



Play Dead is currently one of the truly sublime artistic achievements of contemporary circus, no matter how personal or biased it may sound. It includes the world's highest artistic level of an uncompromising character; captivates with visually engaging images associating tenebrism and naturalism in 17th century painting, and with the overall action on stage draws you into the dreamy timelessness of surrealism. Play Dead in the genre of physical theater; acrobatic dance and circus is a work with an exemplary non-linear dramaturgy, the pillars of which were an excellently built play full of dramatic moments crowned by the interplay of actors, perfect timing of actions and further conscious repetition (e.g., bends) and refined transition of scenic motifs (e.g., touch) and imagination triggering a narrative free from any description. The acting was characterized by a spirited and introverted gestural expression (including meaningful hand shapes), meaning was indicated by both barely perceptible blinks or fixed gazes (someone was always watching someone), and precisely constructed movement scores for highly technically trained bodies. The stage depiction of the coexistence of people who respect, and perhaps even love each other, but also argue, and provoke each other, sounded the strings of tragedy and comedy.

PRESSES

The performance was full of notions, touching and moving, entertaining, and even spontaneously evoking laughter. To get an idea of the beginning, a lady and a gentleman attended the top of the semi-circular auditorium. Natasha, in a long turquoise dress, listened to the narration of Jean Levesque, in a blue suit. His occupation with acting, while the viewer deliberately did not hear anything specific, except for the melodically dense speech, strongly contrasted with her willingness to listen. She tactfully retreated, he added and while she discreetly moved away, the young man immersed himself in himself, but did not stop talking. Her inner state subsequently boiled over. She began to widen her eyes, roll her neck, throw herself back, these bends deepened and the pace of the jangling increased. The man continued to articulate. The originally romantic postcard developed into a drama with a sharp turn into comedy.

PLAY DEAD

PEOPLE WATCHING

In the darkened stage space, reminiscent of an apartment, a massive almara stood on the left, in front of it a wooden table and period chairs with upholstered seats. On the right side there was a two-seater sofa, with its shape and decoration evoking the Baroque, a cupboard and a lamp with a decorative lampshade. A carpet and a light curtain were made of fabrics on the stage. The completely functional scenography was complemented by props - objects such as a duster, plates, a cup, etc., ranging from ostensive effects to functional use by the actors to symbolic use as a theatrical symbol. The dining table, for example, united the group, also served as an anchoring base for the poles with rotating plates, and after folding the legs on one side, it became an inclined plane on which the acrobats climbed and slid. Similarly, the costumes were not only pleasing to the eye, but above all they were able to highlight the geometry of movement and underline the features of the stage character.

Dance Zone: A sublime and Virtuoso Contemporary Circus Prague, Czech Republic

“Not only did the six Montreal artists of People Watching offer us the festival's favorite show, but they also created one of the most memorable contemporary circus shows of recent years.”

La Presse

“The Canadian company People Watching, whose thread we must not lose, has constructed before us, with barbaric delicacy, with the subtlety of clockwork precision, a show of such power that it compels the eye(s) not to miss a single detail.”

La Verdad; When You Feel Like Eating the Whole World
San Javier, Spain - August 2024

“People Watching has created with barbaric finesse, with the subtlety of watchmaking precision, a piece of such power that forces the eye not to want to miss a single detail.”

The Truth

“Baroque decadence elegantly fits into a past era of emotional and sexual repression that ends in a crisis of infidelity revelations and devolves into a new era of unfettered passion.”

Niche MTL

“Play Dead is currently one of the truly sublime artistic achievements of contemporary circus. It includes the world's highest artistic level of an uncompromising character, captivates with visually engaging images associating tenebrism and naturalism in 17th century painting, and with the overall action on stage draws you into the dreamy timelessness of surrealism. Emotions flowed from the performance, it moved and amazed, it entertained and even elicited spontaneous laughter. Behind this unique project is a solid group of creators, virtuoso artists, personalities of different nationalities and disciplines, as well as totally available artists with the willingness to break away from the perfectly familiar and open themselves up to a challenge.”

Dance Zone; A sublime and Virtuoso Contemporary Circus
Prague, Czech Republic

Play Dead is an exceptional, highly promising creation, with a strong dose of energy and talent. Long live Play Dead and this collective that watches people! Let's hope this nugget from the Montréal Complètement Cirque 2023 festival comes to a venue near you soon.

Click Cirque, Françoise Boudreault

PRIX PROPULSION 2024 - FINALIST

Finalistes au Prix Propulsion 2024 pour l'innovation et l'enrichissement des arts du cirque



31 mai 2024

Quatre finalistes d'exception

Play Dead présente six acrobates virtuoses dans un cirque théâtral aux chorégraphies renversantes.

À des questions sensibles, **Acting for Climate Montréal** répond par un cirque contemporain engagé et écoresponsable.

Au service de la communauté, **La compagnie des autres** répond avec pertinence aux fortes demandes des artistes et organisations circassiennes.

Une prise de parole rare dans un solo circassien **Scuse** témoigne avec brio et courage d'une réflexion personnelle sur le conditionnement de genre.

Une Bourse de 10 000\$



People Watching_photo_Alexandre Galliez

Play Dead

Voix fraîche qui s'exprime dans un format distinct et très accessible, le collectif **People Watching** a présenté un projet structuré qui témoigne de solides ancrages dans le milieu. Play Dead se distingue par une **forme innovatrice empreinte d'une théâtralité décalée**. Avec des moyens simples et une esthétique bien définie, le collectif a réussi une création avec des chorégraphies virtuoses. **L'importance de la recherche acrobatique, le haut niveau technique et une dramaturgie touchant à l'absurde contribuent à la signature déjà forte du spectacle de cette toute jeune compagnie.** Ruben Ingerwen, Jérémie Lévesque, Natasha Patterson, Brin Schoellkopf, Jarrod Takle et Sabine Van Rensburg incarnent la diversité d'une génération animée par l'inclusion et l'équité. Fusionnant la danse à l'acrobatie Play Dead a un potentiel de diffusion prometteur. Outre la pratique des arts du cirque et de l'acrodanse, les six membres du collectif réalisent des films, animent des ateliers de création et développent une culture de cirque qui va au-delà du spectacle.

Capsule: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW0m_OY8gSA

PRIX COUP DE COEUR - WINNER

festival
quartiers
dances
21^e édition

AWARDS

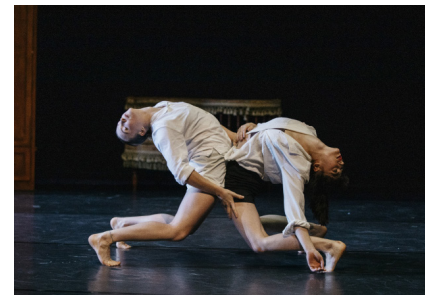
21^E ÉDITION DU FESTIVAL QUARTIERS DANSES

The Festival Quartiers Danses is proud to highlight the excellent work of the People Watching collective, made up of artists Ruben Ingwersen, Jérémie Lévesque, Natasha Patterson, Brin Schoellkopf, Jarrod Takle and Sabine Van Rensburg, with this award of distinction for its 21st edition.

Play Dead, presented on September 8, 2023 at the Studio-Théâtre des Grands Ballets Canadiens, as part of the FQD's theatrical program, has been awarded the Prix Coup de coeur | National, for its originality and artistic richness.

We are proud to contribute to the artistic development of the People Watching collective, and look forward to presenting their choreographic work again at the 22nd edition of the FQD, which runs from September 5 to 15, 2024.

Rafik Hubert Sabbagh
General and Artistic Director



© Melika Dez



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Play Dead Review | The Circus Reinvented | La Presse



SHOWS

Play Dead Review

The circus reinvented



PHOTO ALEXANDRE GALLIEZ, PROVIDED BY COMPLETELY CIRQUE
One of the scenes from *Play Dead*, with Ruben Ingwersen and Natasha Patterson in the background

If there's only one show to see in Montreal, Completely Cirque, it's this one. This small troupe of Montreal artists, born out of Les 7 Doigts, offered us one of the most original and inspiring contemporary circus performances of recent years on Wednesday evening.

Published on July 11, 2024



JEAN SIAG
The Press

For a moment, we thought that the Australians from Circa or even the virtuosos of Gandini would offer us the highlight of this edition. Well, no.

Not only did the six Montreal artists of People Watching—all graduates of the National Circus School of Montreal—offer us the festival's favorite show, but they also created one of the most memorable contemporary circus shows of recent years.

No more juggling pins, straps, trapeze or Cyr wheel... *Play Dead* is the equivalent of a long 70-minute sequence shot during which the six performers – all in their twenties – offer us the best of what we can see in acrobatic dance.

The staging, with its masterful fluidity, manages to create a continuum in which the transitions literally blend into the show's main pieces.

The action takes place in a typical apartment. Sofa, lamp, wardrobe, kitchen table. It's in this intimate setting that the six characters of *Play Dead* will get to know each other, bond, become attached, argue, fall in love, and distance themselves—in short, it's the place where the human relationships that unite them will be explored, dissected, and celebrated.



PHOTO ALEXANDRE GALLIEZ, PROVIDED BY COMPLETELY CIRQUE
Sabine Van Rensburg and Natasha Patterson in one of the many duets in *Play Dead*

The theme itself is not new, but the acrobatic choreographies created by this collective – this is their first show – are breathtaking.

Of course, the fact that they are all connected in real life (they have spent a lot of time together during the pandemic) adds a layer of truth to the show, but there is an intensity and sincerity in the gesture that, combined with the movements – including some never-before-seen acrobatics – make this show quite unique.

There is a little something cinematic in *Play Dead*, the creators' references come from the 7th ^{art} (the Swede Roy Andersson or the Greek Yórgos Lánthimos).

Whether it's the lighting (especially the lamp that moves around in a long dramatic segment), the impression of a sequence shot we were talking about earlier, or the characters, who each play a role in this acrobatic piece that could be described as a "dramatic comedy." A label that would never have been applied to a circus show before.

A comedy, yes, through these numerous dance duets. There are indeed some rather comical moments in *Play Dead*, and right from the opening, when one of the characters pretends to talk to one of the girls, visibly disinterested, who nods politely, while backing away... But all this is interspersed with rather tense and disturbing moments too, and sometimes even touching, which give goosebumps.

Segments that remind us a little of the beginnings of the 7 Doigts; the co-founders of the collective Gypsy Snider and Isabelle Chassé also worked on this show as artistic advisors.

The fact remains that this collective takes us elsewhere. Without circus apparatus or words, it makes us smile and moves us. These six artists, who have the ambition to reinvent the circus of tomorrow, have just raised the bar high. Remember their names: Brin Schoellkopf, Jarrod Takle, Natasha Patterson, Jérémi Lévesque, Sabine Van Rensburg, and Ruben Ingwersen.

Hoping they don't stop there.

[Check out the Play Dead page](#)

[Read our interview with the collective](#)



Play Dead
From the People Watching collective
At TOHU , Until July 14
9/10

Play Dead Review | The Circus Reinvented | La Presse

LA VERDAD

"Play Dead", cuando te entran deseos de comerse entero el mundo

Reseña del 19 de agosto



Monday, August 19, 2024, 07:20 | Updated 10:18h.

Sometimes - it's true - you feel privileged to be there, to contemplate a hypnotic spectacle painted by Caravaggio, who miraculously became flesh in motion with these young figures illuminated by their mystery and magnetism; a spectacle that shows, humbly and at the same time in all its splendor, human nature in all its beauty, its heartbreaks, its fears, its physical prowess, what madness.... And, at other times, what you're looking at is a wandering of ghosts and memories of the past, of shadows that lurk, of loves that have said goodbye, of hands that have helped you, of bodies that you have embraced not without despair, of loved ones who have never returned, of subdued lights that heal your wounds, of family dishes that come to life before your eyes... You see the game of taking risks, of scaling your most hidden desires, of stripping naked in the fog..., of being invisible, of being waited for with someone else's whole body, of being something more than a few bright and dark days in the world, of being even something more than the enamored dust and oblivion we will become.

The Canadian company People Watching, which we must not lose sight of, has constructed before us, with barbaric delicacy, with the subtlety of clockwork precision, a show of such power that it forces the eye(s) not to miss a single detail. And he deploys a pleasing, eerie attentiveness to isolated, distant sounds that come from a small bell or the rubbing of a glass or the opening and closing of a cupboard door. At other times, sublime music will flood the action with a splendor you don't want to end.

"Play Dead", as the project is called, is far from grandiloquent or commercially pretentious, and is the result of the collective creative and interpretive work of the six artists-dancers-acrobats who make this prodigy possible. On stage, a few pieces of antique furniture, a high-corned curtain, a few lamps, and a stroll of palpitations and glances that span centuries of domination of the body, and the pursuit of pleasure, create this production that does not ignore the recognizable character, sometimes so ridiculous, of human behavior, glorious at other times.

Dance, circus stunts, admirable physical theater that sometimes makes you shudder...; this chronicle of human relationships does not omit fatalism, nor the "damn them" of all those fates condemned to meet death at the wrong moment, or the merry-go-round of betrayal or misfortune. Above all, "Play Dead" is a celebration of affection, sensuality, friendship, dance, the pleasure of being together, and the audacity of breaking down walls.

Six authentic, sometimes almost invisible beasts celebrate the miracle of the performing arts on the Almansa Park Auditorium stage. And yes, it's true that this show could have been even better at the Winter Theater - may no one have the stupid idea of changing its name -, the new space of the San Javier Theater, Music and Dance Festival which, directed for another year by David Martínez, has reached its 54th edition converted into one of the most desirable summer theatrical events in all of Spain; I know: let's leave out the Barcelona Greek.

Indeed, six magnificent artists dedicate themselves to a show that they themselves helped to assemble and dismantle and which, as they say, came about when, in the spring of 2020, they felt "driven to seek ways of sharing intimacy with an audience during a period of deep isolation". And they hit the nail on the head, endowing the communicative and impactful possibilities of contemporary circus with doses of dramatic depth that resonate deeply with the spectator. Their names, bless them: Ruben Ingwersen, Jérémi Lévesque, Natasha Patterson, Brin Schoellkopf, Jarrod Takle, Sabine Van Rensburg.

Several things became clear on Saturday evening; One of them is that, without a doubt, both the trajectory of the San Javier Festival - which enjoys the firm support of Mayor José Miguel Luengo (PP) - and the audience accustomed to most of its programming, with its exemplary behavior and demonstrated loyalty, would deserve to be accompanied in future editions by internationally renowned artists, deserve to be accompanied in future editions by companies in the category, for example, of Belgium's Peeping Tom, whose latest show, "S 62°58", W 60°39" -coordinates which correspond to Deception Island, the exact spot where a ship ran aground in the Arctic ice - would certainly leave other nights to remember.

FMCC's Other Circus, Part 2 – Creative Vitality: “Play Dead” and “Everything is Perfect”

July 15, 2023.

Françoise Boudreault

Opening the curtain on this second installment of *L'Autre Cirque* at the Montréal Complètement Cirque festival, held at the Théâtre La Chapelle, are Nini Khelifa and Flavie Beaulieu, who present *Tout est parfait*. This interesting short piece combines physical power, a hint of competitive spirit, and a touch of comedy.

Play Dead begins with a man walking forward, talking rapidly and non-stop to a woman who is backing away. She reacts by moving her head a little, stretching her neck oddly. She continues in an increasingly strange way, letting her head completely back, arching her back and then straightening up, leaning backward almost to the ground, amplifying her movements more and more, like a long physical sentence whose point is a loud cry of exasperation that makes you laugh.

Secure your hat with a pin, the People Watching collective is sweeping you away in a maelstrom of high intensity. A brilliantly performed creation with its rich flow of stage action, dance acrobatics, and acrobatic dance, *Play Dead* also possesses a theatricality brought by the set and the acting.

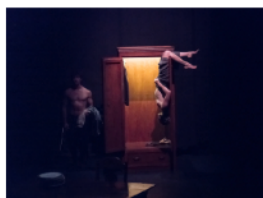
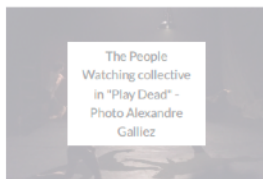
Founded in 2020, People Watching has been active during the pandemic and already has some accomplishments under its belt. The six members of the Montreal-based collective come from South Africa, Australia, California, Quebec, and Vermont, and all graduated from the National Circus School of Montreal between 2016 and 2019. They have been seen on stage with *Les 7 Doigts*, on tour with *Réversible* and *Passagers*, in *Nezha* in Shawinigan with Éloïse, and at the Monastère cabarets. These are therefore experienced performers who burn the stage.

There are no numbers in *Play Dead*, rather tableaux or scenes. The set, which will serve as a support for certain acrobatic choreographies, is made up of furniture – table, armchair, wardrobe – and a rectangle of fabric suspended stage right. Plates and bottles are also used. The center of the stage is freed up to make way for several duos, each more fascinating than the last, whether it be Sabine Van Rensburg and Natasha Patterson, Brin Schoellkopf and Jarrod Takle or Jérémie Lévesque and Ruben Ingwersen. A lot of floor work, lifts, interaction in constant proximity. The chemistry between the individuals works and the group work is skillfully synchronized. The repetitive movements bring momentum, to chain a variation or a different figure.

In a breathtaking scene, the six performers jump, dive, and roll across the ground at high speed, a cascade of stunts, with the only light being a swinging lamp from which one of them briefly hangs. This is one of the moments when the acrobats push themselves to the limit.

All of them perform on stage with a strong presence and a well-balanced expressiveness, in addition to executing their acrobatic choreographies with fluidity. With its just-theatrical enough atmosphere, complex physical scores executed brilliantly, a touch of strangeness, its humor both deadpan and absurd, *Play Dead* is an exceptional creation, very promising, with a strong dose of energy and talent. Long live *Play Dead* and this collective that watches people! Let's hope that this gem of the Montréal Complètement Cirque 2023 festival will soon be in a venue near you.

And speaking of talent, let's salute La Croustade and their playful-acrobatic creation *L'après-midi tombe quand tes biscuits se ruinent*. A show to devour, a delicious moment to spend alone, with others or with family, with Vincent Jutras and Éline Guélat who form a remarkable and touching duo.



TZ ZONE DE DANSE

Nouvelles Entretiens Récit Étranger Vidéo de la semaine



Centrum choreografického rozvoje

Play Dead: A majestic and virtuosic contemporary circus



The 15th annual Montréal *Complètement*, which annually attracts audiences from literally all over the world to the Canadian circus metropolis, offered both “traditional” new circus and the latest in contemporary art. The festival premiere of *Play Dead* by the Collectif People Watching (People Watching Collective) was one of the absolute highlights. The group of graduates of the Montreal National Circus School, with all their qualities, very significantly overshadowed the rest of the program with their magnificent, yet intimate work.

Play Dead is currently one of the truly sublime artistic achievements of contemporary circus, no matter how personal or biased it may sound. It includes the world's highest artistic level of an uncompromising character, captivates with visually engaging images associating tenebrism and naturalism in 17th century painting, and with the overall action on stage draws you into the dreamy timelessness of surrealism. *Play Dead* in the genre of physical theater, acrobatic dance and circus is a work with an exemplary non-linear dramaturgy, the pillars of which were an excellently built play full of dramatic moments crowned by the interplay of actors, perfect timing of actions and further conscious repetition (e.g., bends) and refined transition of scenic motifs (e.g., touch) and imagination triggering a narrative free from any description. The acting was characterized by a spirited and introverted gestural expression (including meaningful hand shapes), meaning was indicated by both barely perceptible blinks or fixed gazes (someone was always watching someone), and precisely constructed movement scores for highly technically trained bodies. The stage depiction of the coexistence of a group of people who perceive, respect, and perhaps even love each other, but also disagree, argue, and provoke each other, sounded the strings of tragedy and comedy.

The performance was full of emotions, touching and stunning, entertaining, and even spontaneously evoking laughter. To give an idea of the beginning, a lady and a gentleman descended the stairs from the top of the semicircular auditorium. Natasha Patterson, in a long turquoise gown, listened to the narration of Jérémie Lévesque, in a blue suit. His preoccupation with talking, while the viewer deliberately did not hear anything specific except for the melodically intense speech, strongly contrasted with her willingness to listen. She tactfully retreated, he added, and while she discreetly moved away, the young man immersed himself in himself, but did not stop talking. Her inner state subsequently boiled over. She began to widen her eyes, roll her neck, throw herself back, these bends deepened and the pace of the failing increased. The man continued to articulate. The originally romantic postcard developed into a drama with a sharp turn into comedy.

In the darkened stage space, reminiscent of an apartment, a massive almara stood on the left, in front of it a wooden table and period chairs with upholstered seats. On the right side there was a two-seater sofa, with its shape and decoration evoking the Baroque, a cupboard and a lamp with a decorative lampshade. A carpet and a light curtain were made of fabrics on the stage. The completely functional scenography was complemented by props - objects such as a duster, plates, a cup, etc., ranging from ostensive effects to functional use by the actors to symbolic use as a theatrical symbol. The dining table, for example, united the group, also served as an anchoring base for the poles with rotating plates, and after folding the legs on one side, it became an inclined plane on which the acrobats climbed and slid. Similarly, the costumes were not only pleasing to the eye, but above all they were able to highlight the geometry of movement and underline the features of the stage character.

For example, Brin Schoellkopf, a visually elongated, slender young man, first entered the scene in trousers with cut-off legs, threads still hanging from the edges. He held excessively long leather shoelaces in his hands, which he imaginatively struggled with in

his flexibility to send a message about the slightly neurotic state of being of a distinctive character. Later, he balanced on glass bottles, and then walked over their necks in a calm mood. After all, all the “heroes of the novel” were distinguished by their originality, which they emphasized with solo action with an object or with a partner, and thanks to this, they constantly differed from each other, which increased the tension both outward and inward in the story. Artist *Natasha Patterson dominated the stage in the role of a manipulative beauty, the character played by Sabine Van Rensburg exuded mystery. The male quartet, represented by Brin Schoellkopf, Jarrod Takle, Jérémie Lévesque and Ruben Ingwersen, was full of strength and sensitivity, delicate and fast, flirtatious and fragile.* The softly lit space exuded the aesthetics of silent films, with a floral, earthy perfume.

Behind this unique project stands a strong six-man crew of creators, virtuoso artists, personalities of different nationalities and disciplines, as well as completely available artists willing to break away from the perfectly familiar and open themselves up to a challenge. For example, none of the performers here flaunted their original circus discipline, on the contrary, they all very cleverly infiltrated it into the scenic universe of *Play Dead* and expanded their portfolios to new levels. For example, Sabine Van Rensburg, a circus artist of South African origin with a deep family tradition, an excellent aerial acrobat on a scarf, allowed herself to “hang” here, but only for a few dramatic seconds, during which she held on to the curtain with which she descended and rose in the throbbing rhythm of chaos. However, she made her mark in the memory above all with her solo situated in a closet. She was able to inhabit the minimalist space from many perspectives, from a position upside down, leaning between frames or hanging on a wardrobe door, all without giving any hint of temporary discomfort. In general, the omnipresent lightness was created under the impression of soft and almost silent touches and impacts, whether the artists “fell like corpses” directly to the ground or smoothly blended into the space, or jumped on each other and bounced off each other in flight.

On the sound level, melodies and noises sounded, classical and also pop music, often as if a gramophone needle was scratching into a worn record. The musical dramaturgy introduced another layer of unexpected connections, one of the surprises was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor, Op. 23 linked to a dynamic destructive action, when the acrobats themselves illuminated sections of the stage with a central light suspended in such a way as to help them move from place to place. It was fascinating to watch how they emerged from the darkness in various phases of the movement phrases, and at the same time the arrangement of things changed with them. It was a moment as if the glowing physical energy, fed by the phenomenal composition, was struggling to the surface from boiling water held by a jumping lid. Although there was no straightforward circus exhibition, the risk not only did not leave this scene, but did not leave it for a second throughout the performance.

The People Watching Collective is a group of six multidisciplinary artists who decided to collaborate in Montreal in 2020. During the pandemic, they shared an apartment, a kind of intimacy during a time of global isolation, and with that came many creative ideas. They therefore began to search for a common language that would include all their previous experiences but also the challenges that successfully filtered into the final form. The production of *Play Dead* by the young collective is literally destined to become a hit of upcoming festivals with artistically directed dramaturgy in the outlook of the seasons, without exaggeration, around the globe.



4/21/25, 2:01 PM

"Play Dead" by the Quebec company People Watching, when dance and theater make their circus | Le Devoir

LEDEVOIR

"Play Dead" brings together different artistic disciplines to address intimacy



Photo: Valérien Muzstaud Le Devoir Three members of the People Watching circus collective

They are six, from four countries, dedicated to collective creation in the purest sense of the term and speaking the same language: one where contemporary dance, theater and circus come together in unison. A dialect tinged with surrealism that the People Watching company considers inseparable from circus art, given the diversion of various objects for acrobatic purposes and the physical feats that transgress the usual and leave one speechless. After having first presented its first show, *Play Dead*, last year at the Théâtre La Chapelle, as part of the exploratory section *L'autre cirque* of the Montréal complètement cirque festival, it is investing this year at the Tohu to reveal it to the general public.

It was at the National Circus School that Brin Schoellkopf (from Vermont), Jérémie Lévesque (from Quebec), Sabine Van Rensburg (from South Africa), Natasha Patterson (from California), Ruben Ingerwen and Jarrod Takle (both from Australia) met, admired each other and formed a strong friendship. While it was clear to the six artists that they wanted to work together, not all of them having graduated in the same year, each began their own career path. However, some of these paths crossed, such as those of Schoellkopf and Van Rensburg, who were from Passagers, and those of Lévesque and Patterson, members of the team of Réversible, two shows by Les 7 doigts, which only cemented their ties, as well as their shared vision.

Then the relentless pandemic struck. It turned out to be rather favorable for the birth of the first opus of what was not yet People Watching. While Takle and Ingerwen were certainly stuck in Oceania, the four other comrades moved into the same loft and devoted themselves to creation without interruption or outside distraction, conditions extremely rare in the current era.

Confinement also influenced the content of *Play Dead*. Not only does its scenography sketch a domestic setting, but the show is particularly interested in "the intimacy, the absurdity" of living together and the visceral need for others, explains Brin Schoellkopf. For the members of People Watching, this imposed break also evokes the end of the carefree spirit of youth. Jérémie Lévesque speaks of an "awareness of our relationship to friendship, love, death, and the fragility of all that." These themes naturally lead to a reflection on appearances. "When it cracks," he adds, "what lies behind it? We approached this question in different ways, without being fatalistic."

Rethinking the circus

Fueled by these considerations, the sextet set out to conquer the Holy Grail of contemporary circus: to create a meaningful work free of discontinuities. "From the beginning, we wanted to move away from the act-transition-act model," says Lévesque. "However, it's nice to say it—and I feel like I've heard it in half the projects I've been involved with—but we usually end up falling back into the act format, because of the circus apparatus."

This is why the six companions made the bold choice to renounce their respective specific expertise. Because creating from given circus disciplines would have predetermined "what the world we tried to build with the show will contain," explains Takle. The creative process would have been oriented towards justifying the use of these disciplines (the Korean board for Lévesque and the tightrope for Schoellkopf, for example) rather than allowing them to be chosen based on what the artists wanted to express. However, the dramaturgical aspect occupies a cardinal position in their approach. "In the circus, often, from one scene to the next, there is a kind of wipe and reset: we sweep the stage, we put on a new apparatus. We wanted the feelings to flow throughout the performance, to find more natural ways of moving from one thing to another through writing."

In addition to marrying dance, circus, and "physical theater," People Watching's work is steeped in cinematic influences. "It's in our visual vocabulary, in the way we compose the image. There are even certain moments in the show that are based on an image that we wanted to set in motion." The challenge, says Brin Schoellkopf (who would love to make a film based on *Play Dead*), was "to find [transitions] between these scenes"... that wouldn't seem like transitions.

The group also refines its composite aesthetic, imbued with a certain "dark humor," as Lévesque calls it, through immersive performances. As Jarrod Takle enthusiastically asserts, he and his colleagues are fond of in situ performances, "where anything can happen, where we can interact with the audience, bring them into our world." And the troupe would love to export this world to other art forms. "We want to continue exploring different creative sources," says Jérémie Lévesque passionately, "working with people who are more into costume design or even fashion. We also want to collaborate with visual artists and do installations, video, and photography."

While exploring new disciplinary territories, the collective will attempt to conquer new lands. After Montréal entièrement cirque, it will tour *Play Dead* to Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and Norway. And the company will embark on its tour with a nomination for the very first Propulsion Prize for Innovation and Enrichment of Circus Arts from the Conseil des arts de Montréal (in partnership with En piste, the national circus arts group). A very attractive calling card.



Ein Traum, ein Fegefeuer, ein Ort, an dem anatomische Logik und Schwerkraft keine Gültigkeit zu haben scheinen. „Play Dead“ des kanadischen Kollektivs People Watching entführt in ein amorphes Universum aus häuslichen Insignien und ineinandergreifenden Geschichten, in dem acht Menschen die Schönheit und Absurdität des menschlichen Daseins erforschen. Die junge Kompanie hat eine ganz eigene Ästhetik an der Schnittstelle von Artistik, Tanz und Physical Theater geschaffen – einen fließen-

den, bilderreichen und leichtfüßigen Zeitgenössischen Zirkus. Mit seiner innovativen Formensprache sorgte das Stück in der internationalen Zirkusszene für Aufsehen. Für die Spielzeit im Chamäleon wurde das Stück auf eine Version für acht Performerinnen und Performer neu inszeniert. Die Gelegenheit, den internationalen Durchbruch dieser jungen Kompanie hautnah mitzuerleben, sollte man sich nicht entgehen lassen! (Seite 5)

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The young Canadian circus company People Watching achieved resounding success with its very first production, "Play Dead." Since then, promoters around the world have been clamoring to hire the Montreal-based collective. "Play Dead" explores human relationships in an absurdly comic way. Acrobatics, dance, and physical theatre are interwoven into a lively performance.

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