

Le Grand Continental

**The most
contemporary
of line dances**

**Participatory
work**

**Hundreds of
enthusiasts
dance as one**

SYLVAIN ÉMARD **DAN SE**



Who would have predicted that one day Sylvain Émard would combine contemporary dance with line dancing? Who would have believed that the choreographer, renowned for his refined style and precise movement, would rely on the authenticity and brio of amateur dancers to galvanize audiences? In realizing that fantastic challenge for the Festival TransAmériques (FTA) in 2009, this major figure in Québec contemporary dance provided resounding proof of the unifying, festive power of dance in a spectacular outdoor presentation.

For this first edition, *Le Grand Continental*® was performed by some sixty dancers. Back by popular demand, the cast doubled in 2010 for *Le Très Grand Continental* at the FTA. A handful of professional performers accompanied 120 dancers of all ages and backgrounds, all driven by the same passion and the same infectious joy. To the rhythms of country, techno, disco, waltzes and R&B music, they danced as one and had the entire Montréal downtown neighborhood rocking to their dynamic vibes. *Le Très Grand Continental* proved as popular as the original, as was *El Gran Continental*, the version presented at the Festival de México in March 2011 and based on Latin social dancing. In 2011, the concept further expanded by featuring 200 non-professional dancers in a whole new piece: *Le Continental XL*. Once again, it was the most festive event at the FTA.

To celebrate Montréal's 375th Anniversary, Sylvain Émard Danse created *Le Super Méga Continental*. This offspring in *Le Grand Continental*® family featured 375 amateur dancers at Place des Festivals, in September 2017.

Since then, New York, Philadelphia, Portland (Oregon), Boston, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, Ansan (South Korea), Wellington (New Zealand), Santiago (Chile), Potsdam (Germany) and St. Pölten (Austria), were won over by this joyous work. Over 3,000 dancers participated in one or more of those 22 editions, which attracted some 125,000 spectators. In addition, Sylvain Émard created original choreographic sections for South Korea, New Zealand, Chile, and Philadelphia, drawing inspiration from their local dances and cultural colors.

Le Grand Continental

“An army of massive joy and delight. [...] 7 lines by 30 columns of concentrated happiness [...] *Le Grand Continental* is not just a simple choreography. Behind the anecdotal square dance reworked for modern tastes lies a very rich human experience that I had never previously enjoyed. And behind the choreographer is one of the most humane, gentle, gracious, inspiring, accessible and talented individuals I have ever met.”

Normand Miron, dancer, Montréal



Two worlds in one

That the choreographer Sylvain Émard decided to combine contemporary dance with line dancing may come as a surprise to some. Yet his fascination for this traditional folk art goes back a long way. It is rooted in his childhood, in the basement of his parish church where he discovered the pleasures of social dancing. He was soon captivated by the concentration required for line dancing, by the trance-like state it provoked among the dancers and by their enthusiasm for the form. Many years later it coloured some of his pieces: one can find implied references to it in *Mensonge Variations* (1998), *Scènes d'intérieur* (2001) or *Wave* (2008). With *Le Grand Continental*®, Sylvain Émard is returning to his first love in strikingly original fashion.

This time round he has concocted a festive work, joining the structured format of line dancing with the organic nature and expressive movement of contemporary dance. While maintaining a methodical approach in developing a wide palette of dance groupings, Sylvain Émard emphasizes busts and arms, brings bodies down to the ground and creates dramatic situations that changes both our ideas about line dancing and our perception of the urban environment where it is performed.

Open to all

If the transmission of the communicative power of dance and the exploration of the body as a source of language lies at the core of Sylvain Émard's artistic approach, making this art form accessible to a wide audience is also part of his aim. Not content in *Le Grand Continental*® to simply step into the street for direct contact with spectators, he also decided to include members of the audience in the creative process. Consequently, only a few professional dancers guide the impressive casts of amateur dancers, which vary from 65 to 250 performers. Most of the non-professional performers are students, amateurs of line-dancing and dance enthusiasts of all ages, recruited on-site and online. In accepting the challenge, the choreographer plunges back into the world of line dancing, directing rehearsals twice a week over a two-month period. The soundtrack by Martin Tétreault reflects the spirit of line dancing, imbued with contemporary accents.

Le Grand Continental on the road

When the concept is exported abroad, it integrates local amateur and professional dancers of each visited city. Sylvain Émard travels to each city to direct an important part of the rehearsals with the local participants. He is assisted by local professional dancers who act like rehearsal assistants that are also part of the cast. The process takes place over a period of approximately 11 weeks, for a total of 22 rehearsal sessions.

Calendar

2022	JUNE	<i>Le Grand Continental: alle tanzen</i> , Festspielhaus St.Pölten, Austria (150 amateur dancers)
2021	APR	<i>Le Grand Continental 3.0</i> , Facebook Live
2020	APR	<i>Le Grand Continental – Format chez soi</i> , Facebook Live
2018	SEPT	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, fabrik Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany (65 amateur dancers) <i>Le Super Grand Continental</i> , Fringe Festival, Philadelphia, United States (165 amateur dancers)
	JUNE	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Luminato Festival, Toronto, Canada (230 amateur dancers)
	MAY	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Potsdamer Tanztage, Potsdam, Germany (150 amateur dancers)
	JAN	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Festival International Santiago a Mil, Santiago, Chili (150 amateur dancers)
2017	SEPT	<i>Le Super Méga Continental</i> , Montréal's 375th Anniversary Celebrations, Montréal, Canada (375 amateur dancers)
2016	FEV	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, opening the 30 th anniversary of the New Zealand Festival, Wellington, New Zealand (150 amateur dancers)
2015	MAY	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Ansan Street Arts Festival, Ansan, South Korea (130 amateur dancers)
	JAN	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, PuSh Festival, Vancouver, Canada (70 amateur dancers)
2014	MAY	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, as part of the 75 th season of Celebrity Series of Boston, Boston, United States (110 amateur dancers)

2013	OCT	<i>El Gran Continental ¡otra vez !</i> , tour of three neighbourhoods, Mexico City, Mexico (150 amateur dancers) <i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Parkinson en mouvement, Montréal, Canada (40 amateur dancers)
	JUNE	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Festival Danse Canada, Ottawa, Canada (115 amateur dancers)
2012	SEPT	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, White Bird, Portland, United States (160 amateur dancers) <i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Philadelphia Live Arts Festival, Philadelphia, United States (150 amateur dancers)
	JUNE	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, River To River Festival (copresented by The Joyce Theater), New York, United States (150 amateur dancers)

Le Super Méga Continental (2017)



© Le Super Méga Continental (2017) | Robert Etcheverry

● Watch the clip

● Watch the full-length

2011	MAY	<i>Le Continental XL</i> , Festival TransAmériques, Montréal, Canada (200 amateur dancers)
	APR	<i>El Gran Continental</i> , International Dance Day, Mexico (100 amateur dancers)
	MAR	<i>El Gran Continental</i> , Festival de México, Mexico (100 amateur dancers)
2010	JUNE	<i>Le Très Grand Continental</i> , Festival TransAmériques, Montréal, Canada (120 amateur dancers)
2009	MAY	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ®, Festival TransAmériques, Montréal, Canada (50 amateur dancers)

Awards and acknowledgment

SEPT 2024	Sylvain Émard receives a Recognition Award from the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership for his contributions to Montréal's cultural vitality, including Le Grand Continental series presented by the Festival TransAmériques in the Quartier des Spectacles.
NOV 2018	Sylvain Émard Danse receives the CINARS International Collaboration Award for the re-creation of <i>Grand Continental</i> ® at Potsdamer Tanztage and Santiago a Mil.
DEC 2015	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ® was included in Best of 2015, Top 5 Dance list by the <i>Vancouver Sun</i> .
OCT 2014	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ® in Boston wins the People's Choice Award in the category Best Nonprofit Event Concept—Budget Under \$250,000 at the BizBash National Event Style Award, New York.
DEC 2012	<i>Le Grand Continental</i> ® in New York is named Best moment in dance 2012 by <i>The New Yorker</i> .
JUNE 2011	Sylvain Émard is named Personality of the Week by <i>La Presse</i> /Radio-Canada for <i>Le Continental XL</i>



On tour

LENGTH	CAST	TEAM ON TOUR	DANCE AREA	SET UP
THIRTY (30) MINUTES	HUNDREDS OF AMATEURS + ONE (1) PROFESSIONAL DANCER FOR TWENTY-FIVE (25) NON-PROFESSIONALS	SYLVAIN ÉMARD	IN ACCORDANCE TO THE CAST	VARIES FROM ONE EDITION TO ANOTHER

Sylvain Émard Danse

A major figure in Québec contemporary dance, Sylvain Émard founded his company, Sylvain Émard Danse, in 1990. From small forms to monumental pieces, from immersive installations to films, he explores the territory of human nature through the power of the body, creating some thirty works, presented on four continents.

A sensitive, rigorous, and inventive creator, he navigates with ease between different artistic spheres, as seen notably in his collaboration with Robert Lepage. Recipient of several prestigious distinctions, including the Jean A. Chalmers Award (1996) for his body of work and the Governor General's Performing Arts Award (2026), Sylvain Émard is also a co-founder of Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique.



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**The dancing
body does
not lie,
and truth
is too
rare to
be ignored.**

**S.É
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