

The Gazette

DANCE

Les Grands' summer in Paris

Performances mark first visit in 30 years

VICTOR SWOBODA
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Quebec City's 400th anniversary celebrations go to Paris in July when Les Grands Ballets Canadiens mark the festive birthday with 16 performances at the showcase Grand Palais in the heart of the French capital.

Artistic director Gradimir Pankov made the announcement yesterday at a news conference where he also announced a new competition for young Canadian choreographers in September.

The Montreal company has toured Europe and the United States extensively in the past several years – it leaves on a 20-day tour of Germany, Spain, Italy and Luxembourg at the end of the month – but the Paris engagement is its first in 30 years. There's further lustre, too. Les Grands will be performing in Les étés de la danse de Paris, a 4-year-old dance series that hosts one major foreign company each year. Its honorary president is Madame Jacques Chirac, wife of the country's former president.

The Paris series has attracted big numbers of dance fans – 45,000 for the National Ballet of Cuba last year and 40,000 for the Alvin Ailey Dance Company from New York the year before – and big international media coverage.

Over the course of the three-and-a-half week engagement, which begins with a gala opening night on July 9 in the presence of the Canadian ambassador and Quebec's delegate general, the Paris audience will see four works created especially for Les Grands by Ohad Naharin, Didy Veldman, Stijn Celis and Mauro Bigonzetti, and two other pieces by Bigonzetti and Jiri Kylián.

The Grand Palais, an Art Nouveau landmark that usually hosts large art shows, will be transformed into a theatre with three thousand seats. During Les Grands' run, one wing next to the auditorium will hold an exhibit of Quebec art, while the other wing will present a post-show cabaret.

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LES GRANDS To produce dances of top four

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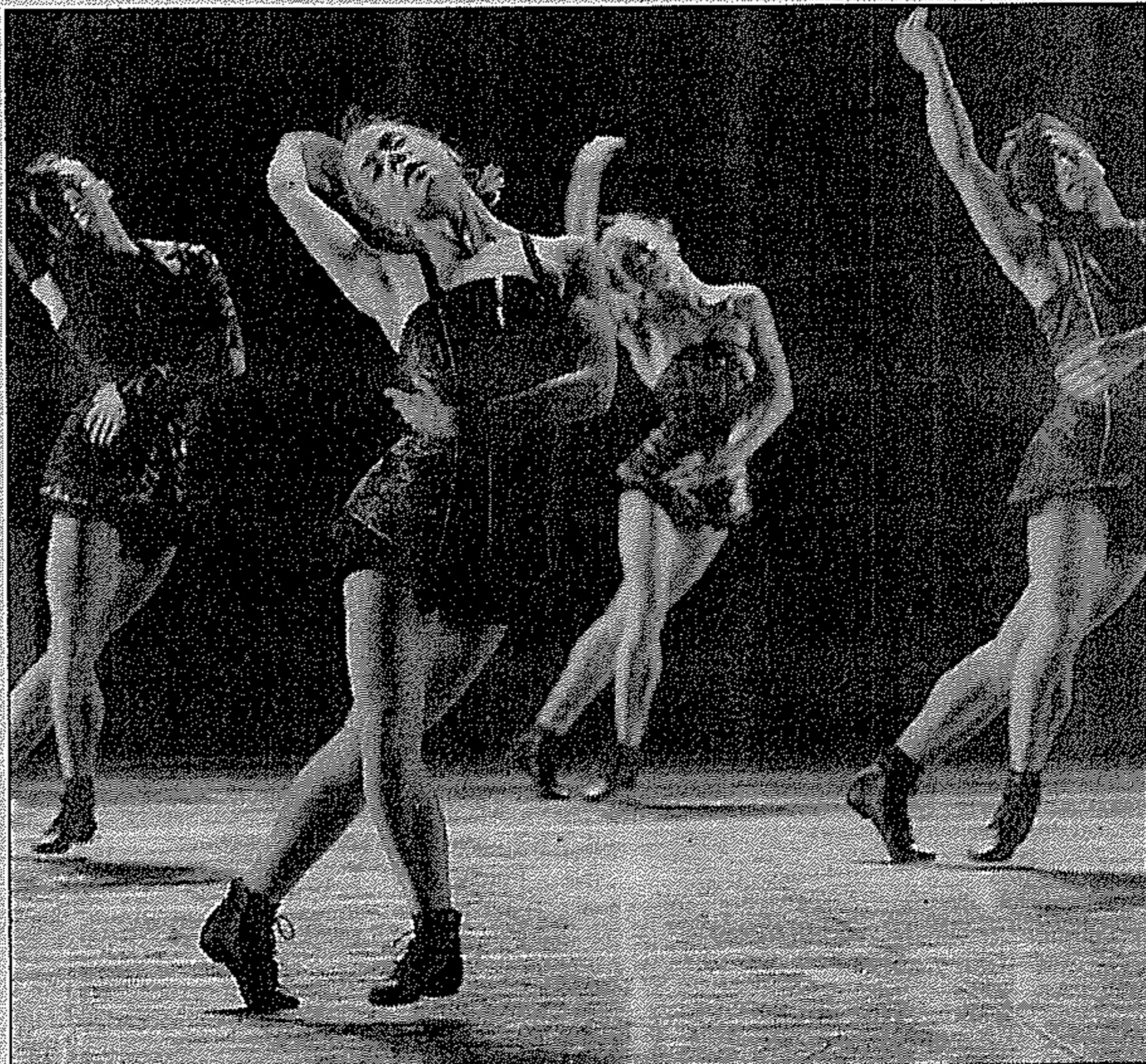
"The Paris appearance will serve as a trampoline to other engagements," predicted Les Grands' executive director, Alain Dancyger.

The choreographers' competition will give four Canadians, including at least one from Quebec, a chance to create a work lasting no more than 25 minutes for four or fewer dancers of Les Grands. Applicants should have an "artistic sensibility based on classical ballet techniques" and should not have had their work performed by a professional ballet company. Deadline to apply is April 18.

"I don't want to see someone repeating what big-name choreographers have done," said Pankov, who, along with company production director Stéphan Pépin, will act as a mentor to the winners. "I'm looking for innovation, for someone who'll do it their own way."

The company will pay for winners' transportation to Montreal, local accommodations, and provide a production budget. Each winner will receive \$2,500 after their works have their premiere at Agora de la Danse, Sept. 25-27.

Competition details are on the company's website, www.grandsballets.com.



ROLAND LORENTE. LES GRANDS BALLETS CANADIENS

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens performed Ohad Naharin's Minus One in 2002.