

I am trying to develop dance that is anchored in everyday life, without losing its poetry. I want to concentrate on what is at the very heart of life in our society.

HISTORY OF THE COMPANY

“Since dance has such great evocative and expressive power, creating a new work always requires much reflection and a thorough development of ideas. As a form of expression, dance may have a long history—yet each performance is necessarily of the moment. It follows that dance must be constantly renewed. To meet this challenge, I enter into a dialogue with the body. The more it speaks to me, the more I understand the full scope of what it has to say. This is how a vocabulary of movement can be developed, and it is precisely what I love most about choreography: being able to develop a language that allows me to investigate the body and reveal some of its deepest secrets.” Sylvain Émard

Sylvain Émard first distinguished himself as a dancer working with renowned choreographers such as Jean-Pierre Perreault, Jo Lechay, Jeanne Renaud, Louise Bédard and Daniel Léveillé before he formed his own company in 1990. Here his signature style soon emerged. Émard is recognized for his complex and refined choreographic vocabulary. His approach draws on the kinaesthetic power of dance by highlighting the inherent intelligence of the body. His repertoire now includes over thirty original pieces that have had a resounding impact all over the world.

Since its foundation, Sylvain Émard Danse has continually evolved. During its first years, artistic director and choreographer Sylvain Émard created mainly solo works such as **Ozone, Ozone** (1987) and **L’Imposture des sens** (1988). These early creations were presented at the Danséchange Montréal-Bruxelles event and took the company to Europe for the first time. In 1990, the company co-produced **De l’Éden au Septentrion** with Danse-Cité. The next year, the piece **Retour d’exil** premiered at the Festival international de nouvelle danse (FIND) in Montreal. These works, characterized by a strong theatrical aesthetic, constituted a meeting of forms: silent theatre and the language of choreography. In 1990, Sylvain Émard received the **Jacqueline Lemieux Prize** of the Canada Council for the Arts for his accomplishments.

Terrains Vagues (1993) marked the beginning of a second cycle. This piece for three men and a woman allowed the choreographer to develop a new dance involving more interactions between the dancers, thereby energizing the space in a new way. The approach to set design played a key role in the creative process when the rehearsal floor was covered with three tons of soil for a period of three months. This created a perfect fit between dance and its scenic environment and maximized the impact of the work. Presented in Glasgow (Scotland), at the Canada Dance Festival (Ottawa), in Montreal and on tours across Western Canada and the Maritimes, this production initiated a much wider dissemination of Sylvain Émard’s repertoire.

In 1994, Sylvain Émard felt the need to return to the solo structure, choreographing and performing **Des siècles avec vous**. He was inspired by portraits and self-portraits in paintings by Rembrandt and Francis Bacon. Émard made a definitive break from the theatrical references and created a dance based essentially on kinaesthesia. The show was publicly and critically acclaimed, and Sylvain Émard was named Dance Personality of the Year by the Montreal cultural weekly VOIR.

With **Rumeurs** (1996), a male quintet co-produced with the Canada Dance Festival, Sylvain Émard explored nature of the human soul under the theme of memory. The piece was a great success: attendance was exceptionally high and critics were more than generous. Sylvain Émard Danse was awarded the **Grand Prix du Conseil des Arts de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal** in 1996, for this piece. The same year, he received the prestigious **Jean A. Chalmers Award** for the body of his work. This acknowledgement constitutes the highest distinction for dance in Canada, and represented a great achievement for the artist.

With the creation of **Mensonge Variations** (1998), a work for six dancers, Sylvain Émard wanted to explore the formal nature of movement with a view to revealing meaning that had been hidden. This piece clearly represents Émard’s most formal and abstract approach to choreography to date. After a highly regarded world première in

Montreal, the company began a Quebec tour and was invited to perform for the first time in Paris as part of Printemps du Québec en France.

Once again, after creating dance for a group, Sylvain Émard felt the need to return to the stage. This led to **Te souvient-il?** (2000), a pas de deux co-created with his long-time collaborator, choreographer Louise Bédard. The resulting work drew on experiments in set design by the artist Pierre Bruneau. This collaboration marked the beginning of a new creative cycle for Sylvain Émard, one in which the work of visual artists plays a central role in his choreographic development. Acclaimed as a unique piece, reflecting the artistic maturity of both choreographers/dancers, **Te souvient-il?** was performed more than fifty times across Quebec, English-speaking Canada, Mexico and France.

After being developed in several residencies in Quebec and France, **Scènes d'intérieur** premiered in October 2001. The creative process was based on a documentary approach that drew inspiration from the dancers' life experiences. Video technology is an important scenic element in **Scènes d'intérieur**. The result is a choreography in which relationships with others take centre stage. This show was the company's first international co-production, resulting from a collaboration between Sylvain Émard Danse, Montreal's Agora de la danse and Centre Culturel Aragon in France. **Scènes d'intérieur** was acclaimed in twenty cities across Canada, France and Great Britain.

In 2004, Sylvain Émard began a new creative cycle called *Climatology of bodies* which takes climate as a metaphor for the external elements affecting our daily lives. **Pluie**, created in 2004 at Usine C in Montreal, is the first piece of this trilogy. With this piece, Sylvain Émard examined the impact of these elements on the relationship between a man and a woman.

Temps de chien (2005), second instalment of *Climatology of bodies* explores the uncertainties, uneasiness and desires provoked by an increasingly unsettled environment. For this creation, Sylvain Émard Danse benefited from residencies at Agora de la danse (Montreal), at the Grand Théâtre de Lorient (France) and at the Banff Centre (Canada). This highly acclaimed piece toured Europe in April 2007. **Temps de chien** was warmly received at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, at DanceXchange in Birmingham (United Kingdom), at the Grand Théâtre de Lorient and at the Schouwburg in Arnhem (Netherlands). **Temps de chien** is an international co-production by Sylvain Émard Danse, the National Arts Centre (Ottawa), the Banff Centre, the Canada Dance Festival (Ottawa) and the Grand Théâtre de Lorient.

In December 2007, Sylvain Émard embarked on the creation of **Wave** – third and last chapter of the *Climatology of bodies*. This work for five female dancers successfully premiered at the Zeeland Nazomerfestival in Middelburg (Netherlands) in August 2008, before touring the South of the Netherlands and Germany. **Wave** made its North American première at Usine C in Montreal, in September, 2008.

In March 2009, Sylvain Émard Danse presented the full version of the *Climatology of bodies* – **Pluie** (2004), **Temps de chien** (2005) and **Wave** (2008) – at the renowned New Territories festival in Glasgow, Scotland. These three seminal works by Sylvain Émard were acclaimed by audiences and critics alike. Welsh audiences also gave a warm welcome to **Wave**, which was presented at Sherman Cymru in Cardiff, and at Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon. **Wave** continued its extensive travels in 2010, with performances in Quebec, Canada and France. **Wave** is an international co-production of Sylvain Émard Danse, Station Zuid (The Netherlands), the Grand Théâtre de Lorient (France) and Usine C (Canada).

In 2009, Sylvain Émard Danse created **Le Grand Continental**[®], at the Festival TransAmériques (FTA). Co-produced by the FTA, this unique show, a hybrid of contemporary dance and line dancing, included some sixty amateur dancers of varying ages and backgrounds. Given the warm response to this initial version of the piece, Sylvain Émard Danse electrified once again Montreal in 2010 with its presentation of **Le Très Grand Continental**, featuring this time some 125 dancers at the FTA.

While **Le Grand Continental**[®] kept expanding, Sylvain Émard unveiled **Fragments – Volume I** at the Canada Dance Festival, in June 2010. This creation inspired by the notion of urgency, is a collection of four striking short pieces (three solos and a duet). This strong work made its Montreal debut as part of Danse Danse series, co-presented with the Saison Cinquième Salle, in October 2011. Afterwards, **Fragments – Volume I** toured Canada and France in March 2012. **Fragments – Volume I** was co-produced by Sylvain Émard Danse and the Canada Dance Festival in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut. In May 2015, the piece was part of the Brighton Festival and the Dublin Dance Festival.

In May 2011, Sylvain Émard explored once again his line dancing concept, creating a new version of his celebrated **Grand Continental**[®]. Even more ambitious than the two previous editions, **Le Continental XL** featured 200 amateur dancers and kicked off the 5th Festival TransAmériques, at Place des Festivals in the heart

of Montreal. For this occasion, Sylvain Émard was named **Personality of the Week** by **La Presse/Radio-Canada**. Two months earlier, the Mexican version of this contagious spectacle, **El Gran Continental**, was presented during the Festival de México, in March 2011, with 110 amateur dancers performing in the historic centre of the capital. In 2013, **El Gran Continental** was reprised in three emblematic neighbourhoods of the Mexican capital, with 150 local non-dancers.

Audiences in New York, Philadelphia, Portland (Oregon), Boston (United States), Ottawa, Vancouver (Canada), Ansan (South Korea), Wellington (New Zealand), Santiago (Chile), Potsdam (Germany) and Toronto were won over by the enthusiasm and festive spirit that characterize **Le Grand Continental**[®]. To date, the different versions of the concept have attracted over 120 000 spectators across the world, and some 3000 dancers have participated in one or another of the 21 editions of the show. **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 2014** in New York. In 2018, together with the Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil (Chile) and the Potsdamer Tanztage (Germany), Sylvain Émard Danse was honoured to receive the **CINARS International Collaboration Award** for the recreation of **Le Grand Continental**[®].

In October 2012, Sylvain Émard embarked on a new creation for seven male dancers entitled **Ce n'est pas la fin du monde** (It's not the end of the world). This group piece premiered in Bordeaux at Théâtre Jean Vilar as part of the dance biennial Danse Toujours, in the Great Bordeaux in April 2013. This work is co-produced by Sylvain Émard Danse, Ville d'Eysines/Le Plateau, Théâtre de Lorient (France), and the Brian Webb Dance Company (Canada), and received the support of iddac, Agence culturelle de la Gironde. Also, during this biennial, the company reprised **Wave** (2008) and **Fragments – Volume I** (2010). In addition, Sylvain Émard created a self-portrait in dance to mark the opening of the festival.

In 2014, **Ce n'est pas la fin du monde** crossed the Atlantic anew, for several dates in France. In 2015 and 2016, the show was performed in Canada: Montréal, Regina, Toronto, Edmonton et Québec welcomed the company, who celebrated its 25th anniversary.

In 2017, Sylvain Émard was back on stage for the first time in 15 years, with **Le chant des sirènes**, a new solo that premiered at Agora de la danse. That same year, he also presented **Le Super Méga Continental**, with 375 amateur dancers at Place des Festivals, to celebrate in grand fashion the 375th anniversary of Montreal. In the spring of 2018, **Le chant des sirènes** was effusively applauded in New York before touring Quebec.

Inspired by the ritual aspect of dance, and the altered states of consciousness it can provoke, Émard commenced the creation of **Rhapsodie** in 2019. Driven by a powerful ensemble of 20 dancers, the piece celebrates the visceral, instinctive parts of our nature, capturing the sometimes subversive abandon of bodies in movement. Hit by the pandemic, the work was set to premiere as part of Danse Danse in novembre 2020, but was postponed. In response to this interrupted trajectory, the choreographer imagined the **Preludes**. This site-specific diptych announces the piece to be presented, using current constraints to explore the very essence of **Rhapsodie**, today deeply shaken. **Prélude #1 – Le Cercle**, first opus of the dyad, was captured on film and recently screened as part of the official selection of the 39th Festival International de Films sur l'Art (2021). Its debut will unfurl on the Esplanade of Place des Arts on October 2 and 3, 2021, in Danse Danse's season.

A proponent of the commingling of genres, Sylvain Émard navigates with ease from one milieu to another – film, theatre, the visual arts and opera, as seen, for example by his collaboration on Lorin Maazel's opera *1984*, directed by Robert Lepage and presented on the celebrated stage of Covent Garden in London in 2005. Sylvain Émard also directed a reprise of the opera at the legendary La Scala in Milan in 2008, and at the Valencia Opera House in Spain in 2011. In 2017, at the behest of theater director René-Richard Cyr, Sylvain Émard is creating the choreographies for the musical *Demain matin, Montréal m'attend* at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal.

Sylvain Émard has long been committed to actively participating in the development of contemporary dance and to responding to the challenges faced by the dance milieu. In 1987 he founded with several colleagues the Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique. Almost thirty years later, that innovative centre used and supported by several member dance companies is a model admired worldwide. From 1993 to 1994 he was chairman of the board of the Regroupement québécois de la danse, and organized the country's first-ever convention of dance companies. He was also a member of the organizing committee of the second dance convention in 2008-09. He sits on several boards of directors: the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards (2000 to 2006), La danse sur les routes du Québec (2011 to 2016), and since 2011 the Prix de la danse de Montréal.

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