

PROMART CANCELLATION / THE FALLOUT

Grands Ballets short \$150,000

JAMES BRADSHAW

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Canada is being embarrassed on the world stage by its lack of support for cultural touring, says the executive director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens as he scrambles to find backing for the company's forthcoming tour to Israel, Egypt and Europe.

Ten days before embarking on a four-week tour, the company is short \$150,000 because of the cancellation last year of Promart and Trade Routes, two government programs that supported the export of Canadian culture, the dance company says.

Les Grands Ballets is travelling in part to help celebrate Tel Aviv's centenary as well as the 60th anniversary of Canadian-Israeli diplomatic relations. Such high-profile guests as Israeli President Shimon Peres and Egyptian first lady Suzanne Mubarak have been invited to opening-night galas in Tel Aviv and Cairo. But Alain Dancyger, Les Grands Ballets' executive director, says corporate and private sponsors at home and abroad are bewildered that the Conservative government is not one of the tour's supporters.

The company planned the tour years in advance and budgeted for \$250,000 in federal funding toward the \$1-million total price tag, based on what they received in past years from Promart and Trade Routes. But since those programs were scrapped, he said, he has received "a flat no" from Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore and Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon when asking for financial help. Trade Routes was operated under the Heritage department and Promart was under Foreign Affairs.

"What are we supposed to say about Canada? It's going to be kind of embarrassing. I'm going to thank all the Egyptian companies [who have sponsored us] very much ... but I cannot say thank you to Canada," he said.

Moore's communications director, Deirdra McCracken, pointed out that Les Grands Ballets received a mere \$6,500 from Trade Routes last year, and said "Canadian Heritage still gives \$22-million per year for international export, and the Canada Council for the Arts - whose

budget we've increased by \$30-million - provides \$13-million per year for touring." Between 2006 and 2008, Les Grands Ballets received \$230,000, \$155,000 and \$185,000 respectively from Promart toward tours of Europe and the United States.

Les Grands Ballets plans its annual tours two to three years in advance and solidified its lengthy negotiations with presenters from Egypt and Israel while touring last summer before the two programs were cancelled. Now, if the company can't find another \$150,000 before it leaves for Tel Aviv on May 28, it risks running a deficit this year and putting pressure on next year's tour to Shanghai, China.

"It puts us in a very difficult situation because the board initially asked us not to go into deficit," Dancyger said. "Contracts had been signed a long time ago, so we don't want to renege on our agreements," he said.

Dancyger thinks the Tories have a responsibility to try to help groups such as his, which planned international work before the touring programs were cancelled.

"My solution, which is very short-term at this point because there is a financial crisis we have to deal with, is that some emergency funds be set up as quickly as possible," he said.

Catherine Loubier, director of communications for Minister Cannon, said that cultural support is still available through embassies around the world. "Culture is still our mandate abroad," she said. "It may not be a financial contribution, but there certainly are resources put to that aim."

Among the performances on the tour are Stijn Celis's *Noces* and Mauro Bigonzetti's *Cantata* in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Cairo. Dancyger recently returned from his third trip to Cairo to drum up corporate support.

"[The foreign companies] would say, 'Yeah, we will support you, but why doesn't Canada support this tour?' "