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ROYAL BALLET OF WINNIPEG: SUZANNE'S LAST DANCE

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While the Royal Winnipeg Ballet opened its 78th edition last week, La Liberté became interested in this pair of spectators who, for 18 years, held the same seats in the heart of the Centennial Hall. A love story that lasts beyond death.

By Barbara GORRAND

At the first notes of music, his heart was knotted. Embraced to suffocation by the unbearable absence. By the desperately empty red of this chair, there, next door. By the infinite echo of this silence, covering the rustling of the crowd. Then, irresistibly, the tears began to dance between the wrinkles of her face. For the first time, Suzanne was not there. And never again would it be.

Door 6. Rank 15. Places 35 and 36. For almost two decades, without even knowing it, the Centennial Room has served as a showcase for an extraordinary love story. That of Suzanne Fountain, and John Borst, "born in Winnipeg by accident".

Because she was not married, because it was in 1939, Rose Villeneuve arrived from Toronto to give birth to her child, sheltered from reproachful looks. Without a word, she went back to Toronto, carrying her child in her arms. Before finally disappearing, shadow among the shadows, leaving to others the care of raising this son she would never see again.

John is named after Borst and the peaceful life of the people of Brampton, Ontario. "I was the stereotype of the provincial sportsman. I only lived for hockey," he smiles again. Between games, one eye on the stadium next to his home, John grows up. Studied. Becomes a teacher. Integrate the local bowling league. And, perfect child of the country, accepts the role of poster boy of his school. "One night, I was asked to welcome two new teachers to bowling. I was 22 years old, I was single, and I see these two young women arrive. When I saw Sue, I thought, "She's pretty; may I dare to invite her?" "And you know what? She said yes! "

A "yes" that Suzanne will renew three years later, this time very solemnly. "You understand, I was Catholic, and she had been brought up according to the precepts of a little sect. She chose to convert for me. And me, she converted me to ballet. "

Of course, the first time Suzanne asked John to accompany him to ballet, our hockey fan was quick to accept. "I was in love! And curious, too. I did well: I gasped. These dancers! I could not believe it. I was not sophisticated enough to know the names of steps, litters; but I knew how to recognize an athlete when I saw one. That's how it all started. "

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JOHN BORST

Now, nothing will ever be the same for Suzanne and John. Timidly at first, then with more and more strength, the ballet will become their parenthesis. Their secret garden. That he sells, that he snows, that they have one, two, three children, four little children, their life will be punctuated by the first, the curtain that opens, and the dancers who enter the scene. "At the National Ballet in Toronto, first. Then in 1993, when I was posted to Dryden, at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Door 6, rank 15, places 35 and 36. Our places, during 18 years. Three and a half hours drive? It's nothing. Because at least three times a year, we were there, alone in the world. Door 6, range 15, places 35 and 36. "

Out of the world, out of time, Suzanne and John fully live their pas de deux. Like this time, knowing that Suzanne's heart ballerina, Karen Kain, is saying goodbye to the scene in Winnipeg, John goes out of his way to get the best seats. And surprise Suzanne with tickets, "and a bouquet of roses, of course! "

Or, Suzanne's 60 years, for which John had a sculpture of a dancer located in Young Street set aside a year ago. "Today, I have a dozen of these porcelain ballerinas. Which I bought for her. Ballet was really our sacred link. "

Until this morning of June 2011, where Suzanne can not get up anymore. Devoured in silence by a rare disease, polyarteritis nodosa. "She died quietly, in the hospital. One night, she opened her eyes. We kissed each other, we said "I love you", we kissed each other again. The next day she did not speak anymore. But she blinked. You understand, Sue taught with people who are very severely disabled, who only communicate by blinking. I knew she had just said goodbye ... "

Suzanne died on July 19th. A few days before this surprise birthday that John had organized for the 70th anniversary of his star. And in the ensuing tremor of life, this reminder: the opening of the season at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. "I wondered what I had to do. And then I said to myself: "You have to continue. For her. Because you're alive, because you owe him. "So, I went back to Winnipeg. Door 6, Row 15, Square 35. Desperately empty square 36 next to me. It's been so, so, so hard. Can I say so much again? He asks again, his face bathed in tears. "It had been our rendezvous for 18 years. And that day, everything seemed meaningless to me. Of life. But I held out, all year. Sitting next to the void. For her. To make it live, a little more. "

Suzanne has been dead for six years today. But John continues to honor their appointments. Three times a year. Gate 6, rank 15, square 35. Of course, he reduced

his subscription to one place. But often, the armchair next door will remain unoccupied. As if, out of modesty, chance had chosen to leave John with his memories. To preserve this parenthesis out of the world, out of time, which nourished this love story.

If, one day, you find yourself there, wears 6, rank 15, armchair 36, alongside a man with misty glasses, let him tell you his story. Above all, let Suzanne's memory dance behind her half-closed eyelids.

"Hearing Mr. Borst's story warms the heart. We feel privileged to know that he and his wife have chosen us as their tradition, and I am grateful that Mr. Borst continues to pay tribute to his wife by attending the Royal Winnipeg Ballet performances. "

André Lewis, artistic director of RWB.

- **LABELS**
- **Royal Winnipeg Ballet (BRW)**
- **Love story**
- **John Borst**

Barbara Gorrard