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## Folk dancers show professional polish

BY STEPHEN GODFREY

Watching a folk dance troupe in a theatre can sometimes be a frustrating experience. By definition, folk dance is something in which everybody in a community should be able to participate, and so the better the dancing, the greater the temptation to join in. It is an open invitation to which, in a theatre, one can't respond.

Les Sortileges, the folk dance troupe from Quebec which performed at Harbourfront on the weekend, generates the same kind of feelings, partly because they are an spirited and infectious company, and some of their group dances look easy to do. But despite their amateur status, many of the 22 performers are quick and exceptionally skilled, and the various step dances are complex enough that one has no desire to take part. It was just fine watching from the sidelines, thank you.

It's puzzling that this was the first theatrical foray into Toronto for this company, which has been in existence for 16 years. In its home province, it has proved itself an incredibly resourceful and well-organized institution, having launched several school programs, a research foundation, books and seven records over the years in its efforts to preserve folk dance, especially that of Quebec.

Mindful of its mixed audience, the company brought a program which included suites of dances from Ireland and Scotland, and isolated dances from England, including a delightfully intricate one called the Rapper, which seemed a combination of sword dancing and

Morris dancing, and a dazzling slip jig. One problem was the lack of program information, which might have explained who the artful Mr. Shirley of Mr. Shirley's Minuet was, or how the timely Trip to the Cottage came by its name.

The program also included sections of comic mime, some of which worked better than others. The puzzling Le Bal du Mardi-Gras demanded a better understanding of Quebec folklore to understand all the characters, although the first piece, which began with a tap-dancing moose, showed that this would be no ordinary folk dance troupe.

During the seemingly endless patterns of crossover or promenade in some of the more courtly dances, this young company seemed a little bored, and a few of the livelier dances seemed less than spontaneous, when all the supposed yelps of joy were delivered in unison on the same beat. To its credit, the company isn't at all slick or mannered, but in the longueurs of the program — which was a good 20 minutes too long — they didn't always prevent their dancing from looking simply routine.

Yet during the cascade of giges, reels, and clog dances of the Quebec dances, the company blossomed. Artistic director Jimmy Di Genova knows where to build a climax, and the evening concluded with an irresistible suite involving the traditional sashes of Quebec and a dance with brooms. The dances were performed at just the right level; easy enough to see their folk origins, but complex enough to stand up as entertainment. Les Sortileges would enliven any dance floor, but given their skill, the stage is where they really belong.



Les Sortileges: complex dances belong in the theatre.