

**C E N T R E
I N T E R N A T I O N A L
D ' A R T
C O N T E M P O R A I N
D E M O N T R É A L**

From the series "Mapping the Automatists in Montreal", #116

Françoise Sullivan's dance studio at the Ross House, 3644, Peel Street "Récital de danse" April 3, 1948

Claude Gosselin, C.M., October 22nd, 2020

Between 1945 and 1947, Françoise Sullivan spent most of her time in New York: mainly at Franzisca Boaz's dance studio but also at the New Dance Group, the Pearl Primus (for African dance) and La Meri (for Indian dance). In the summer of 1947, she returned to Montreal to live with her parents, on Peel Street's Elgin Terrace. Their home was located near the Ross House. This practically empty space served two days a week as a Mess for Canadian army officers during World War II.

One day, in the summer of 1947, by happy coincidence, Françoise, who was looking for a studio to teach dance creation and choreography, met a childhood friend, Anna Saint-Charles. The two friends had met a few years earlier while living on Hutchison Street near Prince-Arthur Street. Anna Saint-Charles suggested that she speaks to her cousin, a captain at the Officers' Mess at the Ross House. An agreement was made, and Françoise was allowed to use the mess every day except the two days the officers were on site. It served as her studio until 1950.



The James Ross House, built in 1892.
Architect: Bruce Price. Photo: William
Notman, McCord Museum.

Today, the Ross House is part of McGill
University and serves as a pavilion for
the Faculty of Law (Chancellor Day
Pavilion).

Récital de danse [Dance Recital]

On April 3, 1948, *Récital de danse* was presented to an audience of friends and acquaintances, following Françoise Sullivan's initiative. For this recital, Françoise invited Jeanne Renaud, who had just returned from New York for a brief stay before going back, to join her and present her choreographies. In total, Françoise Sullivan presented five choreographies, Jeanne Renaud three, and one was by both artists. In total the "recital" lasted about 1h30 including an intermission and decor changes. The show host was Françoise Sullivan's father, announcing the next performances.

This show is today considered an important and daring event for contemporary dance in Quebec. It was a pivotal moment. Three choreographies would have a particularly prolific future, being performed several times by different dancers over the years. These were *Dualité* and *Dédale* by Françoise Sullivan, and *Déformité* by Jeanne Renaud.

The project sparked enthusiasm among the friends of the Automatists group, and they spontaneously offered to help. Jean Paul Riopelle was the manager. Jean-Paul Mousseau designed certain pieces' costumes, recreated a theater stage in jute, and made the show's poster. Maurice Perron took care of lighting. Claude Gavreau read a text by Thérèse Renaud. Françoise Riopelle also designed a costume. Pierre Mercure and Gérard Gagnon joined them, the former on the piano, the latter on the trumpet.

Among the show's attendees was Mary Anthony, a dance teacher at New York's New Dance Group, where Jeanne Renaud was taking technique lessons. She was invited to Montreal by Jeanne and her brother Louis. She came out very enthusiastic and surprised to see a show produced with little means and so many volunteers.

Françoise Sullivan's five choreographies

1. *Déploration sur la mort*, also known as *Gothique*
Danced by Françoise Sullivan
Costume: Françoise Riopelle
Music: Binshois, composer of the Franco-Flemish School from early 15th century.
Choreography: Movements inspired by statuary and illuminations from the Middle Ages.
2. *Dédale*
Danced by Françoise Sullivan
Costumes: Marcel Barbeau (a head prop)
"The choreography takes place in a room without decor or music. After a moment of stillness, one hand and then the dancer's wrist shake to create a movement that sweeps the whole body. The faster the movement, the stronger the dancer's breathing." (FS to CG, July 4, 2020). The work has a trance-like dramatic effect.
3. *Black and Tan Fantasy*
Danced by Françoise Sullivan
Costumes: Jean-Paul Mousseau
Music: Duke Ellington
Scenography: Jean Paul Riopelle
4. *Credo*
Danced by Françoise Sullivan
Music: Jean Sébastien Bach
5. *Dualité*
Danced by Françoise Sullivan and Jeanne Renaud
Music: For the performance in Montreal, Pierre Mercure composed the music while supervising its creation.
Costume: Françoise Sullivan (a white dress and a pale gray dress)
Lighting: Maurice Perron
Management: Jean Paul Riopelle
This choreography was conceived and created while Françoise was a student at Franziska Boaz's Studio in New York in 1947. *"Franziska Boaz asked us, her advanced students, more or less five people, to create a choreography. I presented the 'Dualité' choreography. This is based on the idea that the same person can have a dual personality: tenderness and aggressiveness, beauty and ugliness, softness and coldness, like the Greek god Janus. Franziska Boaz thought the idea was very strong. The choreography, a duet, is for two dancers. On the stage, they arrive together, back to back while turning, they try to separate, then come closer and reunite. It is a struggle of opposites generated by tears and reconciliations until, in the end, a force brings them together again. Face to face, they are like the image created in a mirror. Then they move away again but a force pulls them back and at the end they turn back from where they came from, still united back to back."* (FS to CG, July 8, 2020.)

Jeanne Renaud's three choreographies

1. *Déformité*

Danced by Jeanne Renaud

"'Déformité' was danced while wearing a very tight costume to show the body anguished by the horrors that I uncovered in a big city... also to discover discomforts by this violence... and to convey this difficulty of living in a harsh environment and in seeing poverty all around us. It was danced in a silence intended to express the harsh reality of life." (JR to CG, July 2, 2020.)

2. *Emprise*

Danced by Jeanne Renaud

3. *Un monsieur me suit dans la rue*

Danced by Jeanne Renaud

Decor: Jean-Paul Mousseau (A wavy cardboard banner to evoke a street and a papier-mâché sculpture)

Music: Édith Piaf

Jeanne Renaud and Françoise Sullivan's joint choreography

1. *Moi je suis de cette race rouge et épaisse qui frôle les éruptions volcaniques et les cratères en mouvement*

Dance improvised by Françoise Sullivan and Jeanne Renaud

Costumes and decor: Jean-Paul Mousseau

The choreography's title is from a poem by Thérèse Renaud, Jeanne's sister, and was read by Claude Gauvreau (Text published in Thérèse Renaud, *Les Sables du rêve*, Drawings by Jean-Paul Mousseau, Les Cahiers de la file indienne, Montreal, 1946, p. 32).

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