



Le Grand Continental® **A choreography by Sylvain Émard**

In co-production with the Festival TransAmériques

Who would have predicted that one day Sylvain Émard would combine contemporary dance with line dancing? Who would have believed that the choreographer, renowned for his refined style and precise movement, would rely on the authenticity and brio of amateur dancers to galvanize audiences? In realizing that fantastic challenge for the Festival TransAmériques (FTA) in 2009, this major figure in Quebec contemporary dance provided resounding proof of the unifying, festive power of dance in a spectacular outdoor presentation.

For this first edition, **Le Grand Continental®** was performed by some sixty dancers. Back by popular demand, the cast doubled in 2010 for **Le Très Grand Continental** at the FTA. A handful of professional performers accompanied 120 dancers of all ages and backgrounds, all driven by the same passion and the same infectious joy. To the rhythms of country, techno, disco, waltzes and R&B music, they danced as one and had the entire Montreal downtown neighborhood rocking to their dynamic vibes. **Le Très Grand Continental** proved as popular as the original, as was **El Gran Continental**, the version presented at the Festival de México in March 2011 and based on Latin social dancing. In 2011, the concept further expanded by featuring 200 non-professional dancers in a whole new piece: **Le Continental XL**. Once again, it was the most festive event at the FTA. For this occasion, Sylvain Émard was named Personality of the Week by *La Presse*/Radio-Canada.

In 2012, the fabulous adventure of Sylvain Émard's **Grand Continental®** was exported to New York, Philadelphia and Portland, Oregon. The grand undertaking in the U.S. began in the Big Apple when some 150 New Yorkers took The South Street Seaport by storm, as part of the River To River Festival, co-presented by The Joyce Theater. Then the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival featured 150 dancers performing by the front of the steps of the emblematic Philadelphia Museum of Art. For this version Sylvain Émard imagined an original choreographic section based on *Philly Soul*, a musical movement of the 70's. Finally, **Le Grand Continental®** launched the celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of the White Bird contemporary dance series in Portland. Not less than 160 dance lovers took over Pioneer Courthouse Square in the heart of a city renowned for its dynamic cultural scene.

After conquering the U.S., **Le Grand Continental®** was performed in Ottawa on June 2013, as part of Canada Dance Festival edition entitled *Changing Perspectives*. For its first presentation in Canada outside of Montreal, more than 100 dance enthusiasts were taking part, rousing and shaking up the capital.

Le Grand Continental® has proven to be addictive. Indeed, the show was reprised in Mexico City in the fall of 2013. This time around, 150 local non-dancers gathered in three neighborhoods of the Mexican capital to offer performances of **El Gran Continental**. Afterwards, in May 2014, 110 Bostonians shook the Copley Square with **Le Grand Continental®**, celebrating the closing weekend of Celebrity Series of Boston's 75th anniversary. **Le Grand Continental®** in Boston received the People's Choice Award for Best Non-profit Event Concept (budget under \$250,000) at the National BizBash Event Style Awards.

In January 2015, the show headed to the other side of the country, where 70 Vancouverites performed the huge line dance as part of the PuSh Festival. Then, in May 2015, **Le Grand Continental®** was unveiled at the Ansan Street Festival in South Korea. In February 2016, the New Zealand Festival launched its 30th anniversary edition with **Le Grand Continental®**. One hundred fifty New Zealanders performed the 30-minute choreography at Wellington's Civic Square. For each of these two editions, Sylvain Émard created a new choreographic section inspired on the local colours and social dances.

To celebrate Montreal's 375th Anniversary, Sylvain Émard Danse created **Le Super Méga Continental**. This latest offspring in **Le Grand Continental®** family featured 375 amateur dancers at Place des Festivals, in September 2017.

In 2018, two new continents are added to **Le Grand Continental**'s trajectory. After featuring 150 Chileans to mark the 25th anniversary of the Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil last January, the show boasted as many Germans for the Potsdamer Tanztage, in May. These two editions earned Sylvain Émard Danse the CINARS International Collaboration Award with the Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil and the Potsdamer Tanztage. In June, **Le Grand Continental**[®] comes back to Canada under the auspices of Luminato Festival. No less than 230 dancers danced their hearts out on Nathan Square Philips, in the center of Toronto. Afterwards, the show headed to the United States, where 165 Philadelphians featured in **Le Super Grand Continental** on the Philadelphia Museum of Art plaza in September. This edition marks the return of the concept in this American city. Another reprise took place this fall: **Le Grand Continental**[®] launched fabrik Potsdam's new season, mid-September.

To date, 120 000 persons were won over by the enthusiasm and festive spirit that characterize the different versions of the **Le Grand Continental**[®] concept, and some 3000 dancers have participated in one or another of the 21 editions of the show.

TWO WORLDS IN ONE

That the choreographer Sylvain Émard decided to combine contemporary dance with line dancing may come as a surprise to some. Yet his fascination for this traditional folk art goes back a long way. It is rooted in his childhood, in the basement of his parish church where he discovered the pleasures of social dancing. He was soon captivated by the concentration required for line dancing, by the trance-like state it provoked among the dancers and by their enthusiasm for the form. Many years later it coloured some of his pieces : one can find implied references to it in **Mensonge Variations** (1998), **Scènes d'intérieur** (2001) or **Wave** (2008). With **Le Grand Continental**[®], Sylvain Émard is returning to his first love in strikingly original fashion.

This time round he has concocted a festive work, joining the structured format of line dancing with the organic nature and expressive movement of contemporary dance. While maintaining a methodical approach in developing a wide palette of dance groupings, Sylvain Émard emphasizes busts and arms, brings bodies down to the ground and creates dramatic situations that changes both our ideas about line dancing and our perception of the urban environment where it is performed.

OPEN TO ALL

If the transmission of the communicative power of dance and the exploration of the body as a source of language lie at the core of Sylvain Émard's artistic approach, making this art form accessible to a wide audience is also part of his aim. Not content in **Le Grand Continental**[®] to simply step into the street for direct contact with spectators, he also decided to include members of the audience in the creative process. Consequently, only a few professional dancers guide the impressive casts of amateur dancers, which vary from 65 to 200 performers. Most of the non-professional performers are dance students, amateurs of line-dancing and dance enthusiasts of all ages, recruited on-site and online.

In accepting the challenge, the choreographer plunges back into the world of line dancing, directing rehearsals twice a week over a two-month period. The soundtrack by Martin Tétreault reflects the spirit of line dancing, imbued with contemporary accents.

LE GRAND CONTINENTAL ON THE ROADS

When the concept is exported abroad, it integrates local amateur and professional dancers of each visited city. Sylvain Émard travels to each city to direct an important part of the rehearsals with the local participants. He is assisted by local professional dancers who act like rehearsal assistants that are also part of the cast. The process takes place over a period of approximately three month, for a total of 20 rehearsal sessions.

Contact : **Pascale Joubert, Development Officer**
T : +1 514 473-0010 pjoubert@sylvainemard.com

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