

A New Confinement that will Leave its Mark (translation)

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On September 30, at a press conference, Minister Christian Dubé happily announced the easing of health measures in the cultural and sports sectors, which included the gradual return to full capacity in theaters. This announcement came as a great surprise to the cultural community, many of whose key players had not been consulted.

So, just a few weeks later, we learned that we were suddenly and without warning among the first sectors of activity to have to close their doors in the face of the rising number of cases related to the Omicron variant.

To this day, we are still waiting for the data on which this habit of closing our facilities first when the situation deteriorates is based. We sincerely hope that we will not be the last to reopen when the health situation improves. This method erodes the bond of trust with the public that we are trying to retain despite all the jolts of the crisis.

We understand that being predictable in such a new and uncertain context is difficult, and that priority must be given to the health system and its workers, to whom we express our solidarity.

But this fragility does not explain why we are left with so many questions.

Why does the management of theaters continue to be done in a transversal manner as if there were no great differences between the realities of large amphitheatres and smaller auditoriums?

Why are we often given 48 hours notice, sometimes less, to change our seating plans, putting additional pressure on our already overstretched teams to manage health measures?

After two years, it is unrealistic to talk about a temporary situation. Individuals are exhausted and the milieu is suffering great damage, including an exodus from the cultural milieu to other sectors of activity as well as psychological distress.

A Long-Term Vision

In this context, it is imperative that we have access to a long-term vision and a plan to get out of the crisis, which we have been talking about for several months now.

We have been called to work meetings with the Ministry of Culture and Communications to discuss the future. We are happy to participate in these meetings and we believe that this

discussion must be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue and a more pronounced presence of Minister Nathalie Roy in the public space so that the milieu perceives that the challenges it faces are understood and defended.

From now on, we must unite our minds and our expertise in order to find solutions to the many challenges that await us in the medium term.

For example, with the numerous postponements that have occurred, programming schedules are overflowing until 2024, and this, without the prospect of a new confinement. What does this vision offer to independent artists? To those who have recently graduated? To those who have been waiting to play, to be played, to showcase the fruits of their immense labor for two years now? How will risk-taking and experimentation find their place under such circumstances? How will the sector dedicated to young audiences deal with this shock, whose first partner, the school environment, is also affected by these 22 months of pandemic?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have also repeated that the main measures in place do not take into account enough those whose careers do not always go through the more traditional venues.

What can we do for artists who receive little or no support? What happens to those whose incomes depend on engagements with schools, libraries, international tours, or other organizations that are not supported by dissemination measures?

The consequences of this new confinement are brutal. They will leave traces that deserve more than a few administrative clarifications. The dialogue must be transparent, enlightening and continuous.

We ask that the government's silence on the situation of the living arts cease and that concrete actions be taken to ensure the long-term health of Quebec's cultural life.

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