

Dance: A step in every direction



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Andrew Skeels stars in *Mosaic*, a five-part quartet with Lila-Mae Talbot, Kenji Matsuyama Ribeiro, Christina Brody Harwood and Diane Labrosse. (Photo: Allen Birnbach) *PHOTO: ALLEN BIRNBACH / ©ALLEN BIRNBACH, WWW.ALLENBIRNB*

Note: This is a corrected version of an earlier story. Correction appended below.

MONTREAL — Perseverance seems to have paid off for Rafik Sabbagh, artistic director and indefatigable central force behind Quartiers Danses, the annual nine-day Montreal dance-fest-in-your-neighbourhood.

For his 12th edition, which begins Friday, Sept. 12, Sabbagh has assembled an impressive lineup of local and international talent that will be performing in 19 downtown venues. Marquee names like Ballet Preljocaj and Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal are in the mix, but Quartiers Danses has also become a welcome forum for small-scale troupes and emerging young choreographers.

True to Quartiers Danses' self-imposed democratic mission, free outdoor performances will be popping up at places like Atwater Market, the Mount Royal Kondiaronk lookout and, of course, the Place des Arts Esplanade, which is becoming a Montreal Times Square of year-round public culture interaction.

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Their tongues firmly in cheek, Sabbagh and Quartiers Danses president Marc Béland had journalists chuckling throughout the news conference to announce this year's lineup. Sabbagh the reserved thinker was the perfect straight man for the hyperkinetic comic mugging of Béland, one of Montreal's best-known actor/dancers.

"Be a little more serious, Marc," entreated Sabbagh with a smile. "There are government officials sitting in the audience."

Quartiers Danses' eclecticism has been both strength and weakness. A strength because variety can attract people who might never consider watching dance. A weakness because Quartiers Danses' diversity of programs and venues makes it hard for the public at large to identify the event with a single artistic vision. (For example, Danse Danse, another long-running series, is clearly associated with Place des Arts and with big-name international contemporary dance.) Thankfully, Quartiers Danses has dropped the subtitle Festival Transatlantique, a name that served only to confuse the event with the annual Festival TransAmériques.

Although the aim of Quartiers Danses is to bring dance into people's neighbourhoods, several notable shows will be staged in one central venue: the Gesù. The intimate scale of the Gesù's amphitheatre should suit the confessional side of *Dancing in the Third Act*, a work by Nova Scotia choreographer Randy Glynn for six couples between the ages of 60 and 77. The 12 performers, all amateurs, reveal what it means to them to be entering the last act in their lives. Baby boomers can compare notes.

Glynn's staging was apparently inspired by Kontakthof, Pina Bausch's famous 1978 examination of male/female relations. But in purely thematic terms, there might be a greater affinity with Jean-Claude Gallotta's *Three Generations*, seen here in 2005, in which children, young people and mature dancers gave successive looks at three stages of life.

The Gesù's other offerings include *La Vie secrète* by Ève-Chems de Brouwer, whose *J'entends les murs* for two blind dancers was among the most memorable and touching shows seen in Montreal last year. In her new solo, de Brouwer looks at her fear that people might invade her most private thoughts. On the same bill is Angélique Willkie's dance/theatre solo *Portrait of the Artist As ...*

The Gesù shows also include works by a good number of choreographers who either are or were dancing for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Former Les Grands dancer Frédéric Tavernini, who has partnered with Louise Lecavalier in recent years, presents *La Mort de la Vierge*. Les Grands corps dancer Andrew Skeels, whose work *Remembering Giovanni* was a crowd favourite at last year's *Quartiers Danses*, is presenting a five-part quartet, *Mosaic*, danced by Lila-Mae Talbot, Kenji Matsuyama Ribeiro, Christina Brody Harwood and Diane Labrosse.

In a show of her own works in 2012, Les Grands demi-soloist Eva Kolarova displayed a budding talent for both abstract and narrative choreography. Her latest solo, *Cycle*, is on a triple bill at the Gesù with works by other dancers-turned-choreographers, Audrey Thibodeau of *O Vertigo* and Dylan Crossman, formerly with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

Those curious to see something of Berlin's bustling avant-garde dance scene can investigate *Dancing to the End* by Israeli-born choreographer Nir de Volff. A sardonic wit, de Volff has admitted to being kicked out of his local folk-dance group and running away from ballet class. He did manage, however, to dance with several Tel Aviv companies before settling in 2004 in Berlin, where he found a welcome at Dock 11, a forum of eclectic dancemaking. In *Dancing to the End*, an international trio made up of an Australian, a German and an Israeli wonder about the meaning of death.

One of Europe's best-known and widely produced contemporary choreographers, Angelin Preljocaj has brought his full company from France to Montreal twice in the *Danse Danse* series. Although his attempts at innovation

seem self-conscious at times, Preljocaj can also use the lines and extensions of classical ballet technique to his advantage. At the Gesù, four of his company dancers will interpret Empty Moves (Parts I, II and III), an exercise in sculpting shapes with the body.

As for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, the flashy company is presenting four duets in Bourgie Hall of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The crowd-pleasing program — BJM always aims to please — includes Benjamin Millepied's Closer, which he created for Céline Cassone in 2006 before she became a company member, Annabelle Ochoa's splendidly sensual La Pluie, Wen Wei Wang's Night Box, and Zero In On, a duet by Cayetano Soto, who staged a restless group work, Fuel, for the company's 40th anniversary last year.

Among Quartiers Danses' non-stage offerings are dance films, including one about Preljocaj, a photo exhibit by Jackie Hopfinger showing scenes from Preljocaj's Empty Moves, and a mass "happening" at the Kondiaronk lookout organized by former Solid State dancer Helen Simard to promote the importance of the arts.

Quartiers Danses — coming to a neighbourhood near you.

Quartiers Danses takes place Friday, Sept. 12, to Sept. 20 at various venues. Tickets cost \$18 to \$23 (\$17.40 to \$32.60 for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal). Outdoor performances are free. For more information about shows and venues, visit [quartiersdances.com \(http://www.quartiersdances.com/en\)](http://www.quartiersdances.com/en).

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Back for a third year, the seven-day Montreal Flamenco Festival begins on Sunday and features local dancers Lina Moros, Sarah Bronsard, Rae Bowhay, Julie Fontaine and Lynne McGee, the Toronto troupes Fin de Fiesta Flamenco and Carmen Romero, Calgary's Fiona Malena Ensemble and the troupe of Andalusia native Dani Navaro.

The accompanying singers and musicians include the splendid Montreal guitarist Caroline Plante, who again organized the festival along with Benoît Bigham.

For showtimes and venues, call 514-969-6128 or visit [festivalflamencodemontreal.org \(http://www.festivalflamencodemontreal.org/\)](http://www.festivalflamencodemontreal.org/).

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story included two incorrect photo captions for Dancing to the End and Empty Moves.

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