

CANADIAN DANCE LEAPS ONTO THE WORLD STAGE

Les Ballets jazz
de Montréal

Canadian dance has leapt onto the world stage in recent years. A major success story from Quebec is Les Ballets jazz de Montréal, one of the busiest touring groups in North America. Artistic director Louis Robitaille has given Les Ballets jazz a crisp, contemporary, neoclassical style. Its electrifying performances wowed audiences in Asia in 2001, and in Europe in 2002. This year Mexico was on the itinerary: a February tour assisted by DFAIT's Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion Division, featuring the widely acclaimed *Light-Time-Open Space I & II*.

Édouard Lock's La La La Human Steps is another of the high-calibre Canadian dance companies active on the international scene. DFAIT has been instrumental in the success of the group and is currently providing assistance for the world tour of *Amelia*, the company's latest creation.

The work premiered in Prague, Czech Republic, in October 2002 (see p. 3). Over the next two years the production will tour Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and South America.

A high note of 2002 was the Cervantino Festival in Guanajuato, Mexico. The two prominent Canadian dance companies that performed there could not have differed more in style: Ballet British Columbia is a progressive classical ballet

troupe, while Les gens d'R specializes in aerial ballet and circus acrobatics in the manner of Cirque du Soleil. Both received assistance from DFAIT to perform at the festival and in several other venues across Mexico.

A major event within the international ballet community was a conference in May 2002 on the past, present and future of ballet, hosted by National Ballet of Canada artistic director James Kudelka. This was the first conference in North America to bring together the artistic directors of

leading North American and European ballet companies. The conference focused on the role of the artistic director in dealing with a variety of aesthetic, administrative and managerial considerations.

Manitoba's Royal Winnipeg Ballet has won acclaim around the world for its innovative productions of both classical and contemporary ballet. In summer 2001 it toured Asia, with several stops in China, performing *Dracula* and *Butterfly*.

A DFAIT priority continues to be the international promotion of First Nations culture. Recently funded projects include the inspired Inuit group Aqsarniit, an ensemble that mesmerizes audiences with drum dancing and throat singing. In Vancouver, British Columbia, the Raven Spirit Dance Company received funding for a unique cross-cultural project that brought performance artist Yukio Waguri from Japan for workshops and performances. Among other groups, the Dakwakada Dancers went to the Netherlands last summer and Kehewin Native Performance went to Switzerland last November.

DFAIT also supports artists and groups from Canada's cultural communities. For example, the Menaka Thakkar Dance Company, based in Toronto, Ontario, received a grant to visit Britain in 2000; the troupe performs Bharata Natyam (Indian classical dance). Another grant recipient in 2000 was Toronto's Fujiwara Dance, which performs Butoh (an avant-garde Japanese dance form). And last summer, assistance went to Kokoro Dance of Vancouver for a tour of Poland; the company integrates the aesthetics of Europe and Japan.

In many different styles, in many different traditions, Canadian dance is scoring successes—yet more evidence of our country's vibrant, diverse culture. 🍀



photos: David Cooper

Tara Birtwhistle and Johnny W. Chang in *Dracula*, an original production presented by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet during its 2001 Asian tour