

NEWS

For immediate release

LES GRANDS BALLETS CANADIENS DE MONTRÉAL EMBARKS ON HISTORIC MIDDLE EAST TOUR



Photos: Serguei Endinian, Robert Etcheverry

Montréal, March 9, 2009 — After conquering the City of Lights last summer with 16 performances at the Grand Palais as guests of the *Les Étés de la danse de Paris* festival, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal will embark on another major tour abroad this June featuring three different programs. The company will be visiting **Tel Aviv** to join in marking the city's 100th anniversary celebrations and the 60th anniversary of bilateral relations between Canada and the State of Israel, as well as **Jerusalem** and **Cairo**, Egypt. The company will then fly to Europe to perform in **Ljubljana**, Slovenia and **Baden-Baden**, Germany. This is a major event for Les Grands Ballets, which is clearly on a roll: it is the first time since its inception that the company will perform in the Middle East. To mark this exceptional visit, invitations have been sent to the President of Israel, Shimon Peres, and to the first lady of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak.

During its first stop, in **Tel Aviv**, Les Grands Ballets will give two performances, on **June 1 and 2**, on the outdoor stage of the **Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre**, the Israeli capital's principal dance stage and the home base of Batsheva Dance Company. Les Grands Ballets will perform two major pieces from its repertoire: *Noces* by Stijn Celis and *Cantata* by Mauro Bigonzetti.

In *Noces*, a highly popular piece on the company's tours, 24 dancers strut and clash brutally at a delirious Balkan peasant wedding, expressionistic and intense, to the haunting music of Igor Stravinsky. "*Noces* is extraordinary," said John Rockwell of *The New York Times*. "Guaranteed goosebumps," wrote Stéphanie Brody in *La Presse*. Among other comments: "Celis, Stravinsky and Les Grands Ballets generate an irresistible force field on the stage" (*Los Angeles Times*); "Explodes with vitality and passion." (*Voir*).

Cantata, commissioned by Ballet Gulbenkian in 2001, has been part of the Les Grands repertoire for two years. Set to popular Neapolitan songs performed live by the singers of the group Assurd, *Cantata*, through instinctive and visceral dance, explores the multiple facets of relations between men and women, from seduction to jealousy. "*Cantata* is an homage to Italian culture and to the country's musical tradition, popular in the best sense of the word," explains Italian choreographer Bigonzetti. The piece includes Italian music from the 18th and 19th centuries, from lullabies to Salentine *pizziche* and Neapolitan serenades. "*Cantata* is an explosive work," according to *The Times* of London.



This same program will also be performed at the **Jerusalem Centre for the Performing Arts** on **June 5** during the Israel Festival and at the Cairo Opera House on **June 9, 10, 11 and 12**. A gift to Egypt from Japan, after the first Cairo Opera House was destroyed in a fire in 1971, the new building, featuring modern Islamic architecture, was inaugurated in 1988. It boasts seven performance spaces; Les Grands Ballets will grace the stage of the Main Hall, which seats 1,200.

After touring Middle East, the company will head to Europe, where on **June 16** at **Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana**, it will perform a double program by Celis: *Noces* and *The Rite of Spring*, the latter its European première following its world première at Théâtre Maisonneuve in Montreal on March 26, 2008. In his third creation for Les Grands Ballets, choreographer Celis takes on Stravinsky's best-known work, which inspired the greatest choreographers of the 20th century.

The tour will come to a close at **Festspielhaus Baden-Baden in Germany** with three performances of a program by Bigonzetti on **June 19, 20 and 21**. In addition to *Cantata*, the company will perform *The Four Seasons*, set to Antonio Vivaldi's extremely well-known score. The work was commissioned by Les Grands Ballets and premiered in May 2007 at Théâtre Maisonneuve; in it, Bigonzetti successfully carried off the challenge of innovating with music that's been used thousands of times, drawing out "the internal seasons of man, in all his moods and swings."

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"Unquestionably, this tour will be a milestone in our history," says **Alain Dancyger, Executive Director, Les Grands Ballets de Montréal**. "The company's historic presence in the Middle East is significant, clearly underscoring our established international reputation. Through its commitment to excellence and innovation, Les Grands Ballets is confirming the distinctive and original role it plays on the world stage.

"I am, however, extremely upset that the Government of Canada has abolished PromArt and Trade Routes, the only two programs that support international tours," Mr. Dancyger continues. "The decision to cut off all financial support for exporting and raising the visibility of our culture is surprising in the current economic context. Foreign demand for our company's work is at the highest level it has ever been in our history. The situation is all the more critical because we are seeing a drop in our private-sector revenues due to the current recession. The federal government's withdrawal of support leaves us short \$250,000."

Mr. Dancyger concludes: "Les Grands Ballets remains one of today's most dynamic cultural promoters on the international stage, exporting excellence, innovation and diversity. I hold out hope that the Government of Canada will recognize the importance of the role our company plays within the international community and for the Canadian economy."

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