

BIOGRAPHY OF FRÉDÉRIK GRAVEL



Photo: Brianna Lombardo

Born in Montreal in 1978. Choreographer, light designer, researcher. Artistic director of DLD (Daniel Léveillé Danse), cofounder of the choreographic collective La 2e Porte à Gauche, administrator at Prix de la danse de Montréal and a member of Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique, Frédéric Gravel is also a dancer – a bad one, he claims, although he aspires to “become an interesting bad dancer”. And a researcher who, after completing an undergraduate degree in dance at Université du Québec à Montréal, presented in 2009 a master’s thesis on “the role of the dance artist in a democratic society”. Since 2005, he works at UQAM’s Laboratoire de recherche en technochorégraphie, on motion capture and 3D animation technologies in dance. Gravel is the leader of the Grouped’ArtGravelArtGroup (GAG), a variable collective of personalities actively involved in the creative process of his works. They have come together to create extensively, try prolifically, persist enormously and to have fun while doing so. In intelligent fashion.

Starting with his earliest pieces, notably *Du pittoresque en danse, et dans la mienne en particulier* in 2004 (with a nod to Kandinsky!), Frédéric Gravel, although still a student at the time, made his mark with his tone, stage intelligence and direct complicity with the audience. This was (and is) a choreographer to keep an eye on. His mentor is Daniel Léveillé, and his brother-in-arm Dave St- Pierre, for whom he danced. He is also a great admirer of Édouard Lock, a distant source of inspiration. But dance historians might find in his work an affinity with

postmodern American dance of the '60s, given his bent for questioning or distancing himself from the affectations of dance.

As he has noted, "I like to create a show with a non-show [...] and demystify the spectacular," a position that evokes Yvonne Rainer and her *No Manifesto*. What does that say about this dancer, choreographer, guitarist, singer and lighting designer, who in his Master's thesis (UQAM, 2009), reflected on "the role of the dance artist in democratic society"? His work is presented not only in underground performance spaces in Montreal and New York, but at scholarly symposia as well. He also did the choreography for two of singer/songwriter Pierre Lapointe's music concert, *Mutantès* and *Amour, acide et orgue*, alongside author Étienne Lépage and actress Sophie Cadieux, both presented at Montreal's Francos festival.

With a sense of paradox and a nonchalant manner, Gravel portrays the touchstones of contemporary dance – physical intensity, raw virtuosity and pedestrian movement, nudity, sexuality, coexistence of artistic genres (rock, performance art, scripted scenes, improv, etc.). They have been present in his work from the beginning, stripped of mannered effects and far removed from any unifying dramaturgy. Gravel talks about these component elements, explains how they function, their status in the art of choreography.

He turns the performance upside down, disrupting the passiveness of the audience and the expectations of fans of contemporary dance, very much like the members of 2e Porte à gauche – of which he is a founder. The choreographer use dance as a source of reflection, demonstrating the mechanics behind spectacle, revealing the framework, the structuring, the tricks and effects, portraying the "traceability" of the artistic process and the seduction of the spectator, and underlining the strategies of the art market. His intent is to let the audience cope with the unexpressed aspects of bodies and music, and their power over the senses and meaning.

Untangling the reflexive experience from the palpable experience can be pataphysical jubilation or Brechtian distancing – it all depends. We slide from one to the other, amused and pensive and charmed, witnessing the fact of bodies committed to an action and the detachment of critical thinking and self-mockery. What have we come to see? Gravel cultivates artistic ambiguity, cultural transversality, the mixing of disciplines and postmodern irony. After all, it is part of the current climate. He plays with the contemporary zeitgeist, flippant and sceptical. He is complicit with the audience, thumbing his nose at the avant-garde, at the exclusive preserves of the elite. In lucid, offhand fashion, he takes popular culture and establishment culture out of their assigned roles and brings them together.

Frédéric Gravel is one of the pioneers of the new wave of choreographers who are breaking down the image of elitism in contemporary dance to make it more accessible [...] Having everything to please, he is posed as a rising star of the international dance scene. — Fabienne Cabado, Voir (Montréal)

WORKS BY FRÉDÉRIC GRAVEL

2008	Gravel Works
2010, 2024	All Hell is Breaking Loose, Honey
2012	Gravel Cabaret
2012	Usually Beauty Fails
2013	Thus Spoke...
2015	This Duet That We've Already Done (so many times)
2016	Logique du pire (Logic of the Worst)
2017	Some Hope for the Bastards
2019	Fear and Greed
2023	Gravel (re)Works