



## PERFORMANCE CREATION CANADA – A BRIEF HISTORY

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Performance Creation Canada (PCC) was founded in Calgary in January 2004. Sixty-two professionals from all facets working within the disciplines of theatre, dance, music and performance art, gathered from every part of the country. Our purpose was to propose a new, open-formatted structure for the exploration and discussion of topics relevant to the creation and dissemination, support, appreciation and education of new Canadian performance.

Each PCC event constitutes an ongoing, freewheeling discussion of performance creation in Canada: its challenges, its developments and, most importantly, a meeting place for the individuals at its core and a celebration of the communities in which they work. PCC remains a network of individuals first and foremost – artists, presenters, administrators, educators, officers working within fund agencies, etc. – regardless of their professional affiliation.

PCC has purposefully remained informal. There are no rigid membership criteria. To date there has been no formal administrative structure. It has been more important to the network to remain unfettered by the obligations of incorporation so as to remain free to focus on its main purpose: to move freely about the country, to address the specific needs of the host communities, and to spend energy and funding on the primary task of moving the network around the country.

The dynamically evolving discussion that is PCC's national mandate continues to articulate these and other relevant themes:

- the organic evolution of a shared vocabulary,
- the ongoing introduction and integration of individuals from separate but complimentary disciplines,
- the geographic and cultural exploration and a developing appreciation of our new country,
- experiencing and addressing cultural and regional character,

- acknowledging our many differences as well as those characteristics that (sometimes surprisingly) we share,
- stimulating and galvanizing the wide variety of artists and institutions within the hosting community,
- the demonstration and “open source” sharing of best practices from the many facets of our complex enterprise,
- successful networking in myriad predictable and unpredictable ways
- the creation and dissemination of new performances and collaborations

The strategy is to have ongoing critical discussions about these and other themes. This discussion picks up where previous PCC events left it off. Sometimes it is necessary to have the same discussion again in different parts of the country. When a critical mass is achieved, the entire dialogue is lifted to a higher level, and the art of performance creation is served.

That this dynamic discussion is relevant can be proven by the legacies left behind the moveable networking event, and by the number of communities eager to have a PCC experience of their own.

Brief reports from past PCC events show the ways in which the impact of the network differs depending on the needs and aspirations of the distinct communities that have hosted it.

- **Calgary:** The network was born from a perceived need for an entity like PCC. The commitment was made that PCC remain informal in order to allow for an organizational evolution that could respond to the needs of the national performance creation community as illuminated by ongoing discussion and experience. Hosted by One Yellow Rabbit and Vertigo Theatre; theme **To Be Or Not To Be.**
- **St. John's:** PCC came to Newfoundland and Labrador to address the reality of geographic and cultural isolation – a hallmark of the regional experience. No event of this sort had previously been held in St. John's. One undeniable result has been that the St. John's community was subsequently inspired to host Magnetic North in the summer of 2006. Hosted by Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland and Sound Symposium; theme **Regionalism, Connectivity and Access.**

- **Vancouver:** PCC entered the mainstream of Canada's performance creation community and the size of the national and international turnout was remarkable. PCC marked the launch of Vancouver's interdisciplinary performance festival, Push. PCC Vancouver also facilitated Canada's first International Artist Centres conference. Hosted by Push Festival, Grunt Gallery and The Roundhouse; theme **A New Ecology for Performance**.
- **Regina:** PCC interfaced seamlessly with Performance Perimeters Symposium, a performance and panel event produced specifically for PCC, exposing national delegates to Regina and Saskatchewan's significant history of interdisciplinary practice. The particularly inclusive nature of PCC Regina meant all disciplines shared common ground and the similarities and differences of each were weighed and discussed in a constructive atmosphere. New Dance Horizons, Sakewewak First Nations Artists' Collective, Curtain Razors and Neutral Ground; theme **Historical Traces And Touring**.
- **Toronto:** This is a time of flux in Toronto's performance milieu. Many challenges and opportunities are converging to remake the cultural landscape of Canada's largest city. PCC provided a fresh and fluid environment to discuss topics related to evolving definitions of community. One result has been a new collaborative openness between previously more insular institutions and artists. Hosted by Buddies in Bad Times, Harbourfront Centre, Theatre Centre and Red Cabaret; theme **Where Are the Artists?**
- **Whitehorse:** PCC Whitehorse and its corresponding performance event, Arts Equinox Festival, provided Yukon artists with their first opportunity to present new visual and performing arts to presenters, producers and funders from across Canada, and to participate in discussions and activities with national and international conference participants. The results have been significant and the experience appears to have been instrumental in propelling the local arts scene and in plotting new directions for performance creation in the Yukon Territory. Hosted by Yukon Arts Centre, Northern Arts and Culture Centre of Yellowknife and Superfriends; theme **Power of Place**.
- **Calgary:** The return of PCC to Calgary this January provides a timely

opportunity to reflect on the network's successes and challenges, and to take stock of where we have come in short period of time. The event will be an occasion to reconsider questions of organizational structure, mandate and our evolving relationship to national funding agencies Canada Council and Canadian Heritage. Hosted by Alberta College of Art and Design, Calgary Arts Development/Calgary Economic Development, Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival Society, One Yellow Rabbit, Springboard Dance and University of Calgary Faculty of Fine Arts; theme **Building Community Through Performance**.

The immediate effects of PCC on Canada's evolving performance milieu are as undeniable as they are sometimes intangible. The experience works best when participants arrive without preconceived ideas about accomplishment or acquisition.

Chris Dray of the Yukon Arts Centre (YAC) has this to say:

Since its inception three years ago, PCC has been the most significant contributor to performing arts event planning at the YAC and has provided more opportunities for Yukon artists than any other national network meeting or showcase, such as CAPACOA, Pacific Contact, Contact East, CINARS and CANDANCE.

Ann Brophy summarizes the St. John's experience:

In response to the needs of the local community... sessions were created around the theme of Regionalism, Connectivity and Access.... (T)he informal quality of the weekend... added greatly to the overall pleasure and value of the event. In particular the opportunity for this small but extremely creative community to meet with like-minded and equally creative artists from across the country was probably the most satisfying outcome.... PCC... provided an opportunity for us to get to know each other a little better. That was its success.

PCC functions as a showcase, a conference and a festival event. And yet it is none of these things. Inspired by the formative years of the Informal European Theatre Meeting, PCC is perhaps more akin to a nomadic bazaar where the exchange of ideas is as intrinsic to the experience as the trade of goods and services. The network's informality (basic networking) is as

valuable as the programming of more formal exchanges of thoughts and vision (panels and presentations).

Taking place in an atmosphere of changing aesthetics and evolving creative structures and political landscapes, the PCC experience is both invigorating and timely, and this explains the network's current momentum. It may be that, in the future, there will no longer be the same drive to assemble the network twice annually. But for the meantime, that desire and need are demonstrable.

Future PCC events are already being planned biannually into 2009.

- Ottawa: June '07
- Montreal: February '08
- Halifax: September '08
- Kelowna: February '09

Each of these events will express the essential differences between the regions and communities that host them. Meanwhile, the same conversations will be picked up and reexamined as new ideas and best practices are shared and articulated by the individuals who make up Canada's performance creation community.

To be continued....

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