

Les Seconds États généraux du théâtre québécois...

Les suites - english version -



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" We are there to pass the torch, in an effort to transmit the sense of our obligation to be vigilant in spite of everything. "

André Brassard

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Quebec theatre is a living art, anchored in the society in which it evolves.

Quebec theatre is a vital space. It is an essential element of social cohesion, a source of dialogue, reflection and escape offered to all Quebecers, of all ages and of all origins.

Quebec theatre is an expressive art. It is a voice that allows us to speak to the world around us through works from here and beyond that are creative, classical, modern and contemporary, so we can better understand ourselves and the work itself.

Quebec theatre is in a state of perpetual motion, a catalyst for our community. Thanks to the work of our playwrights, directors, designers and cultural workers, who never cease to explore, innovate and to renew, our art is in a constant state of evolution.

Quebec theatre has turned towards the future.

The Executive Summary

The following is an Executive Summary of the document *Les Seconds États Généraux du théâtre Québécois – Les Suites*, published by the *Conseil québécois du théâtre* on World Theatre Day, March 27, 2008. It is a summary of results from the Second Conference on the State of Professional Theatre in Quebec, held in October of 2007. As the original document in French is long and detailed, it was felt that an Executive Summary would be the most perspicuous way to convey the recommendations and conclusions of the conference to the English theatre community. For a precise understanding of the position of the *Conseil québécois du théâtre*, please refer to the French-language document.

Fifty-nine resolutions were adopted at the plenary assembly, representing five major thrusts:

1. Coherent Financial Support for Theatre: a Question of Longevity
2. Dissemination of Theatre: The Provincial, National and International Issues
3. The Challenge of Making a Living in Theatre
4. Bringing Youth into the Professional Theatre: An Act of Citizenship
5. Quebec Playwrights – Support for a Unique Voice

All of these themes were discussed in workshop round tables during one entire day of the conference, and the resulting recommendations and resolutions were debated at great length at the plenary session on the final day, with some resolutions being defeated and others retained for deliberation and final approval by the new Board of Directors.

Chapter One: Coherent Financial Support for Theatre - A Question of Longevity

This chapter begins with a description of the types of organizations referred to in the recommendations: a *Project* company, which receives support on a project-by-project basis, mostly sporadic; an *Operational* company, which is supported on an annual or multi-year basis; and *Institutions* (established long-term organizations), which are funded on an annual or multi-year basis.

Conclusions

The large majority of theatre companies cannot offer sufficient salary levels for their artists, cultural workers or artistic directors to allow them to participate fully in the creative process and to take advantage of the talents for which they were hired. In the same vein, these companies cannot provide production budgets that match the scope of the projects undertaken, which leads theatre to become an art of “making do” and forced poverty. As a result, the milieu is seeing the loss of specialists (props artists, wig makers, cutters and costumers, millinery experts, scenic painters, etc.) as well as an exodus of seasoned and talented playwrights, designers, technicians and administrators towards other related sectors.

By perpetuating the chronic under-funding of the production of Quebec theatre, an inestimable wisdom will be lost, which impoverishes future generations of theatre.

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Recommendations

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That the reflections initiated at the Second Conference on the State of the Professional Theatre in Quebec on the best ways of supporting our future theatre practitioners be continued in order to establish more coherence and congruency between different theatre production structures, while at the same time preserving their specific artistic identities.

The federal and provincial governments are asked:

That the Canada Council and the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* be sufficiently supported in order that:

- The essential work and role of artistic directorships of theatre institutions and organizations be recognized and funded accordingly.

- The specific and essential roles of 'project', 'operational' and 'institutional' theatre structures be recognized in the development and vitality of Quebec theatre in order that each of them be supported according to their realistic needs, within the ecology of the entire Quebec theatre community.
- Production centres be created (following the excellent examples in Quebec City) in areas such as Montreal (or where justified in the regions) which include performance spaces, production facilities, resource centres, and resource-sharing facilities dedicated to emerging theatre companies and for companies without a space.

Chapter Two: Dissemination of Theatre - Provincial, National and International Issues

In this chapter the five different types of presenters are outlined: those that have their own facilities, specialized presenters, multi-disciplinary presenters, festivals, and self-presenters. Descriptions of existing networks are provided, along with Theatre for Young Audiences and their particular problems. In addition, there is also discussion of the challenges of touring, as well as the difficulties of encouraging audiences, both young and old, to be interested in the benefits of theatre.

Recommendations

i. Provincial Touring

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That the discussions initiated at the Second Conference on the State of the Professional Theatre in Quebec on the best ways of supporting our current dissemination structures in Quebec be continued in order to establish more coherence and congruency between different theatre production structures, while at the same time preserving their specific artistic identities.

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The provincial and federal governments are asked:

That sufficient funding be accorded to the Canada Council, the *Conseil des art et des lettres du Quebec*, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Ministry of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women in order that:

- The primordial role of presenter-producers, specialized presenters, multidisciplinary presenters, theatre festivals, and any other organization acknowledged by its peers as practicing the self-presentation of theatre in Quebec be recognized, and that they be funded according to their actual needs.
- The importance of the work and role of artistic directorships at the heart of theatre presentation structures in Quebec be recognized and compensated appropriately.
- The importance of the work and role of cultural mediators in dissemination of theatre in Quebec be recognized and compensated accordingly.
- The difficulties and challenges directly related to touring Theatre for Young Audiences be recognized so that the diffusion of this theatre can be increased and its artists and cultural workers remunerated accordingly. To achieve this objective, it is recommended that measures be undertaken to ensure that

sufficient monies are allocated to these companies, as well as their host venues.

- That funds be allocated for the on-going regular maintenance of venues that host touring Quebec theatre.
- That the ratio of “population vs. seating” and “cost-of-work vs. seating” be revised in order to encourage the development of smaller venues dedicated to the touring of Quebec theatre throughout the province.

ii. International Touring

In this section, the decline of support over the past 8 to 10 years from the Department of Foreign Affairs and CALQ is discussed. Within this discussion it is acknowledged that the provincial government has announced an injection of \$500,000 into international touring over the next three years.

The organizations that support the international touring of Quebec theatre are also listed:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
- The Canada Council
- *Le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec*
- International theatre festivals
- Qualified cultural workers present in embassies and consulates
- Qualified cultural workers participating in international delegations from Quebec

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Recommendations

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That a round table be created to bring together all the partners and stakeholders involved in international touring of Quebec theatre in order to coordinate and develop greater coherency among the different funding programs.
- That a joint reference, resource and consultation centre be created devoted to the support of international touring.

The federal government is asked:

- That culture be reinstated as one of the main pillars of Canadian international policy and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade recognize the importance of allocating human resources and the necessary funding to ensure the dissemination of Quebec theatre on an international basis.

- That Canadian cultural policy abroad not be subordinated to commercial policy, and that artistic merit be made the fundamental evaluative criteria, following the model of the Canada Council.
- That this Canadian cultural policy abroad also reflect the realities of small- and medium-sized Quebec theatre organizations.
- That the role of the international festivals be recognized as a catalyst in terms of international dissemination of Quebec theatre, and, as a result, that they be sufficiently supported accordingly on an ongoing basis.
- That new posts be opened for cultural attaches and councilors in all Canadian consulates and embassies.

The provincial government is asked:

- That the importance of dissemination of Quebec theatre outside the province be recognized and that the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* be adequately financed in order to carry out this mandate.
- That the catalyzing role of international festivals be recognized in terms of the international dissemination of Quebec theatre, and, as a result, that they be sufficiently supported on an ongoing basis.
- That new posts be opened for cultural attaches and councilors in all Quebec delegations outside the province.

Chapter Three: The Challenge of Making a Living in Theatre

This chapter offers a detailed description of the funding envelopes available at CALQ and the Canada Council and how they have decreased over the past five years for both individual artists and companies, which has resulted in a decrease in the number of grants allocated.

There is also a discussion of the difficulties faced by artists and companies vis-à-vis the physical condition of the rehearsal halls and performance spaces in which they must work, the lack of funds available to improve these spaces, and the effects of this situation on the artistic product of artists who are forced to compromise their ideas and visions.

Finally, the status of regional artists is discussed with respect to the distances they must travel to work in urban centres, and the competition they encounter there from the resident urban artists who are both more numerous and easier for producers to engage due to their proximity to the work. The result of this situation is that regional artists who are highly qualified often do not get the chance to be seen outside of their particular region.

Conclusions

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The major impediment facing theatre artists and the companies that hire them is the lack of funding provided to the funding agencies, which would provide artists with liveable wages and increase the ability of companies to engage them. Another impediment is the lack of individual grants available for artists who wish to undertake creations of their own. When one considers that the average income for an individual artist on a grant is \$2,000 per month, or \$24,000 annually, one can understand that an artist cannot totally devote their time to the creative process, regardless of experience, age or desire.

Recommendations

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That, in collaboration with the artist organizations and producers, a research procedure be put in place to establish a permanent data base of statistics that can accurately document the evolving social conditions of artists and cultural workers in all spheres of Quebec theatre.
- That, in collaboration with the artist organizations and producers, research be undertaken to define a system of employment insurance accessible to artists and cultural workers in Quebec theatre possessing the status of self-employed workers.

- That, in collaboration with artists' organizations and producers, reflections be made on the issue of family-work equilibrium for artists and cultural workers in Quebec theatre.
- That discussions be held vis-à-vis theatre training in Quebec, in terms of the cohesion and complementarities of this training with respect to the development of the professional theatre milieu.

The federal and provincial governments are asked:

That the Canada Council and the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* be sufficiently supported in order that:

- The primary role played by professional theatre companies in the engagement of artists and cultural workers of all generations be recognized, and that, in order for them to achieve this end, they be accorded sufficient and stable funding to offer the social-economic conditions that reflect these individuals' training, the value of their work, and their level of professional experience.
- The critical role played by creation, research, and on-going training grants to individual artists be recognized in terms of its development of the artist, and that as a result, the number of these grants increase to reflect increases in the number of Quebec theatre artists, and finally, that the subsistence fees paid to these artists be indexed so they can devote themselves entirely to their creative process.
- The importance for professional Quebec theatre artists to be able to practice their art throughout the province be recognized, and that professional theatre companies be funded accordingly to allow and encourage the touring of these artists.

The provincial government is asked:

- That the primary role played by professional Quebec theatre companies in the integration of emerging artists and administrators be recognized, and that *Emploi Québec* along with the Ministry of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women put in place a permanent and specific program addressing the first engagement of artists and cultural workers in order that the theatre companies be able to fulfill this role.

Chapter Four: Bringing Youth into the Professional Theatre: An Act of Citizenship

This chapter refers to the importance attached to Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in terms of the responsibility of the general public and the school systems to support this branch of theatre. It discusses the ways in which TYA has increased in scope and technical requirements and that the venues in which they currently play often do not meet those requirements. It also refers to the different types of performances created for young people, including puppetry, multimedia theatre, creative theatre and new styles of production which address the abundance of offerings related to film and music.

There is notation of the complexities and costs of touring TYA and the difficulties of obtaining sufficient fees to recoup the costs of these tours and their preparations.

There is also discussion of the role of the schools and the educational system in the process of touring and accessing TYA. Although the Government of Quebec has reaffirmed its support for bringing theatre to young audiences, there has been little concrete actions taken to this effect. The chapter makes note of the recent boycott of artistic events by educators and the drastic effect on TYA production companies. Also, changes in the educational pedagogical programs have diminished the importance of the arts in society, and have decreased the number of professional artists teaching the arts.

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Conclusions

Attendance of theatrical events provides invaluable benefits to younger generations of today and tomorrow, and it is more important now than ever that access to Theatre for Young Audiences be made easier and more affordable for everyone. It is also important that the educational system and its teachers become partners with the theatrical milieu to underline the value of the arts for the younger generation.

Recommendations

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That the discussions initiated at the Second Conference of the State of Professional Theatre in Quebec on the obligatory attendance of the younger generations in Quebec to professional theatre performances be continued, and that this reflection be broadened to include all professional performing arts, along with their respective partners.

The provincial and federal governments are asked:

- That the benefits provided by the performing arts to the development and growth of young Quebecers be recognized, and as a result, that the fiscal means be put in place to encourage entire families to attend the performing arts.
- That the importance of a Quebec-wide network of performance venues adequately equipped for presentation of Theatre for Young Audiences be recognized.

That the Canada Council and the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* be sufficiently supported in order that:

- Measures be put in place dedicated to the improvement of fees paid to Theatre for Young Audience companies, and that financial resources be accorded to host venues in order to achieve these objectives, particularly in an educational context.
- The important role of cultural mediation of the production and dissemination structures of Theatre for Young Audiences be recognized, not just in terms of the 'educational' context but with the 'general public' as well, and that this work be remunerated appropriately.

The provincial government is asked:

- That the benefits provided by the performing arts to the development and growth of young Quebecers be recognized, and as a result, that regular attendance of artistic events become mandatory for all Quebec students during their formative years.
- That the determining role teachers play in a student's appreciation of performing arts be recognized in order that arts' education becomes mandatory in teachers' college and teachers' continuing education, to the effect that teachers are placed in direct contact with professional theatre productions and their artists.
- That the Ministry of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women resume their responsibility within their entente with the Ministry of Education to put in place programmes that encourage the attendance of students at professional performing arts events in order to stimulate contact between artists and students, and, that the cultural milieu take the lead in the projects which emanate from these programs.

Chapter Five: Quebec Playwrights – Support for a Unique Voice

Chapter Five discusses the access that Quebec playwrights currently have to individual grants. It also discusses the commissioning process and the difficulties playwrights experience supporting themselves on the meager fees they are paid, given the length of time that it takes to write, workshop and guide a play into production. A separate section discusses the adaptation process for a work or translation and how this work brings the playwright into a different kind of contact with other writers, giving them opportunities to increase the quality of Quebecois dramaturgy.

It is noted that (according to responses obtained from a questionnaire), the average income for a playwright for a play written and produced by a small-to medium-sized theatre company generates an average income of only \$5,000 per play, with only 4% of playwrights reporting an income greater than \$20,000 a year.

Furthermore, the level of grants accorded by the funding bodies does not reflect the increasing number of writers that are coming onto the Quebec scene, with statistics showing that the envelope accorded to writers by CALQ decreased from \$233,000 in 2001-2002 to just over \$140,000 in 2005-2006. The Canada Council envelope was limited to \$148,000 during the same period of time.

In terms of translation of texts from French to English, the Canada Council's budgets were extremely limited, with \$23,351 being allocated in 2001-2002, decreasing to \$19,782 in 2005-2006.

Conclusions

Quebec playwrights must be offered better working conditions and funding to increase the quality of their work, so that these very important voices in Quebec culture will be heard on a larger scale, both in the province and beyond.

Recommendations

The theatre milieu is asked:

- That, in view of the societal force represented by contemporary writing and the intellectual value of those who practice the artform, professional theatre companies in Quebec encourage the presence and involvement of playwrights at the core of their organizations.
- That a special fund for Quebec dramaturgy be created for Quebec playwrights that would be financed through applying a portion of the rights for works that have already fallen into the public domain, or any other type of contribution.

The provincial and federal governments are asked:

That the Canada Council and the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* be sufficiently supported in order that:

- They properly recognize the fundamental role that Quebec dramatists play in the expression of the *Québécois* reality as well as their enrichment of Quebec dramaturgy, and, as a result, create a program of grants for research, creation and translation exclusively reserved for playwrights and adapted to take into consideration their needs and numbers.

Conclusion

The five themes that constitute the basis of this document give only a technical sense of an artform that expresses itself more through mystery, the unforeseen and the unpredictable.

Theatre is a secular art that is fundamentally humble, a craft whose profound meaning is felt through the human encounters it engenders in society. These human encounters can only be but rich and fertile for those who have the opportunity to experience them, and through these encounters, which transpire in four stages, can we appreciate the immensity of this art, which emerges from dreams and the ephemeral, all the while remaining resolutely anchored in its particular age and epoch.

The first encounter of theatrical art is the secret intimacy of the artist faced with himself. Whether it be a playwright, a director, an actor or a scenic designer, the artist chooses to express himself and grow in the heart of his society through his dedication to theatrical art, nourishing himself with a protracted personal experience that has shaped both him and his perception of life, so he can express his own artistic voice and unique theatrical language.

The second encounter of theatrical art is between a group of artists who, commencing from a desire, project or utopia, gather together regularly to combine their individual perspectives and give the best of their talents to the incarnation of an emerging theatrical work. These artists need to be supported by seasoned cultural workers, who are indispensable partners in the final creation of any theatrical work.

The third encounter is the sharing of the theatrical work from the artists to the curious—that is, the public—who come to see the final result. When the theatrical work is realized, the singular desire is for this exchange to travel to the furthest reaches of the world and to last for as long as possible.

The fourth and final encounter of theatrical art is that of the spectator, an encounter both impalpable and mysterious; someone who, having attended many theatrical presentations, finds himself, like the artist, face to face with himself, and, for the space of a minute, a day, a year or a lifetime, departs on an interior journey in the company of all that this theatrical work has given to the deepest parts of his being.

In order that this last encounter between the spectator and the theatre be lived and relived the most intensely and the most frequently, Quebec theatre has a duty to uphold and safeguard the first three encounters.

This is the challenge for the artists and cultural workers in Quebec theatre. In order to accomplish this, however, they cannot do it alone.