

Dear friends, colleagues and sponsors,

Most of you don't know me. I'm not a dancer or a choreographer, nor have I ever been involved with the dance community .... In fact many of you must see me as some kind of alien. I have done a lot of things in my life, but I don't want to spend much time talking about myself today, because there are much more important subjects to discuss. This said, if you want to know more about me, I would love to meet with you or talk to you on the phone at your convenience. In short, I have spent my life so far on three continents: Europe, Africa and North America. Aside from my own creativity as a woman of letters, aside from my personal commitment to the world of the arts, I have spent most of my professional career in three very different arenas:

- 1- The world of **culture** (as an artist, activist, consultant and business leader)
- 2- The **private sector** (also as a consultant and business leader)
- 3- The **social sector**, as director of various advocacy groups and also in women's services

It was undoubtedly because of these three areas of experience that I was hired by the CDA's Board of Directors, aware as it was of the urgent needs facing the dance community, and the national body that represents it: the Canadian Dance Assembly.

Since my arrival on August 9, I have attempted to compile a **kind of inventory of dance in Canada** and to **determine how dance fits into the overall economic, political, social, professional, and legal context in Canada, by province and by city**. I have also sought to identify the role played by Canadian dance **internationally**. I have talked to dozens of people and each person's views and experience have contributed to furthering my knowledge. Of course, I have already formulated an overview of some basic points, but before sharing them with you, I would urge you to talk to me, advise me and share your views with me, because without you, I will be unable to meet the challenge that you have entrusted me with, which is to bring the Canadian Dance Assembly to the next level of its development.

What have I learned over the past two months?

I have picked up two kinds of information. First, in terms of the endogenous or internal aspects, I have been able to identify the principal issues, as seen by those in the dance milieu. Many challenges await us, such as the lack of a social safety net for individual dancers, and the aging of the dance audience. I then examined the **exogenous factors**, in other words the external factors that had an impact on the evolution of dance, such as federal, provincial, and municipal policies. I have also begun to understand the impact of the Canadian and international economic situation, because dance, like all other sectors of activity, cannot escape the world financial situation.

While my analysis may be superficial, I can assure you that I am genuinely enthusiastic about the challenge I have been offered. This is not a naïve burst of enthusiasm, which I might have had a few years ago. No, it is an enthusiasm that is responsible, mature, measured, and carefully calculated. It is

an enthusiasm that draws its energy from an overwhelming conviction that **dance in Canada deserves a better fate**. It is an enthusiasm that weighs all the human and technical issues, the personal dynamics, the power struggles, and the divvying up of a cake that has gotten progressively smaller over the years. I intend to take action on all these elements, and make progress, in a spirit of peace and professionalism. Any improvements will of course be the result of making demands, but not by being aggressive, antagonistic and confrontational. **The Canadian Dance Assembly can also formulate its demands by positioning itself as a concrete, positive force**, putting forward **specific, well documented** projects corresponding to structural flaws specific to the sector, for instance structural legislative gaps, inadequate social measures and flaws in the education system.

But let's go back to some of the first observations I have made over the past two months. I have divided them into two categories: endogenous and exogenous. I will conclude by proposing some forward-looking avenues for action.

**1- First, the endogenous factors.** I have been able to see for myself the effervescence and creativity of the dance world, the open-mindedness of the people who talked to me, and the vast capacity for renewal of creative endeavors of all kinds. As for challenges, there were two constraints that concerned me:

- **First, the lack of specific centralized data** about the sector, a situation which is aggravated by the multiplicity of service agencies, each of which has its own rather inaccessible database. Hopefully, this problem will be largely solved by the dance sector mapping project that will provide easier access to data and information.
- **Second, the ISOLATION of professionals in our field.** Isolation of dancers spread out over a vast continent, a territory that is unthinkable huge to a European-African like myself. Isolation of dancers, most of whom do not have sufficient technical or financial resources, or opportunities to get together. And isolation resulting from a lack of harmony among dance professionals, who enjoy different statuses, levels of social and economic security, collective agreements, and challenges.

**2- As for the many exogenous factors,** I will not spend much time here, since everyone is already all too familiar with them.

- **The economic recession** and government actions involving varying levels of budget cuts at the federal and provincial levels sometimes, particularly cutbacks relating to touring.
- **At the international level,** the global recession means that culture budgets have also been cut in other countries that were historically open to foreign dancers... which reduces the international dance market even further.

Of course, these observations should not stop us. In fact, I am in the process of drafting an action plan as part of our strategic planning, which I will be submitting to the Board of Directors.

**There is one ESSENTIAL concept that we have to start with, however. We cannot successfully meet the challenges facing us if we are not *united*. I am sure that you would agree with writer Antoine de Saint Exupéry, who said, “*Loving is not looking at one other, it's looking together in the same direction.*”**

With this in mind, I propose a multidimensional three-year action plan. It includes the following points (but not exclusively):

- A consultancy approach and a policy proposal with a view to **consolidating policies and procedures that govern the dance profession.**
- Measures designed to contribute to improving the **social safety net for dancers.**
- A national public education program on dance.
- And last, an ambitious **federative project** designed to promote the interests of all of our members.

At the same time, of course, we will continue to gain strength. We will monitor **public decisions as observers, actively denounce budget cuts that affect our community,** and **lobby politicians to support our issues,** by maintaining our traditional alliances and by creating new ad hoc partnerships on specific common projects. We will also have to implement an aggressive fundraising strategy, relying on a diversification of supporters and sponsors.

In conclusion, I hope that you will approve of this ambitious draft, which will be presented in detail to the Board of Directors. I would like to thank you in advance for feeding my energy and for sharing your knowledge, for the common good of the whole dance community in Canada.

Thank you for your attention.

Nathalie Fave