

# Les Sortilèges to dance magic spell over Town, tonight

By Mike Foster  
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**Sous le à voir p. 3**

After acting as 'world-wide cultural ambassadors of folk dancing traditions for the past 30 years, the Ensemble National de Folklore Les Sortilèges performs a pot-pourri of four jigs, a Russian duet, four Israeli dances and some movements from regions of the former Yugoslavia in the Town of Mount Royal tonight.

Les Sortilèges is the only professional folkloric dance company in Canada and its 20 permanent dancers have a repertoire of nearly 200 folk dances. Les Sortilèges, which from the root word sortilegium in latin means 'magic spell', was founded by Jimmy Di Genova in 1966. The idea behind the troupe is to charm audiences into recalling their ancestry and to reconnect them with basic human instincts. Many of the dances tell stories of courtship or the harvest from a time when people tilled the earth and battled against nature to survive.

In an interview at the troupe's headquarters on Chambord St. in Montreal last week, Mr. Di Genova, general director of Les Sortilèges, explained why he has

dedicated 30 years of his life to preserving and promoting centuries-old traditions of folk dance.

"There was a touch of challenge about it; a desire to change something maybe," Mr. Di Genova said. "I wanted culture to have a larger place in people's lives."

He says cultural traditions are generally not as strong in North America as they are in other countries. While the folk dances performed by Les Sortilèges remain authentic, some of the choreography is adapted for the stage to suit modern tastes, he says. The dances originate from Bretagne, England, Ireland, Quebec, Mexico, Romania, Ukraine, Israel, Turkey, Yemen, China, Russia, Italy, Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. The troupe started as a completely voluntary effort when Mr. Di Genova was teaching French at École secondaire Saint-Stanislas in the Villeray district. In 1981, he decided to transform Les Sortilèges into a professional company.

The troupe's public relations director, Lucie Beauchamp, says Les Sortilèges are know all over the world and have performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, the Cervantino Festival in Mexico, the

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## Les Sortilèges

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Epcott Centre in Florida and at the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976 and the Calgary Olympic Games in 1988.

Mr. Di Genova says the troupe reflects both Quebec culture and the multi-ethnic aspects of Canada.

"The composition of my dancers reflects cosmopolitan Montreal and all corners of Quebec," Mr. Di Genova said, adding that there are also two members on work permits from Romania. Since 1988, he has been inviting dancers from other countries in order to add to the troupe's international profile.

Two of the dancers now with Les Sortilèges graduated from École secondaire Pierre-Laporte's ballet program in 1993: Julie Perron and Annie Filioux. Another Pierre-Laporte graduate, Marie-Claude

Daigle, has also performed with the troupe. About six dancers have formal training in ballet from the École supérieure de la danse. They are taught the folk dance moves in courses offered by choreographers with Les Sortilèges.

"Western ballet comes from folkloric dance. It's just more stylized," Mr. Di Genova said. "Ballet just forgot where it came from."

Les Sortilèges is more than just a dance troupe, however. In 1977, Mr. Di Genova also set up a library and research centre - the Centre de documentation Marius Barbeau - at the Chambord St. location. The centre includes information on the history of costumes, songs, popular customs, legends and folk beliefs. The library has 2500 choreographic outlines of dances, 1500 publications and an audiovisual section. The École Nationale de Folklore, which offers courses in dances and jigs, is also affiliated with Les

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An example of the colorful and multi-cultural costumes worn by Les Sortilèges folk-dancing troupe.

Sortilèges.

Les Sortilèges has nearly 2,000 costumes: When dancers perform an English clog jig at the recreation fields tonight, they will be wearing footwear that was especially made to match the style of clogs worn during the 18th Century. Also, costumes were flown in from Turkey and swords were delivered from England, for example. Folklore comes from the seasonal calendar and many

dances incorporate the use of a broom, an ax, hats or sicles, Mr. Di Genova says.

Among the performances tonight at 7:30 p.m. are four jigs: an English clog, an Irish jig, American clogging and a Quebec gigue. An Israeli Suite, with choreography by Ilan Zaoui, will include a harvest dance, Khemdati (a bittersweet dance of love) and Adama (the earth; lots of hand clapping and spinning). A Banat

Suite, with choreography by Zeljko Jergan, involves a competitive dance between men with canes, knives and bottles to show their agility. The women then dance and the men imitate their movements. As the dance reaches its climax, the women spur the men on with screams of fear. The dances are called Saranac, Mamacko Nadigravanje, Pancevacki and Juzno-Banatski Madjarac.