
Interview with

Denis Marleau

... on his work as artistic director of the NAC.

Denis Marleau, artistic director, National Arts Centre's French Theatre.

What are the main responsibilities of the artistic director of the National Arts Centre's French Theatre?

The main responsibilities of the artistic director are related to production, presentation, hosting, and animating in an environment which is that of the Nation's Capital, Ottawa; our programs also reach people living in the Gatineau area. For me, what's important is to create a sustained relationship between the community and its stage facilities and to invite potential and current audiences to take advantage of our programs at the Studio, at the Theatre. It's also about presenting shows beyond the National Arts Centre, across the country and internationally, as well as developing creative launching pads such as the Laboratoires, for example. My work involves inviting artists, attending shows, meeting arts groups, and creating an artistic season which will bring people together.

How does one become the artistic director of the NAC?

First of all, I feel I'm here at the French Theatre as an artist; I'm part of an organization that requires my subjectivity, my views. I am asked to be at once personal and think of the community and it is this relationship that is important to me. I accepted this position because it gave me the opportunity to express a certain vision of theatre, a certain philosophy, which I have developed over almost 30 years of theatre practice and which has allowed me to forge links with other creators, other companies. This has also enabled me to develop my curiosity, because you need curiosity; you need to want to meet others and this is an important component of my involvement.

How do you reconcile your creative work with that of being the artistic director of a major institution?

I have to travel a lot! I think that the fact that I'm both the artistic director of Ubu and of the National Arts Centre, here, in Ottawa, means I really have two jobs. At UBU, however, I don't do the programming; I focus mainly on creation. I don't work alone there either, I have a team around me, including a co-artistic director who also does creation. The responsibilities are shared which is essential. There's a synergy, too, which allows you to create common projects, which was happening here even before I became artistic director of the French Theatre. So, for me, it's very important that the National Arts Centre's French Theatre benefit from the experience that I've had with Ubu, and vice versa. I really feel it's in the interest of both parties.