



EXTENDING OUR REACH

FOR THE NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
OF THE CIRCUS
ARTS

Circus Arts Sector
Development Plan
2017-2027

en **Piste**

National Circus
Arts Network

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Depending on their geographical location, the circus arts in Canada face very different situations. Obviously, Quebec distinguishes itself from other provinces because of the success of its many international circus troops and the existence of vocational training. In some respects, Quebec is both a springboard for the circus arts in Canada and a world leader in the sector. Developing new vehicles for the development of the Canadian circus sector inevitably means implementing a strategy adapted to Quebec, but also creating targeted and distinct measures for all Canadian provinces. Promoting the growth of the circus arts across Canada is a key element for the optimal development of the entire sector.

Since its incorporation in 1997, *En Piste* remains the only umbrella organization for the circus arts in Canada, bringing together nearly 400 professionals and organizations. It works to implement conditions favourable to the development of the circus arts by offering various services (continuing education, networking activities, support for business creation, group insurance programs, etc.) as well as by multiplying representational and promotional activities on the national and international scenes.

In 2007, *En Piste* made public an assessment¹ demonstrating the growth² of the sector and calling on governments to consolidate power structures in order to give a new impetus to the circus arts and ensure both their diversity and their longevity. In addition to establishing the current state of the circus arts and charting the future prospects of the sector, this baseline analysis offered a privileged opportunity for the community to exchange, to come together and to speak with a common voice on major issues regarding development, creation, production and distribution.

OF ALL THE PERFORMING ARTS, THE CIRCUS RECEIVES THE LEAST AMOUNT OF SUPPORT FROM THE PUBLIC AND PARA-PUBLIC SECTORS IN QUEBEC AND CANADA.

Ten years after this important collective reflection emanating from the Canadian circus industry, very little has been done by public decision makers. Although the sector has continued to grow and has received official recognition by the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* (2001), the *Conseil des arts de Montréal* (2008) and the Canada Council for the Arts (2009), most provinces still do not acknowledge the circus arts. Today, of all the performing arts, the circus sector receives the least amount of support from the public and

para-public sectors in Quebec and Canada.

What conclusions can be drawn from the lack of progress in government support over the last decade?

Even today, for the majority of circus companies, more than 90% of revenue comes from abroad or from the sale of shows or circus routines for special or corporate events³. To be clear, without

¹ État des lieux – Les arts du cirque au Québec et au Canada – « Éclairage sur un paradoxe » — available on line at enpiste.qc.ca/files/publications/etat_des_lieux_eclairage_sur_un_paradoxe.pdf.

² Some examples of growth: an increase in the number of circus companies, the founding of the Cité des arts du cirque, the creation of the National Circus School research chair, the creation of a circus college diploma by the Limoilou Cégep.

³ This information was provided by *En Piste* members.

an international presence and the associated revenues, the circus arts sector would not exist in Canada.

The glaring lack of resources puts at risk the sector's ability to maintain its strategic advances, renew itself, ensure its sustainability and maintain its long-term role as an international leader in the performing arts. Without increased funding from the state, the circus arts will never fully establish themselves throughout Canada, as evidenced by the slow progress they have made since the public assessment of 2007.

Today, Quebec and Canada are teeming with dynamic artists, artists' collectives, and small and large companies, owing in part to special and corporate events as well as international tours. The circus community suffers, however, from its apparent "good health".

When it comes to the circus arts, creation and production values are high and research and development of new equipment is also very expensive, not to mention constant risk management. The lack of measures supporting research and development makes it notably difficult to innovate aesthetically, creatively and technically. The lack of infrastructure for the creation of circus productions is felt in both large urban centres and in rural areas. Producing a circus show involves high costs that cannot always be absorbed, particularly because of the difficulty in securing partners or setting up coproductions with government, private sponsors, distributors, etc. A real distribution network is yet to materialize at the local and national levels, hindering the ability of the circus arts to reach out to the public. In addition, the high cost of purchasing a show and taking it on tour, installation time and infrastructure limitations also have an impact on both distribution and access to the circus arts. It should be noted that the relative brevity of the careers of professional circus performers as well as questions dealing with physical integrity (recovery, maternity, etc.) add to the precariousness of their art. As for producers, they are constantly in a high-risk situation, having very little room to maneuver as they are largely dependent on revenue from foreign distribution or the corporate sector.

Moreover, the phenomenal success of the *Cirque du Soleil* still creates, inadvertently, a distortion of reality, particularly in terms of financing and distribution. The circus community is de facto forced to scatter its energy and manpower to the four winds, and rely on self-production and corporate events to survive. In addition, the perception that the circus arts are wealthy also creates development difficulties in terms of securing private funding and sponsorship. In short, the circus arts are not sufficiently recognized as a strategic and creative sector in Quebec and Canada by most public and private bodies.

To illustrate the reality of the circus arts in our country, *En Piste* conducted a national survey by reaching out to more than 500 participants in Canada. *En Piste* also submitted a proposal as part of the overhaul of the Quebec government's cultural policy⁴. The results of this reflection can be found in our Sector Development Plan for 2017-2027: "Extending our reach: for the national development of the circus arts". Through this approach, *En Piste* has undertaken the first phase of a macrosectoral strategy to achieve a full national roll-out of the circus arts. Over the next decade, as the only umbrella organization for the circus arts in Canada, *En Piste* would like to establish a sector development plan for each province in collaboration with local circus communities. With the 2017-2027 Sector Development Plan, *En Piste* has taken a first step in this direction for Quebec, but its efforts are part of a larger national strategy.

⁴ The data presented in this document comes from a proposal produced by *En Piste* as part of the overhaul of Quebec's cultural policy. This proposal entitled "Le cirque en action vers l'avenir partout au Québec" is available online at the following address: www.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/documents/Cultural-Policy/Memoires_Metadonnees/En_Piste_Regroupement_national_des_arts_du_cirque.pdf.

CIRCUS ARTS SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017-2027: FIVE MAJOR ORIENTATIONS AND 17 STRATEGIES

The circus arts sector is complex and atypical. To promote its national roll-out, the 2017-2027 Sector Development Plan is structured around 5 major orientations and 17 interrelated strategies that reflect all the issues at stake. The following sections reflect the current situation and the needs of the sector while defining its orientations. For each of these, we've identified strategies and possibilities of intervention.

OUR CIRCUS ARTS SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOCUSES ON 5 ORIENTATIONS AND 17 STRATEGIES:



The 2017-2027 Sector Development Plan reflects the requirements that must be met by the circus community in order to ensure its full national roll-out. It is essential that the circus arts sector be better equipped to pursue its regional, national and international growth. To sum up, the demands of the circus arts sector are as follows:

- To develop the circus arts education network. From recreational to preparatory training to higher education, the entire vocational training sector must become a source of inspiration for the circus arts and the public.
- To offer more support to artists for their creative approaches and audacity. In this regard, significant efforts must be made to support the emergence of appropriate creative venues and increased financial support for creation, production and research, adapted to the reality of the circus arts across Canada.
- To bring Canadian audiences to the heart of the next wave of circus arts development. This new territorial development must target all audiences and all regions by establishing a real distribution network in theatres, under circus tents and public spaces, while involving cultural mediation and social circus activities. International success must also have impact on a local level.
- To structure the circus arts sector by promoting sharing and collaboration. Exchanges and the prioritization of collective initiatives must be better supported in order to foster the emergence of artists' collectives, collective infrastructures, circus hubs, networks, new forms of collaboration, creations and innovative ideas.
- To encourage philanthropy in the circus arts sector because it is fundamental to growth. It is necessary to encourage corporations and sponsors to fund projects that play a supporting and unifying role for the circus community and audiences.

The role of *En Piste* is thus crucial for the development and creation of unifying projects for the circus arts sector. This umbrella organization needs increased funding to better support the circus community and promote the national roll-out of the circus arts.

THE 2017-2027 SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN REFLECTS THE REQUIREMENTS THAT MUST BE MET BY THE CIRCUS COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO ENSURE ITS FULL NATIONAL ROLL-OUT.

At a time when government agencies and arts councils are attempting to erase boundaries between artistic disciplines, review governance models, breakdown silos, and foster civic participation and digital innovation, these priorities represent additional challenges for the development of the circus arts. It is clear that if the public sector doesn't allot new funds for the circus arts, targeted goals for training, creation, production, distribution, mediation and social circus cannot be achieved.

Due to the rapid growth and vitality of the circus arts sector as well as a significant shortfall in funding, *En Piste* is calling on governments, municipalities and the business community to adopt a national circus arts policy, so that it can pursue its national development, maintain its international leadership, and ensure that audiences throughout the country have access to the circus arts.