



Dancers are not children (nor are they dogs)

This summer, employers in the dance sector presented a booklet entitled « *ce que peut la danse* » or, « *what dance can do* ». It synthesizes work carried out by « *une diversité d'acteur·ices du champ chorégraphique* ». The authors claim to represent « *performing artists* » and « *the unions* » yet **the performing artists and the workers unions were never invited to participate**. Even though we, as dancers, have collectively organized for over a century, **employers are therefore speaking on our behalf**. Today, the SFA CGT is the leading representative organization of employees. In the professional elections, the CGT obtains 74% in the subsidized sector and 80% in the private sector. **Excluding the dancers and their union is not only insulting to these groups on the part of employers, but also revealing of an outdated outlook that does not regard dancers as adults.**

In 1953 Gérard Philippe wrote, « *Actors are not dogs.* » 73 years later, his words continue to resonate, reflecting stagnation in the culture of the dance world. The main qualities expected of dancers are discipline and docility; **Performers are reduced to pawns or machines. They are not asked to speak**, and if they must, they should do so only with the « head of the family, » not with fellow colleagues or within their union, and *especially* not if it's to discuss salary levels, expenses, and the economic conditions of the work performed.

In 2026, it is still common to address dancers as « *les enfants* » (kids). And yet, paradoxically, choreographic creations increasingly rely on the participation of performers to contribute movement and research. It is striking how quickly choreographers forget that they were once performers. **Would leaving this outdated mindset and treating dancers as adults be too financially costly?** Occasionally, there will be a program note stating « *created in collaboration with the performers* », at the cost of sometimes tense exchanges. And yet the choreographers who actually share the economic benefits of their work via copyrights can be counted on one hand, and the *Droits Voisins* – a form of intellectual property copyright that is owed to performers for the use of the recordings of their performances – are more often an exception than a rule.

In this old world, it is not only the status of co-creating artists that is denied; **while dancers are organizing, they are not being heard**. Regarding VHMSS and preservation of « *the physical and mental integrity of the dancers* », measures are occasionally taken, **but there lacks a greater systemic questioning**.

We see a pattern: a board provides **unconditional support** to a director, and the day that becomes untenable, the board cuts off the head and installs a new director who, in turn, receives unconditional support from the board. Incidentally, the board apologizes to the dancers for having doubted their word, but no questioning of the system seems possible. **We remain in this cycle where authority goes hand in hand with the infantilization of the employees.**

Yet, today, dancers are organizing. **We have opinions about how we want to work and the behaviors we will no longer endure. We also have things to say about what the works we perform convey.**



The booklet « *ce que peut la danse* » praises this art which « *brings together a considerable number of people of all ages and plays a key role in addressing the common needs of all citizens and fostering community spirit.* » Yes, the dance *can* do all of that. But **in this outdated world, dance hurts**. Choosing this profession should no longer mean exposing oneself to moral and physical violence, humiliation, sexist and sexual violence, racism and abuse of power; all in a state of exacerbated precarity. The booklet acknowledges that « *prevention and support mechanisms remain insufficiently structured.* » But **if the #MeTooDance movement is struggling to gain traction, it's because this old world doesn't want dancers to speak out, and victims know that speaking out will cost them dearly**. Prevention requires liberation and a welcoming space for people to speak. Excluding dancers from these discussions is certainly not the right approach.

To the dancers: let's bury this old world, let's organize collectively, let's speak out, let's take our rightful place. Let's unionize, join us!!

To choreographers who wish to join a workers union, the SNMS, a member of the CGT Spectacle federation, is your union.

To employers in the field of dance: It is high time to break with paternalism. Dancers are neither machines nor children. Respect the collective organizational structures that dancers establish, even if it means a reduction in your power.

In short « *what dance can do* » cannot be reduced just to what the boss *wants*.

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