaningful and safe spaces where children can lose themselves in order to better understand themselves and to discover a reality that is not always rosy.

On the left  
*La Tribu Hurluberlu,*  
*Bouge de là*  
With Siônéd Watkins  
Photo by Rolline Laporte



On the right  
*Burning Skin,*  
Roger Sinha  
Photo by Stephen Hues



## CHAPTER 2

# CREATING FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

The immediate and honest response of a young audience forces choreographers to find ways to capture and hold their attention. How can they engage this audience while staying true to their artistic vision? There are a variety of answers to this fundamental question.



*Ô lit!, Bouge de là*  
With Emily Honegger  
and Nathan Yaffe  
Photo by Suzane O'Neill

Why do the media so rarely cover creative performances for young audiences and why does the dance community itself attach so little importance to this type of work? Perhaps it is because in categorizing children's development stages and in trying very hard to respond to their needs in the best way possible, we no longer consider them individuals in their own right. Their dependence on adults does not, however, make them inferior—quite the contrary. As playwright Suzanne Lebeau noted at the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, citing Henri Michaud,



**ZÓ, [ZØGMA]**

With Olivier Arseneault,  
Noémie Azoulay,  
Frédérique-Annie Robitaille,  
Antoine Turmine,  
Ian Yaworski and storyteller  
Isabelle Crépeau  
Photo by Philippe Dubois

“It is what children lack that makes them brilliant.” Although adults might not fully understand, children have an immense creativity and ability to learn. The best thing choreographers can offer them is a world they have created based on their own questions, conveyed in their unique language. It is regrettable when choreographers take on the role of teacher, preacher or entertainer, and curb young imaginations with unnecessary precautions and the certainties of adults. Schools and society are already sufficiently rigid and limited.

## A YOUNG AUDIENCE OR ANY AUDIENCE?

*CLASH*,  
Le fils d'Adrien danse  
With Pierre-Alexandre  
Lamoureux,  
Arielle Warnke St-Pierre,  
Stéphane Déléigny,  
Karine Ledoyen  
and Harold Rhéaume  
Photo by David Cannon

Several of the choreographers interviewed for this thematic issue said they do not create specifically for children or teenagers, since their works may be read on different levels and address audiences of all ages. Those specialized in street and percussive dance have found that young audiences are drawn to works that were not originally intended for them. Given that, in the 1990s,

demanding choreographies such as *Les Trous du ciel* by Marie Chouinard and *Burning Skin* by Roger Sinha were presented to teenagers, and that today's high school students attend some of the most iconoclastic performances at the Festival TransAmériques, one might ask whether it is justified to create choreographies specifically for this segment of the population. Presenters like it when a work is suitable for both the general public and school groups, and even if very young children have specific areas of interest, this does not necessarily mean that adults will find age-appropriate shows boring. We are all kids at heart and children do not live in a vacuum. It is therefore entirely possible for youth-oriented shows to appeal to audiences of all ages.



## FOCUSING ON INTELLIGENCE

Two potential pitfalls identified by most presenters and choreographers are underestimating children's intelligence and dumbing down content. The desire to win over the audience at all costs can also be dangerous. For example, casting dancers in teenage roles to reach this audience is a double-edged sword. Even though teenagers are more likely to be interested in works that speak to their experience (e.g., identity issues, loneliness, depression and social media), they prefer adults to treat them as equals and appeal to their intelligence, rather than serve up content that is predigested, deliberately

persuasive or preachy. Spectators of all ages do not necessarily have to be like the performers in order to identify with them. Rather, it is the characters' adventures, values and questions that strike a chord. Choreographers who work in an abstract style are surprised to discover that young audiences are not necessarily resistant to this more demanding approach. Whatever the circumstances, the most successful choreographers are likely to be those who question themselves artistically, are exacting and rigorous, and create a work that is coherent.



*Futur Proche,  
Destins Croisés  
With Simon Ampleman  
and Samuel Nadai  
Photo by Valérie Boulet*

## THE CHALLENGE OF ACCESSIBILITY

Paradoxically, a number of choreographers describe the freedom they experience in creating for this supposedly uncompromising audience. Young spectators' spontaneous response is no doubt less painful than negative judgments from peers. Also, the fact that youth-oriented dance is generally presented in a closed circuit, mostly to school groups, means that both hits and flops can fly under the radar of many dance artists and enthusiasts. In France as in Quebec, a number of choreographers see creating for young audiences as an opportunity to recharge and have fun. They are able to be lighter, more playful and sometimes more literal, but they also have to pay closer attention to the rhythm of choreographic sequences and the dramatic arc of the performance.



*Suites curieuses,*  
Cas Public  
With IsaBelle Paquette  
Photo by Julie Artacho  
Illustration by  
Marjolaine Leray



Brief structures, contrasts and surprises are necessary to hold the interest of young audiences who have a different relationship to time than adults, and who are increasingly influenced by the fast pace of modern life and over-stimulation of information technologies. When it is important for a story to unfold gradually, choreographers have to find visual and/or aural means to keep the audience engaged. They almost invariably do a trial run of their show before a target audience and make a number of adjustments, even after the premiere. The challenge is to resist the pressure and temptation to offer pure and simple entertainment by making room for contemplation, discomfort, misunderstanding and even confrontation.



*Remous remis,*  
*La marche du crabe*  
With Simon Fournier  
Photo by Catherine Jobin

The secret to success also lies in the variety of approaches, dance styles and artistic media. Particularly popular are dynamic multimedia and interdisciplinary works, which stimulate the senses and imagination through images, music and voice, in addition to movement. Some choreographers may use theatricality, humour, clown acts and spectacular dance sequences to counterbalance more abstract segments. Others present clear images and references, which they gradually transform to create a more abstract poetic mood. The key to accessibility appears to lie more in the work's dynamics and creative elements than in the topics explored, which may be serious and thought-provoking. The balance between style and content is particularly complex in works created for young audiences.

## THE CHALLENGE OF ABSTRACTION

Our cousins across the Atlantic tend to favour a poetic approach while in North America we focus more on spectacular effects. In both cases, dance for young audiences is generally guided by a narrative. The narrative can be presented in broad brushstrokes, sometimes evoked by more or less discreet set elements or by the repetition of strong gestural and aural symbols. It is difficult to imagine a work without a narrative thread, given that choreographies require the approval of school boards (the main presenting networks) and that many adults are at a loss when there is no story to guide them. Accessibility criteria are in large part defined by the way teachers view dance and what they consider to be appropriate for their students.



*EMMAC Terre marine,*  
Emmanuelle Calvé  
Photo by Frédérick Duchesne



## ADAPTING PERFORMANCE CODES

An outing to the theatre is an opportunity for children to learn the rules of this unique creative gathering. It is not that easy for children to be in a dark space and sit still while watching the show, or to experience strong emotions while keeping certain thoughts to themselves. Some adults are bothered when a child is restless during a performance, although this is often simply a physical response to the work. Very young children don't hesitate to directly address the characters on stage and to answer questions, even if they are not directly posed to the audience. Interaction is particularly beneficial for babies and is another key to success with young audiences. The experience is all the more memorable when the child is personally engaged.



*Tope là, Tope ci, wifi  
takka takka dhim,  
Sinha Danse  
With Lise McMillan,  
Marie-Ève Lafontaine,  
Mark Medrano and  
Elise Legrand  
Photo by Michael  
Slobodian*

## CLOSE READING OF FOUR CHOREOGRAPHIES



*Ô lit !, Bouge de là*  
With Nathan Yaffe  
and Guillaume Chouinard  
Photo by Suzane O'Neill

**A**t the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, university instructor Geneviève Dussault conducted a choreological analysis of four works by Hélène Blackburn, Francine Châteauvert, Hélène Langevin and Pierre-Paul Savoie, respectively. Disregarding the set, composition and structure of the works, she focused on their raw material: the movement. Her approach, more creative than objective, sought to uncover common elements among the four works in order to confirm some of her hypotheses. Using LMA (Laban Movement Analysis) tools, she observed the movement dynamics—body, space, shape and effort.

The presence of a narrator was one of the similarities, although words were sometimes replaced by gestures. The metamorphosis of the body, which sometimes became non-human, was also a common element, with the use of many accessories and movements suggestive of animals. Geneviève Dussault also underlined a maximum use of space and an active dialogue with space, as well as a form of giddy movement that was fluid and energetic, similar to the way children move. She noticed a hyperarticulation of voice and exaggeration of movement to make the story more intelligible. Dancers often used their arms and dynamic phrasing with short sentences, stop-action freezes and accents on the end of movements. Insisting on the exploratory nature of her analysis, she is looking into processes instinctively adopted by choreographers that are likely to appeal to young or new audiences. It remains to be seen whether these observations may be applied to other dance, theatre or music performances created for young audiences.

*Tales for Naughty Children,*  
PPS Danse  
With Dany Desjardins,  
Amélie Rajotte,  
Mathilde Addy-Laird  
and Edward Toledo  
Photo by Rolline Laporte



## A VAST FIELD OF EXPERIMENTATION

In Quebec, as in the rest of Canada and many other countries, dance for young audiences is a rich terrain to be explored. For choreographers, it offers a release from intellectualism and opens up a space of freedom, at the same time demanding an approach that is both rigorous and coherent. As the dancer Jean-François Légaré noted in one of the round table discussions at the symposium, works created for young audiences are presented so many times, the dancers become more relaxed and are able to hone their craft and talent in direct communication with the audience. What if we were to see this type of dance not as an inferior genre, but rather as a fabulous laboratory in which we could explore ways to make contemporary dance more accessible without sacrificing art in any way?

*Boo!*, Sursaut  
With Stéphanie  
Brochard and Simon  
Durocher-Gosselin  
Photo by François  
Lafrance



## STAGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND DANCE\*

### 0 to 2 years: Children discover the world using their senses and motor skills

Children this age are especially sensitive to sounds, colours and textures. Between 12 and 16 months, they move to music as if they were dancing. They can share their movements with an adult who guides and encourages them in this discovery.

### 2 to 7 years: Children develop concepts and language

They project their experience onto what they see and create meaning using their imagination. They must be guided at first in a simple and clear manner, so that they can precisely position themselves in space and create basic, static forms involving only one body part at a time. From age five, children may be encouraged to create movement by imagining, imitating others and embodying non-human creatures and inanimate objects.

### 8 to 11 years: They use language and begin to refer to the outside world

Children this age understand concepts and abstraction, develop their analytical and critical skills, can produce and transform complex forms, and have a strong need to discuss their experiences.

### 12 to 20 years: They are able to resolve problems through reflection, which makes experimentation less essential

Young people this age are more demanding and critical, and need genuine encouragement. Their level of development varies according to their experiences and the knowledge they have acquired.

\*Based on Sue Stinson's (1985) application of Piaget's stages of development to the learning of dance.

## CHAPTER 3

# BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

In France, there is no question that children should be encouraged to discover and appreciate choreographic works. As a result, performances for young audiences have been developed in tandem with pedagogical or cultural mediation activities. In Quebec, cultural mediation is often used to persuade teachers to take their class to the show. In an ideal world, teachers prepare their students for the performance and/or conduct follow-up activities. Let's take a closer look at what this entails.



Post-performance  
discussion with  
the audience,  
*Suites curieuses*,  
Cas Public  
With David Campbell,  
IsaBelle Paquette and  
Alexandre Carlos  
Courtesy of  
Festival Méli'Môme



When choreographers are asked what motivates them to create works for young audiences and what they would like to offer, their responses are extremely varied. In general, choreographers say they want to move and stimulate children, encourage them to dance, put them in touch with their body, and feed their imagination. They also want to share with children their questions and the beauty they see in the world. They want to transform sociocultural realities and, less often, propose solutions for problems encountered by young people. They want to give young audiences pleasure, foster in them a love of art and quality, and encourage them to become self-reflexive. By planting the seeds of choreographic culture in this way, they want to help democratize dance. Many artistic vocations are born in the darkness of a theatre or the excitement of a dance class.



*Playing Hooky,  
PPS Danse  
Photo by Eduardo  
Ruiz Vergara*

## IS CULTURAL MEDIATION NECESSARY?

Beyond sharing a passion, cultural mediation is a way to get young audiences to engage with the work and to supplement the low fees currently paid in the youth sector. For artists who believe their role is essentially to create, cultural mediation is seen as a necessary chore. This is the reason some artists decline invitations to present their work to young audiences. A study conducted in 2010 by professor Nicole Turcotte showed that presenters' main objective is to attract audiences and build loyalty through cultural mediation. Since a taste for dance is cultivated over time, it is a good idea to expose young audiences to this art form. Children's love of dance also grows through their relationship with themselves and others, such as a teacher, a parent or an artist. It is subtly woven into their evolving identity.



*Remous remis,  
La marche du crabe  
With Sandy Bessette  
Photo by Catherine Jobin*

Could youth-oriented works be presented independently, without the support of cultural mediation? This question was asked at the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences, given the strong focus on cultural mediation, which tended to overshadow artistic considerations. The overall consensus was that works could be presented on their own. However, it was agreed that children would not derive the same benefits as with cultural mediation. So, what types of activities should be carried out and with what aims?



## PUTTING THE EXPERIENCE INTO WORDS

Psychologists emphasize children's need to relate their experience in order to integrate it and transform certain elements. They recall the pleasure very young children derive from looking at the same cartoons over and over, or reading the same books. They also encourage adults to let art work its magic and to allow children to explore in their own way without guiding them too much. A dance performance creates a space for identification and imagination that is fun to revisit in class or at home, in the case of a family outing. It is a great springboard for children to talk about themselves, their impressions and sensations, and to develop their ideas about what they have seen and heard.



Dance workshop  
led by H el ene Langevin  
after the show *L'Atelier,  
Bouge de l a*  
Photo by H el ene  
Langevin

In engaging children's minds and bodies, and showing them how to watch dance, we help them to build their identity and develop critical skills. Starting in kindergarten, educators can set aside time to observe and discuss a work. Taking into account children's emotional world and cognitive potentialities, educators can gently guide them and at the same time follow their lead as they explore the work

In other words, the most precious gift one can offer to young audiences is to help them discover themselves through a work without trying to direct their thinking in any way. The goal is to open doors for children to realize their innate potential, to help them become fulfilled human beings and wise citizens. This role is mainly carried out by educators. Post-performance activities are likely to contribute more strongly to this identity-building process than preparatory activities.



Dance workshop led by Hélène Langevin during the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences

An encounter with art is above all an encounter with the self. With older students, teachers can intellectualize the experience and initiate discussions before or after the performance. This helps to overcome the resistance of some teenagers. It is also important to personally involve them in artistic practice and the adventure of creation.

## PROMOTING INTEGRATION

Activities focused on a dance performance—cultural mediation workshops or follow-up activities in class—can help to build children’s sense of self and identity. Whether or not these activities are related to teaching objectives (there is significant pressure to do this), cultural mediation workshops help children to develop different types of psychomotor and relational skills, and to examine their relationship to their body. Cultural mediation also allows educators to see students in a new light. Teachers may be surprised by how students express themselves in a creative context.

Richard Moisan, who is involved in the government program *Une école montréalaise pour tous*, and was invited to the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences to talk about the effects of cultural mediation on the school success of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, noted that it provides universal reference points for immigrant children, allowing them to identify with their new culture and to make a place for themselves at school and, eventually, in society. In this sense, cultural mediation promotes integration and social cohesion. Choreographer and performer Ismaël Mouaraki, who also attended the symposium, is living proof of this reality. Born in France to immigrant parents, he grew up in the *banlieues* and found in art his anchor. Mixing high-brow

and popular culture in his choreographies, he remains close to his childhood experience, speaking to young audiences through shows presented by his company *Destins Croisés*, and inviting them to create choreographies with him in the context of cultural mediation projects.



*Loops, Destins Croisés*  
With Jossua Collin,  
Simon Ampleman,  
Geneviève Boulet,  
Jennifer Casimir  
and Joe Danny Aurélien  
Photo by Whitney Browne

## DIVERSE APPROACHES

The symposium participants had the opportunity to observe three guided workshops. Hélène Langevin led a workshop with a group of 7- and 8-year-olds in which she explored the line, energy, relationships and textures of the dancing body, using paintings from her choreographic work *L'Atelier*. Pierre-Paul Savoie introduced children aged 10 to 11 to the creative process by inviting them to engage in a playful exploration of movement using a chair, and to develop a character around the dance theatre piece *Les Chaises*. He also invited the work's dramaturge to lead a discussion with the children. Finally, two of Hélène Blackburn's dancers performed sequences from *Suites cruelles* before students in the dance program at the Université du Québec à Montréal and then proceeded to create a short choreographic sequence with them.



Dance workshop  
led by Pierre-Paul Savoie  
during the Symposium  
on Dance for  
Young Audiences

These three approaches encompass the main strategies identified by Nicole Turcotte to spark young people's interest in dance. The first involves giving children an active role, allowing them relative freedom. Favouring action over explanation, the goal is to encourage participants to experience the pleasure of dance, known to be a key factor in building self-esteem. The second approach involves arousing students' curiosity by engaging them in a discussion with artists and giving them an opportunity to participate in the creative process. Inviting them to rehearsals and encouraging conversation around this process and artistic



Creative workshop during a dance day camp led by Sursaut  
Photo by François Lafrance

pathways can also help them to identify with artists and appreciate their work. Since for most people, the dancer is the main entry point to a work, establishing a relationship prior to the performance is particularly beneficial. Young people become more attached to artists they have already met—and whose career they will follow over time—than to an artistic discipline. The set, costumes, lighting, sound and discussions with various artistic collaborators are

other potential entry points. Finally, the third strategy is to explore participants' kinesthetic appreciation of movement by giving them an opportunity to try out a choreographic sequence for themselves or by using another medium such as drawing.



## PROMOTING DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING

Today's school programs aim to develop students' competencies in the understanding and appreciation of dance works. In our era of instant communications and social media buzz, young people are strongly influenced by popular culture. Their natural reflex is to negatively judge or completely dismiss a work of art they can't relate to. The challenge for teachers is to encourage them to consider the work for what it is and to develop their critical skills. If they are guided in this process, their perceptions and attitudes rapidly change and their opinions become more nuanced. The secret is to combine sensorial, emotional and analytical approaches, starting in elementary school.

*Playing Hooky* features a series of songs celebrating children's vivid imagination and is performed in school yards and classrooms.

The work reveals not only the playfulness and poetry of childhood, but also how some children feel marginalized.



*Playing Hooky*, PPS Danse  
Photo by Eduardo Ruiz Vergara

The first step is to encourage children to identify and describe their personal, sensorial and reflexive experience in relation to the work in order to help them become aware of the impact of the body on aesthetic experience. They are then invited to observe various elements before proceeding to analyze the work and the group's responses to it. Children are able to take a closer look at themselves and to understand how they appreciate art. Finally, after reflecting on the work in this way, they form a critical opinion and take a stance.



Dance workshop  
led by Dany Desjardins,  
PPS Danse  
Photo courtesy of  
PPS Danse

As they navigate between the performance and their emotional response, and use their imagination to find the right words to communicate their sensations and ideas, young people are honing their language skills. By valuing experiential intelligence and modulating it with critical reflection, teachers and cultural mediators are able to stimulate creative thinking and help students appreciate dance in a thoughtful way. The more they are exposed to artistic experiences, the better.

## BENEFITS OF DANCE IN SCHOOLS

What better way to promote creative and critical thinking than through the arts, as the Québec Education Program has recommended since 2001? Students greatly benefit when the dance teachers at their school collaborate with their colleagues who teach French, history or the Contemporary World program to explore the themes in a choreographic work. Some 15 years ago, there were only a handful of dance teachers in schools; today there are roughly one hundred. They are a valuable resource, helping students to develop a variety of skills and promoting the art of choreography.

As Ginette Ferland—who spearheaded the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences—noted in her opening talk, dance facilitates students' understanding of their body schema and the complexity of movement, and contributes to their physical, emotional and cognitive development. It invites students to excel, to develop notions of space, rhythm, temporal structure and cooperation, and to understand the connection between interiority and exteriority. It also helps them overcome certain inhibitions and promotes learning. In addition to the benefits already mentioned in this thematic issue, dance encourages students to respect one another and improves their self-esteem and communication skills. For some, it is way to relieve tensions without talking and to become more receptive to learning. An effective stress-reliever, dance is also an important motivating factor for potential dropouts.

Although schools are under pressure to respond to market needs, these many benefits invite us to seriously consider the idea of human ecology and to rethink our priorities in terms of academic subjects and the arts.



## CHAPTER 4

# DANCE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES IN QUEBEC

### Part I – BRIEF HISTORY

It was on the celebrated 1950s TV show *L'Heure du concert* /*The Concert Hour* that young Quebecers (and many adults) discovered dance, with Les Ballets Chiriaeff. Dance in Quebec was in its infancy and the main offerings for youth were matinees targeting family audiences. With the founding of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in 1957, educational activities were developed to introduce children to the history and aesthetics of dance. Starting in 1963, governments provided funding to schools in major urban centres to promote dance education.



*The Nutcracker*,  
Les Grands Ballets  
Canadiens de Montréal  
Photo by John Hall

At the time, Ludmilla Chiriaeff tried her hand at creating works for general audiences, without much success. It was choreographer Fernand Nault who discovered the magic formula with his timeless classic *The Nutcracker*, which has been performed in Montreal every holiday season since 1964. Starting in 1970, Les Compagnons de la Danse, the

new junior company of Les Grands Ballets, promoted dance in some 30 schools across the province. They would end their activities four years later, on account of insufficient funds.

## FIRST YOUTH DANCE COMPANIES

It was not until 1976 that Canada's first youth dance company was founded in Quebec. Called Tournifolie, the company embraced contemporary dance aesthetics. It was soon followed by the Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, where teenagers danced for younger audiences. Given the growing interest in child development during this period,



*À la nuit tombante,  
Sursaut  
With Adam Dymburt  
Photo by  
François Lafrance*

works were created to appeal to children's experience and reality. Dance theatre made it easier to tell a story while Nikolais' theatrical approach emphasized all aspects of the performance. Although Tournifolie reached a wider audience than regular dance companies, it ran into obstacles with funding agencies, which had difficulty evaluating contemporary dance and its potential impact on young audiences.

With the industrialization of culture in the 1980s at home and abroad, and growing pressure for shows to be profitable, there was an increase in complementary cultural mediation activities. In France, these activities were incorporated into artistic performances for children and adolescents. In Quebec, where the emphasis was more on promoting dance in schools than on encouraging outings to the theatre, specialized companies began to emerge. Between 1986 and 2004, the Laval-based company Danse Trielle focused on teaching in the Lanaudière region and Sursaut, founded in Sherbrooke in 1985 by Francine Châteauvert, performed across the country. In recent years, this company has also made inroads in the Chinese and Mexican markets.

## MAJOR SHIFT AT THE DAWN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

In 1996, Hélène Langevin discovered her vocation in youth dance with *Roche, papier, ciseaux*, a work accompanied by a major cultural mediation project. In 2000, she founded Bouge de là, devoted to very young audiences. Thanks to the quality of Langevin's work, her natural ability to get parents and children dancing, and her energetic partner Ginette Ferland, Bouge de là played an important role in the rise of dance for young audiences in Quebec. Hélène Blackburn, who founded the company Cas Public, also made a significant contribution to dance for teenage audiences, starting with her 2001 piece *Nous n'irons plus au bois*. Since then, the company has alternated between creating choreographies for general audiences and adults.



*Roche, papier, ciseaux*,  
Brouhaha danse  
With Sandrine Lafond  
Choreographer: Hélène  
Langevin  
Photo by Rolline Laporte

In the early 2000s, choreographers such as Paul-André Fortier would make forays into the world of dance for young or general audiences. In Quebec City, Daniel Bélanger got involved after becoming a father, and Harold Rhéaume created several works for young audiences. Montrealer Pierre-Paul Savoie first explored the genre in 2006 through a collaboration with the Théâtre Bouches Décousues, and went on to develop a niche in dance for young audiences with *Tales for Naughty Children* (2010). Since then, PPS Danse has been actively involved in promoting youth-oriented works and in getting schools interested in cultural mediation activities.

## THE NEW WAVE

In recent years, companies such as Destins Croisés (Ismaël Mouaraki) and FloorRider & TONIK (Geneviève Gagné and Émilie Honegger) have drawn young audiences with their signature blend of contemporary and street dance. Works combining folk music, percussion and theatre by Les Bordéliques (Mélissandre Tremblay-Bourrassa) and [ZØGMA], as well as a piece featuring puppets by Emmanuelle Calvé, have also proven popular with young audiences. Choreographers like Roger Sinha, Manon Oligny, Estelle Clareton and Dominique Porte have been involved in youth-focused projects, and emerging artists Sandy Bessette and Simon Fournier, of La marche du crabe, combine dance and circus arts to create works for very young audiences. Their piece *De doigts et de pieds* was developed for babies, as was the show *Eaux* by the theatre company Les Incomplètes, featuring a dancer and a bassist. The history of dance for young audiences has just begun. An entire world remains to be discovered.



ZÓ, [ZØGMA]  
With Frédérique-Annie  
Robitaille and storyteller  
Isabelle Crépeau  
Photo by Philippe Dubois

## Part 2 – PRESENTING TO YOUNG AUDIENCES

Dance for youth is totally dependent on school audiences and suffers serious setbacks whenever there are upheavals in the education system. To make up for strike periods or to organize marches against government austerity, schools tend to cut down on cultural outings, which threatens the precarious financial situation of companies specialized in dance for young audiences.



Matinee performance  
of *The Nutcracker*  
for schoolchildren,  
Les Grands Ballets  
Canadiens de Montréal  
Photo by Jean-Francois Héту

Efforts have been made in Canada over the past 30 years to ensure that young audiences have access to the performing arts. In the case of dance, these efforts have recently borne fruit in British Columbia and New Brunswick. Although Ontario also offers some presentation opportunities, the national presenting network remains very limited. Quebec's network is the envy of the rest of the country. Most Canadian children attend dance and theatre shows in gymnasiums, where the equipment and conditions are woefully inadequate. Sometimes development agents (cultural workers or artists) have to negotiate directly with school principals or teachers to book shows. With a maximum of two performances per school and average fees of \$2,100 (or as low as \$800), the sets are spare, the casts are small and tours follow a tight schedule to stay on budget.



## THE QUEBEC EL DORADO

Things are much easier in Quebec where it is rarer for youth dance and theatre companies to present their work in schools. This is because they receive support from specialized presenters and multidisciplinary programmers who have developed solid ties with families and the school system in their respective communities. Furthermore, Quebec has almost as many specialized presenters in youth theatre as all of English-speaking Canada. In this context, fees are more generous—as is the case with the province’s daycare system. However, fees remain on average 50% lower than those for shows targeting general audiences. And although youth shows are often presented between 60 and 75 times in a given year, with up to eight performances per venue, all is not perfect in *la belle province*.



*Les Chaises*,  
PPS Danse  
With Heather Ma  
and Sylvain Lafortune  
Photo by Rolline Laporte



## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Presentation fees might be low, but stage costs are fixed. A company must therefore perform several times in the same venue and must give workshops on the side to cover its costs. This is good for dancers, who spend more time on stage than in the studio and develop close ties with their audiences. However, it is also very physically demanding. Some performers start warming up at 7 a.m. to give a first performance at 9 a.m. and another in the afternoon. This routine is repeated for several consecutive days. For health and safety reasons, dancers need more frequent rest periods than actors or musicians. This increases costs.

With ticket prices ranging from \$5 to \$10 (when admission is not free), presenters are not looking to make a profit. Most of them program works for young audiences in order to democratize the performing arts and open the doors of the theatre to all—from children to parents who could not otherwise afford an outing, or who would not even think of going to a dance show. Many presenters see themselves as sowing the seeds for new generations of audiences. While some fill their venues to capacity without respecting the quality of performing conditions, others limit audience numbers, even if this means running a deficit. For theatres, an ideal performance is one that draws audiences of all ages and that may be presented during the day to schoolchildren and in the evening or on weekends to families.

## TOUGH COMPETITION

Quebec's presenting network covers a wide area, but competition is fierce all the same. With some 40 youth theatre troupes offering quality works competing against a handful of dance companies, and with buyers' (and the general public's) more natural inclination towards theatre, the dance development agent's mission becomes something of a struggle. The proportion of choreographic works presented in the market of networks such as the Réseau indépendant des diffuseurs d'événements artistiques unis (RIDEAU) corresponds to more or less 12% of theatrical performances. Like festivals and other youth-oriented presenters, programmers of youth series put far more emphasis on theatre. The ratio of dance to theatre in their programs is also roughly 1:10. Although many presenters might be open to dance, they tend to book dance shows once most of their youth programming for the season is complete.



*Tope là, Tope ci, wifi  
takka takka dhim,  
Sinha Danse  
With Erin O'Loughlin,  
Mark Medrano, Katia  
Lacelle and Marie-Ève  
Lafontaine  
Photo by Michael  
Slobodian*

The hegemony of text and narrative can also make it challenging to present more abstract works in multidisciplinary venues and establishments catering to young audiences. Since these venues are primarily intended for plays, some consider the risk of upsetting both audiences and theatre companies too difficult to manage. Interdisciplinary works combining dance and theatre are more likely to be presented than purely choreographic creations.



*Cousins,  
Le fils d'Adrien danse  
With Daniel Parent,  
Harold Rhéaume  
and Martin Faucher  
Photo by Michael  
Slobodian*

Dance promoters therefore have to be persuasive to create and maintain their niche in the presentation circuit. Some companies have occupied this niche for a long time, which makes it difficult for emerging youth-focused choreographers to find their place. These choreographers might try to target different age groups, but they do not have sufficient human and administrative resources to support development. Moreover, many presenters find there are not enough dance works to choose from and that dance companies, in comparison with theatre companies, lack management resources. They may refuse to collaborate with an emerging dance company, for fear it will not be able to handle a tour. Adding to the problem, each presenting organization has its own policies and modes of operation.

## TIGHT-KNIT RELATIONSHIPS

**D**evelopment agents in Quebec have a complex job. They have to negotiate with theatre and festival directors, school boards and cultural committees made up of teachers or daycare managers. A show presented for three consecutive days in the same venue may very well be the result of agreements with three different buyers who do not necessarily have the same selection criteria. This is why it is essential for development agents to know their potential partners in order to adjust their sales pitches accordingly.

They first have to target programmers whose artistic orientation is a good fit with the proposed work. If they cast too wide a net, they run the risk of coming away empty-handed. They obviously need to be very familiar with the artistic approach of the work they are trying to sell and, especially, with the target audience. Not to mention the cultural factor. Audiences' responses vary according to their sociocultural environment and the degree to which they have been exposed to the performing arts. The target age group for the same work might therefore vary from one geographical area to another.

Although a few presenters disagree, creating a teaching guide is an effective way to convince teachers who are often intimidated by contemporary dance. For some buyers, it is even essential that the artistic content be tied to teaching objectives in the curriculum. Others, in contrast, have no desire to stick to the beaten trail, and select works based on their aesthetic quality or the questions they raise.

Cultural mediation workshops are often recognized as effective ways to reach out to young audiences and are a good source of income for artists, but they are not an absolute necessity for all presenters. Increasingly, the latter follow choreographers' research and creative processes and become true development partners.

## MONTREAL: A DANCE PARADISE

The potential for presentation and cultural action is especially great in Montreal, where cultural networks such as the réseau Accès culture and the Association des diffuseurs culturels de l'Île have forged exceptional ties with schools and the general public. The City of Montréal and Ministère de la Culture et des Communications fund a substantial portion of cultural mediation, and the Ministère de l'Éducation funds the program *Une école montréalaise pour tous*, which promotes access to the arts and the social integration of children from multiethnic backgrounds. The conditions for dance in Montreal are an ideal to which communities across Canada aspire.

The numbers in Montreal are impressive: during peak periods, 100 mediation activities may be carried out in parallel with 10 performances. While the numbers in the regions do not compare, there are passionate individuals who work miracles. For example, with its two-person team, the Théâtre du Bic accompanied two artists within a 250-kilometer radius, holding some 30 workshops in schools in the Bas-Saint-Laurent in connection with a single show for family audiences!



*Tendre,*  
Créations Estelle Claretton  
With Brice Noeser and  
Katia Petrowick  
Photo by Stéphane Najman

## PRESENTING NETWORKS IN QUEBEC

In addition to acting as an incentive for parents who would not spontaneously go to the theatre, dance for young audiences is paving the way for the entire discipline by increasing audience awareness activities. It is not rare for this genre to garner awards at the annual Prix Tournée RIDEAU. In the Greater Montreal Area, presenters who are part of Réseau-Scène have created a young audience series, and some tours are also made possible through collaborative efforts within the RIDEAU network or the Réseau des Organismes de Spectacles de l'Est du Québec (ROSEQ). The organization La danse sur les routes du Québec also helps to reach young audiences by offering financial support to presenters who include dance works in their programming.



*Suites curieuses,*  
Cas Public  
With Cai Glover  
Photo by Julie Artacho  
Illustration by  
Marjolaine Leray

In the regions—to a far greater extent than in major urban centres—dance schools are presenters' main allies. Although solid ties have already been established with an impressive number of schools and cultural committees, much ground remains to be covered. Dance teachers in the school system do a wonderful job of raising awareness among their colleagues and parents. The more dance teachers we have, the more dance for youth will be able to flourish across Quebec.



## INSPIRING INITIATIVES

A number of presenters' success stories were shared at a one-day seminar on young audiences held by ROSEQ, in Rimouski, in 2014. Although these initiatives mainly concerned theatrical works, they may easily be applied to dance as well. Among them was an agreement between the Commission scolaire de l'Estuaire and the presenter in Baie-Comeau, which allowed children in daycare to attend an average of three shows per year. It also gave dance companies the opportunity to perform in an Innu community. Driven by a vision of sustainable development and a robust dance ecology, this same presenter invites college students (especially those likely to become early childhood educators) to accompany young children to shows.

Among other success stories shared at the seminar were the dynamic approaches of school boards such as that of the Chic-Chocs, which created an inter-school budget to share transportation costs and ensure that more remote communities would not be left out. Elsewhere, the general admission fee was increased by a modest 25 cents to raise funds for youth programming. Partnerships are also being forged with private companies and social organizations. The allocation of funds to budget items such as transportation is an effective argument for more pragmatic businesspeople. Participants at the Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences in Montreal also mentioned the "star days" initiative in private schools, which gives students an opportunity to see shows.

## APPEALING TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Teachers and parents are the gatekeepers to culture. They can be wonderful facilitators or can create immense barriers (some schools will go so far as to reallocate funds intended for cultural outings). At the elementary level, outings depend on a single teacher, whereas in high schools, a consensus must be reached by all colleagues. It is common knowledge that, of the four arts taught in schools, dance is the least popular. Furthermore, it is adults who contribute to negative stereotypes of contemporary art and, especially, contemporary dance. Every effort must be made to reach out to these teachers and convince them of the value of this art form.



*CLASH,*  
Le fils d'Adrien danse  
With Arielle Warnke  
St-Pierre, Karine  
Ledoyen and  
Stéphane Deligny  
Photo by David Cannon

In Montreal, a cultural mediator specialized in theatre has adopted a personalized approach with teachers in a number of schools—with positive results. In dance, the presence of artists in residence for extended periods has also been extremely influential. In eastern Quebec, presenters invite teachers, educational consultants and

school board directors to sit on their board of directors, and invite decision-makers in the education system to attend youth programming launches. To encourage parents to take their children to shows, some presenters offer a single low admission fee or free admission. However, free admission does not automatically incite people to go and see shows. It can even undermine the value of works for young audiences, already considered by some to be an inferior genre.

## EXPOSURE OUTSIDE QUEBEC

A successful youth dance show may be presented up to 150 times in Quebec over three or four seasons—a success rate never achieved by contemporary dance shows for general audiences. However, the search for new markets remains a major challenge for all artists. Although dance is a universal language, it is not necessarily easily exportable, since aesthetic tastes vary from one place to another. With the exception of Cas Public, whose style is popular in Europe, and the Sherbrooke-based company Sursaut, which has toured in China and Mexico, most Quebec dance companies tour only in Canada. Both here and abroad, a company needs to book three performance dates to obtain touring funding. Such conditions have already forced certain companies to decline presenters' invitations, thus losing valuable development opportunities.



*GOLD,*  
Cas Public  
With Merryn Kritzinger,  
Alexandre Carlos  
and Roxanne  
Duchesne-Roy  
Photo by Damian Siqueiros

## CHAPTER 5

# DREAMS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

As many endeavour to carve out a niche for youth dance in the choreographic landscape, community stakeholders continue to dream of an ideal world. The ideas put forward at the symposium and by some of the individuals interviewed for this thematic issue both reflect and build on the recommendations set out in the *Master Plan for Professional Dance in Quebec 2011–2021*.



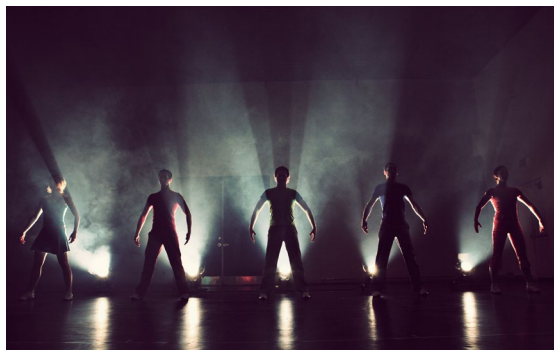
*La cigale et la fourmi,*  
Sursaut  
With Stéphanie  
Brochard  
Photo by François  
Lafrance

One of the major objectives of the first Symposium on Dance for Young Audiences was to raise the status of the genre in the dance and educational milieus by underlining its unique and fascinating qualities, revealing its artistic underpinnings, and demonstrating the benefits of exposing schoolchildren to dance. What concrete actions can we undertake for the future?

## MAKING DANCE PART OF DAILY LIFE

For many, one of the first ways to raise interest in dance for young audiences is to democratize this art form, often considered to be elitist. How? By embracing a wide range of styles to attract diverse audiences; by producing more general audience works that are accessible to those new to the art; by increasing artist residencies and cultural mediation activities related to dance appreciation in general rather than to a specific work; and by ensuring that children have access to dance as early as possible. We propose offering dance as an alternative to physical education classes, and making outings to professional dance shows part of the curriculum.

*CLASH,*  
Le fils d'Adrien danse  
With Pierre-Alexandre  
Lamoureux,  
Arielle Warnke St-Pierre,  
Stéphane Déigny,  
Karine Ledoyen  
and Harold Rhéaume  
Photo by David Cannon



In the meantime (and if this dream does not become a reality), it is essential that we provide substantial support to teachers who opt for dance by helping them to select quality works suitable for their students. This will inspire them to overcome any logistical and

organizational challenges in order to repeat the experience. They will become ambassadors for dance in their respective schools. For these teachers, as for parents, an outing to the theatre, accompanied by simple activities related to the performance can also be very fruitful.

## VALUING CHILDREN AND THEIR CULTURE

Children have a lot to teach those who take the time to listen and learn. Observing us with an innocent gaze and holding up a mirror up to our actions, they question our behaviour and invite us to see the world in a new light, to develop new ways of being together. How is it that we take so much interest in them and use them to sell all types of products, yet at the same time dismiss the things they find important? What would happen if, instead of approaching children like a market to be conquered or a population to be moulded in order to better control it, we saw in them a space for new possibilities and an opportunity for evolving identities to thrive? What role would art play in this space?



Show at dance  
day camp,  
Sursaut  
Photo by François  
Lafrance



Without seeking to change the world or create a new educational paradigm, we hope that media, communications and marketing professionals will approach dance for young audiences with the same degree of rigour as dance for adult or general audiences. It is important to address parents and teachers as much as the general public, and to bridge the gap between adults and children. In this vein, systematically including an approach focused on young audiences in professional artistic training—as does UQAM’s undergraduate dance education program—would be highly beneficial.



Dance workshop at Saint-Joseph school in preparation for International Dance Day 2015, Danse Carpe Diem / Emmanuel Jouthe and the Regroupement québécois de la danse With Emmanuel Jouthe and Laurence Fournier Campeau  
Photo by Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique

## MONETARY RECOGNITION

**T** rue recognition of dance for young audiences would evidently involve financial recognition as well, with a substantial increase in fees. As already mentioned, these fees are currently two to three times lower than those paid for shows targeting general audiences. Increased recognition would also translate into better support for research, creation and dissemination. For now, it is artists who bear most of the cost of ensuring access to the arts. At a time when a company's numbers (presentations, audience attendance, self-generated revenue) are important factors in the awarding of certain grants, it is absurd that those who tour the most are penalized, because dance for young audiences does not generate revenues commensurate with its activities



and scope. Presentation venues dedicated to young audiences and youth series developed by specialized presenters will also lay the foundations for long-term growth.

*EMMAC Terre marine,  
Emmanuelle Calvé  
Photo by Frédérick Duchesne*

## LENDING A HAND TO EMERGING COMPANIES

Although dance for youth has been flourishing in Quebec for about 15 years, a number of professionals believe this genre will not mature until 2025. Many note that, in addition to creating new works, it is important to support up-and-coming dancers and companies. Certain choreographers are already carrying out mentorship activities. Hélène Blackburn of Cas Public has offered research labs to seasoned choreographers Estelle Clareton and Dominique Porte, and has guided them in their creation of works for children. Hélène Langevin has invited younger choreographers such as Caroline Laurin-Beaucage, Menka Nagrani and Manuel Roque to the Bouge de là studio to create letters for an ABC dance work currently in development.

*Tendre,*  
Créations Estelle  
Clareton  
With Brice Noeser  
and Katia Petrowick  
Photos by Stéphane  
Najman



These initiatives are key to developing the genre. Not only do they generate valuable intergenerational exchanges among artists; they also bring creators into contact with presenters, encouraging the latter to trust emerging companies focused on young audiences and, hopefully, to book one or two of their shows every year. For the time being, the market is dominated by four well-known companies and many are unhappy that they scoop up most of the available contracts, grants and artist residencies.



Workshop to develop  
*26 lettres à danser,*  
Bouge de là  
Photo by Hélène  
Langevin

To develop and raise the profile of youth-oriented dance, advocates must work together, addressing all levels of the education system and all stakeholders. They also have no choice but to reflect on their practices, to think in terms of sustainable development, and to be open to working with a variety of generations, professional sectors, cultures and aesthetic styles. Dance for young audiences could, as it does

in France, be supported by celebrity spokespersons. But it especially requires the support of as many people as possible to convince government of the crucial importance of the performing arts in children's lives.

# APPENDIX – REFERENCES

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## INTERVIEWEES

**Sandy Bessette**, Choreographer, Executive and Artistic Director, La marche du crabe (Montreal)

**Hélène Blackburn**, Choreographer, Executive and Artistic Director, Cas Public (Montreal)

**Daniel Bélanger**, Choreographer, Executive and Artistic Director, Code Universel (Quebec City)

**Luce Botella**, Cultural Agent, Maison de la culture de Côte-des-Neiges (Montreal)

**Mélanie Brisebois**, Manager of cultural mediation and performances for young audiences, Corporation de développement culturel de Trois-Rivières

**Francine Châteauvert**, Choreographer, Artistic Director, Sursaut (Sherbrooke)

**Stéphanie Connors**, Teacher, dance department at Lucien-Pagé high school (Montreal)

**Louise Duchesne**, Director of Development and Communications, Agora de la danse (Montreal)



**Hélène Duval**, Professor, Dance Education, Université du Québec à Montréal

**Ginette Ferland**, Executive Director, Director of Communications, Bouge de là (2000-2015), Development Agent (2015- )

**Geneviève Gagné**, Choreographer, Co-Founder, FloorRider & TONIK (Montreal)

**Catherine Gaudet**, Independent Choreographer, Member of Lorganisme (Montreal)

**Hélène Langevin**, Choreographer and Artistic Director, Bouge de là (Montreal)

**Pierre Larivière**, Director, Festival Petits bonheurs, Maison de la culture Maisonneuve (Montreal)

**Anouck Leblanc Dominguez**, Assistant General Director, PPS Danse (Montreal)

**Ismaël Mouaraki**, Choreographer, Executive and Artistic Director, Destins Croisés (Montreal)

**Allen MacInnis**, Artistic Director, Young People's Theatre (Toronto)

**Caroline Paré**, Teacher and founder of dance program at Collège de Champigny (Quebec City)

**Dominique Porte**, Choreographer, Executive and Artistic Director, Système D (Montreal)

**David Pressault**, Choreographer, Psychoanalyst (Montreal)

**Harold Rhéaume**, Choreographer, Artistic Director, Le Fils d'Adrien danse (Quebec City)

**Pierre-Paul Savoie**, Choreographer, General and Artistic Director, PPS Danse (Montreal)

**Joël Simon**, Director, Association Nova Villa and the Festival Méli Mômes, Reims, France

**Roger Sinha**, Choreographer, Artistic Director, Sinha Danse (Montreal)

**Mélessandre Tremblay-Bourassa**, Independent Choreographer, Les Bordéliques (Joliette)

**Florence Vinit**, Professor, Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal



Project Supervision  
**Lorraine Hébert**

Research and Writing  
**Fabienne Cabado**

Revision and Coordination  
**Judith Lessard-Bérubé**  
**Coralie Muroi**

Translation  
**Vanessa Nicolai**

Graphic Design  
**Anne Lizotte**

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