

FOR CANADA, ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

When *Amelia* had its world première at the State Opera in Prague last October, the curtain rose on more than the nine dancers of *La La La Human Steps*. Sharing the spotlight with the celebrated troupe was their homeland of Canada. But in fact the opening almost didn't happen.

Amelia was the culmination of a three-week festival of Canadian performing arts in the Czech capital. The production's mix of contemporary dance, video and music projected a very different image of Canada from the stereotype of lumberjacks and polar bears. But when flooding forced the declaration of a state of emergency two months earlier in Prague, the event was almost washed down the river.

Normally, the Vltava River winds peacefully through this picturesque city. In August 2002, though, heavy rains brought water levels to record highs, inundating much of the historic old town. One building damaged was the Archa Theatre, where *Amelia* was to be performed. Facing repairs that would cost around \$3 million, the Archa decided it could no longer handle a large-scale première.

Fortunately, at the last minute some Czech-based producers (including a Canadian) provided the necessary support and the show was able to open at the State Opera. Margaret Huber, Canada's Ambassador to the Czech Republic, was delighted that after all the Montreal company could begin its world tour of *Amelia* in Prague: "Like Montreal, it is a city that takes pride in culture, artistic excellence and high talent."

Canadian cultural events abroad don't usually have to overcome such obstacles. What they share with the opening of *Amelia* in Prague is something more positive: in cities all over the world, Canada's artists are winning acclaim, making a name for themselves and their country.



The spires of Prague Castle soar above the capital of the Czech Republic, where *La La La Human Steps* premiered *Amelia* in October 2002.



A scene from *Amelia*, the new production of *La La La Human Steps*, choreographed by artistic director Édouard Lock

Culture may not be what first springs to mind when people from other countries think of

Canada, but that is changing—thanks to cultural stars such as writers Margaret Atwood and Rohinton Mistry, theatre director Robert Lepage, filmmaker Atom Egoyan, installation artist Janet Cardiff, the Canadian Opera Company, and a host of other artists and groups. With their success, they are helping Canada emerge on the world scene, refashioning its national identity along the way.

"Our artists tell the world who we are by sharing our perspectives, values and tremendous creativity with the world," says Curtis Barlow, Director of the Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion Division at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) in Ottawa. "And that influences the way people abroad see Canada when it comes time to invest, immigrate, import goods, travel or pursue post-secondary education."

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