

Split into small groups, students spent the first week with four Montreal companies – Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal and Système D – and with Nathalie Buisson, who represents Madrid's Compañía Nacional de Danza. During the second week, they worked with the Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Les Ballets Jazz and choreographers Margie Gillis and Shawn Hounsell. At night, with Gillis as a sounding board, they created and rehearsed their own choreographies. The results of this intense activity were presented July 18 as works in progress.

In a dazzling display of youthful freshness and exhilarating technique, the students performed extracts of Crystal Pite's *24 Short Works*, Nacho Duato's *Without Words* and, along with their own works, presented two new pieces made for them by Hounsell and Gillis.

The Project generated an immediate spin-off. Stephan Laks, who had already been offered a contract with Lisbon's Gulbenkian Foundation, signed on with Les Grands instead. Another Juilliard student, Randy Castillo, was hired by Duato's company. Ten were invited to Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault's auditions for *Joe*, and five auditioned for Madrid's Compañía Nacional de Danza 2.

In response to students' suggestions for more time with choreographers in their studios, Wells and Alexander – both of them pleased and proud – promised to expand the Project next season.

In Wells' view, the workshop is tailored to students' needs, to give them a taste of how professional dancers work. "It's about bridging the gap between being a student and a professional... Students ask 'where do I go?' after college. They rarely know the dance market and have no idea which companies they may be suited for." ▼

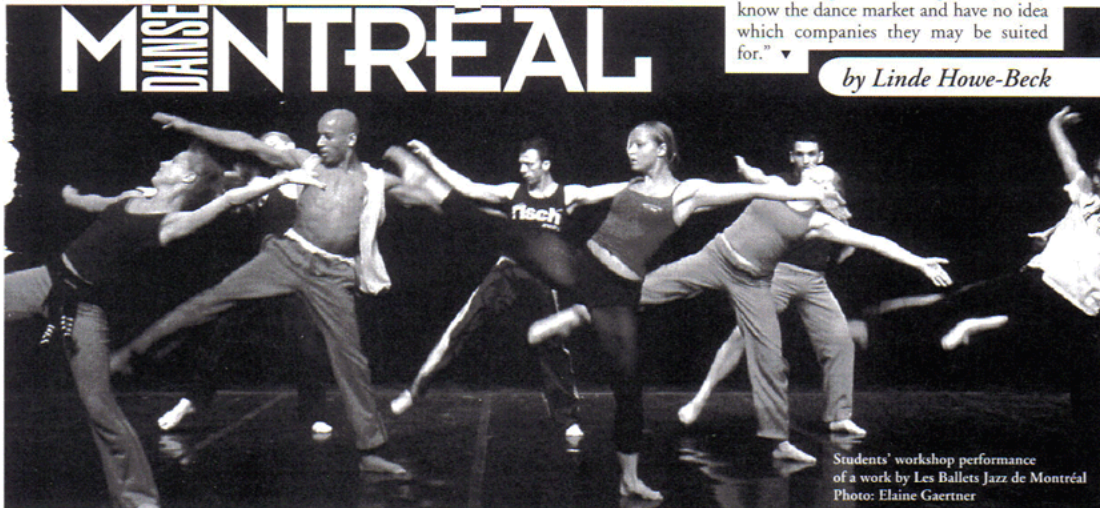
by Linde Howe-Beck



Hurrah! Ballet Divertimento is making the Professional Project an annual affair. The unique three-week event – expanding to four weeks in 2004 – gives exceptional students a taste of working with Montreal companies and choreographers.

The ballet school's founder, Susan Alexander, is general director of the project. Alexandra Wells, a teacher at New York's famed Juilliard School, is artistic director. In 2002, they created a pilot project geared to offering gifted senior dance students an opportunity to work with and be seen by professionals.

This year's session, June 30 to July 18, welcomed 41 students chosen by audition and extensive interviewing. Among them were five from Vancouver, six from Montreal, one from Winnipeg, four from Purchase University in the United States, two from New York University, one from



Students' workshop performance of a work by Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal
Photo: Elaine Gaertner