

# Informal Survey of Dance Artists on Conditions for Reopening Studio Activities



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**Project conducted by Les Reservoirs\* and Simon Renaud  
with the collaboration of Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique for creation of this report**

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# INTRODUCTION

While the pandemic was a death knell for cultural activities, artisans in the dance milieu were totally left in the dark. Although several institutions have taken initiatives to restart, it was once again obvious that the voice of those mainly concerned, the performers, had not been given serious consideration. Out of concern for inclusiveness, but also for practical reasons facing the dance community (a performer is at the same time choreographer and/or director of rehearsals and/or instructor), we wanted everyone's voice to be heard. Faced with this reality, the Informal Survey for Dance Artists was conceived concerning the conditions for resumption of activities in the studio.

The most important thing about this project is that it be done for and by the artists. The hope in this process was to create a trusted space where everyone felt safe to express their thoughts, concerns, fears, and also their ideas and solutions with respect to individual realities. Out of a concern to not put words in the mouths of questionnaire respondents, these were not multiple-choice questions. We wanted to invite artists to reflect and express themselves. We also put in place a telephone hotline option to offer an attentive ear for all those who felt the need for it or were more comfortable expressing themselves in that manner.

In order to reflect the reality of the Montreal dance community, we wanted to create a bilingual document. Ambitiously, we hope that this document will enable us to break down barriers and bring us all together. From Ottawa to Calgary, Vancouver to Halifax and back to Montreal. The answers made us realize more than ever to what extent the sentiment of the community is important to us in difficult times.

Although the spectrum of opinions in confronting the situation is considerable, we have, in true humility, tried to create a document compiling all the voices that participated in the survey. This document will be accessible to everyone. We hope that it will be shared among you, the artists, but also with studios, companies and/or institutions, to begin the conversation between all of us and provide food for thought. Let's hope that our voices bring more to the table than just the relentless pursuit of production and money, which too often govern decisions.

We must thank Daniel Villeneuve who, thanks to the support of Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique, was able to collaborate in the final stage of this project. We must also thank the Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists/West Chapter, as well as the Canadian Dance Assembly, for their support in the translation of this document.

In conclusion, thanks to each and every one of you who took the time to respond to this questionnaire.

We hear you.

Alexia, Audrey, Élise, Marie-France & Simon

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# 1. CONDITIONS FOR RETURNING TO THE STUDIO

## 1.1 Hygiene

**A majority mentioned that studios need to institute new measures, including frequent disinfection of surfaces and adequate ventilation.**

**A majority mentioned the importance of having access to disinfectant or a washbasin for frequent/mandatory hand-washing.**

Many mentioned that lessors of studios establish clear protocols for entering and exiting the venue.

Many mentioned wearing a mask at all times during rehearsal, from the moment of entering the premises. Others added also wearing a mask while travelling to rehearsal.

Some mentioned avoiding sharing items in the studio such as clothes, mats and accessories. Others added the disinfection of personal items upon arrival.

## 1.2 Responsibility

**Several mentioned the need for all to follow public health guidelines and that it's the responsibility of each person to stay home if symptoms appear. Others added that, where appropriate, a negative test result is necessary before a person can return to the studio.**

Some think it's the responsibility of those who lease the studio space to regularly disinfect surfaces.

Some said they prefer to wait for an expert's opinion concerning the specific context of the dance environment before wanting to return to the studio.

## 1.3 Social Distancing

Some mentioned applying the 2m distance rule at all times. While others added marking the floor in order to comply with this rule.

## 1.4 Communication and Consent

**Most mentioned that it's necessary to establish a culture of trust and consent in the work environment in order to respect the needs of each person.**

Several mentioned the need to conduct follow-ups. Some mentioned the necessity of being aware of everyone's health condition at the start of rehearsal; others added taking everyone's temperature at the start of each rehearsal.

## 1.5 Studio Attendance

### Responsibility of Lessors of Studios

The majority mentioned the necessity for lessors of studios to take special measures to reduce traffic and avoid people crossing paths. Some think there should be a limit on the number of people in the studio; others think there should be limits on the number of creative teams frequenting the studio; several think it's necessary to have a buffer period between each rehearsal to avoid crossing paths (and for disinfecting). Operating rules for each studio should be clearly articulated and should ensure fairness for both funded and non-funded artists.

### Responsibility of Producers

To reduce traffic, several mentioned that producers need to rethink the way they lease studios. Some mentioned using a single venue for the duration of rehearsals; others mentioned leasing a studio for a minimum of one week.

Several mentioned the necessity for producers to rethink schedules by compressing work periods, to offer periods that are longer, but less frequent.

Some people mentioned the necessity of offering artists/associates more hours of work so that they can reduce the number of projects in which they are participating.

### Responsibility of Artists

Several mentioned that artists reduce the number of projects in which they are involved. Some suggested that freelancers work on only one project at a time.

Some mentioned rethinking the schedules of freelancers to reduce the number of rehearsals in which they participate daily.

## 2. LIMITATIONS AND CONSENT

### 2.1 Personal Limitations

Several mentioned they are ready to take risks under a pre-defined protocol. Several prefer to return to the studio only if they can do so alone. Some hope to be able to wear a mask. A small portion prefer no rolling on the floor and want adequate ventilation.

**A large portion are uncomfortable with returning to the studio in the current context. However, some are ready to do rehearsals outside, while others prefer to wait longer or for specific sanitary measures to be put in place.**

Some do not feel comfortable returning to the studio, but are afraid of losing their job.

**Several mentioned the importance of ensuring that each person's personal limitations are respected.**

### 2.2 Touching

Some said they are comfortable with touching in the context of a rehearsal, without stating any conditions. Others said they are comfortable with touching but not being breathed on.

#### **Under certain conditions**

A large proportion said they are comfortable with physical contact in the context of a rehearsal, but with certain conditions. For example, if:

- all members of the group consent
- an exclusive cell can be created
- there's a secluded residence and quarantine before and after
- there's a reduction of teams and number of projects for each artist
- collaborators do not present symptoms and are not at risk
- touching is done with the least amount of people possible
- each collaborator keeps track of their contacts
- masks are worn and hands washed frequently
- it's a duo

#### **With reservations**

Some mentioned having strong reservations about touching and wanted as little contact as possible, although a gradual return to touching was feasible (first social distancing, then touching).

**Several mentioned being uncomfortable with touching or not wanting any physical contact.**

## 3. ETHICS AND PROTOCOL

### 3.1 Protocol

A vast majority mentioned the importance of establishing a protocol. Some think this is the responsibility of the producer, while others think an overall protocol for the profession is essential. For some, the protocol should be established by people who are most at risk of developing complications or who mix regularly with at-risk persons.

### 3.2 Contract Provisions

**A large proportion mentioned adding consent clauses to contracts. Several mentioned that contract clauses should allow for open discussion and be sensitive to individual levels of tolerance.**

Some mentioned the importance of producers clearly outlining their positions around COVID-19. Others mentioned the importance of being able to withdraw from a contract at any time if health measures are not respected by the employer.

**Several mentioned the importance of receiving economic support from their employer in the eventuality where one would become sick and that their job would be assured for the future.**

Some mentioned the importance of including special clauses in the contract around touching. Some mentioned that these clauses include a 14-day quarantine (with an all-inclusive fee for this period, as well as an exclusive residence).

For technical classes or for in-studio work periods, some mentioned the necessity that individuals sign a release stipulating that they accept the risks incurred by participating in the activity.

Some mentioned that the protocol be updated depending on general or individual changes, and that updating one's consent should be scheduled in the contract.

### 3.3 Economic, Psychological and Legal Support

Some think it's important that producers provide financial support for employees' diagnostic tests.

Some recommend that psychological resources be made available to support trauma or emotional shock related to the new work situation.

Some want legal resources to be made available, to better understand contractual commitments.

### 3.4 Consent and Communication

**A large portion mentioned that contracts include health measures and individual responsibility and be clearly articulated at the start of a project; that contracts be agreed to and signed by each individual; and that personal responsibilities be assumed, including around withdrawing from a project if needed.**

Several mentioned that conversations around contracts be clear, transparent and open, so all feel comfortable expressing their levels of tolerance.

Some think it's important that producers consult with collaborators individually and anonymously.

### 3.5 Individual Responsibility

**A large proportion mentioned the importance of all collaborators taking individual responsibility.** Others mentioned that all collaborators be committed to minimizing risks and be tested if risks are high. Some mentioned that artists and collaborators be honest with their colleagues if they develop symptoms or if they have been in contact with a person having symptoms. Others added that a monitoring system for all collaborators should be implemented (disclosure of the number of persons with which they work, their work schedule, signing a release at the beginning of rehearsals declaring they are symptom-free, etc.).

### 3.6 Responsibility of the Venue

Some mentioned that it's the responsibility of lessors of studios to establish a clear protocol for entering and leaving the studio, and to ensure cleaning before and after rehearsals.

Some mentioned that it's the responsibility of lessors of studios to make disinfectant products available and/or washbasins for washing hands.



## 4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH MEASURES

### 4.1 Regroupement québécois de la danse/Union des Artistes

A vast majority want the **RQD** and **UDA** to be responsible for establishing a basic protocol for companies and choreographers. A toolbox was also recommended to help ensure compliance with this protocol and to adapt it to different situations.

**Several suggest establishment of a special committee within the RQD that could arbitrate specific cases (discrimination, threat of cancelling contracts, etc.). This committee would also act as mediator and ensure that the health measures put in place are adhered to.**

### 4.2 Rehearsal and Broadcast Venues

Several consider the owners of rehearsal or broadcast venues responsible for ensuring that workspaces are **cleaned regularly** (between each rehearsal) and that **sanitary products** (disinfectant gel and soap) are made available.

### 4.3 Companies, Employers and Artists

Several stress that companies and employers must respect the health measures and protocols put in place.

**A significant number stress that companies and employers communicate with artists and let them know that they are committed to respecting hygiene protocols.**

Some suggest that work groups (employers/artists) adopt a flattened hierarchy to ensure respect and understanding.

Some suggest respecting the needs of each individual involved in the project and that it is everyone's responsibility to see that protocol is respected.

# 5. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

## 5.1 Freedom of Expression

**The majority acknowledge being comfortable talking with their employer.**

A significant number prefer to express themselves in the presence of a mediator.

A significant number prefer to express themselves anonymously.

A vast majority indicated that even if many are comfortable with expressing their opinions, that it isn't the case for everybody and that reputation, age and experience can determine different degrees of freedom of expression.

Some responded they are comfortable expressing themselves, but would not be the first to act.



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## 6. COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FROM RESPONDENTS

*Have meetings where we consult and listen to people more often*

*I would be interested in a collective process where we say that we do not work for one year or something, but we get support to do this in some way maybe by the lobbying organizations RQD, CDA, (for me Ontario organizations) Canada Council etc.*

*Visits to settings to find other venues, because there are not enough studios for everyone (new hygiene measures).*

*Have a doctor or a specialized assistant that we can see on-site, at the rehearsal location.*

*Offer all artists an impartial committee to listen to comments, criticism and/or proposals, which would subsequently be properly handled by the special committee of the RQD, depending on their substance.*

*Have people responsible for this problem for each organization (perhaps members of CA a bit more detached from the work of the organization or other) that could also help in this sense, a bit like the workplace anti-harassment policy.*

*Psychological support / care - protection in contracts that allow for refusing to work a given day in the event that doubt, or uncertainty arises. To not lose one's contract because others are ready more quickly, allow some to participate as observers via Zoom or certain instruction could be done via other means when such situations arise.*

*We have sometimes addressed the solution of exclusivity (one project at a time for performers), but I think that financially that this would be unviable for performers who don't have contracts in order to survive. So, I wonder if it's still considered a solution or if we will be able to find a way to remain safe with a well-established protocol.*

*Promote awareness among people that proximity without contact is something that is also appealing. Touching is not mandatory for one to feel called to our art of contemporary dance.*

*Fear of losing one's voice if only the 'stars' have access to the studio.*

*The importance of focusing on returning to the milieu, of a sequence, of a disciplinary whole in relation to a health crisis and avoiding any unreasonable slide towards other sectoral grievances. Concretely, favouring solidarity and avoiding rifts between producers and broadcasters, performers and producers.*

*I feel dancers know what we need to return to the studio. How do we express this to employers via an outside mediator? What can be spaces where dancers can talk about these needs before going to the employer?*

*My main worry at this time is not feeling that I have the right (possibility) of refusing something.*

*There are many independent studios that are run voluntarily and 'out of pocket' by people who are practising artists themselves. They are part of the web of dependency and responsibility and have no support at the moment other than their own free labour (while trying to find means to support the continuation of the spaces they run). I am one of these people. We want to provide mutually safe environments for studio users, but the increased workload to do so in the financial precocity of the situation will make this very difficult (and for some, impossible) without support.*

*As for me, as long as the rules of public health are respected, I don't have any concerns.*

*Accessibility to studios (in a context where everyone will be in restart mode in a compressed time period, how can we guarantee a certain fairness in access to workspaces?)*

*Offering the possibility of anonymously contacting someone in mediation at the RQD and the UDA, even, perhaps within each dance company or artistic organization.*

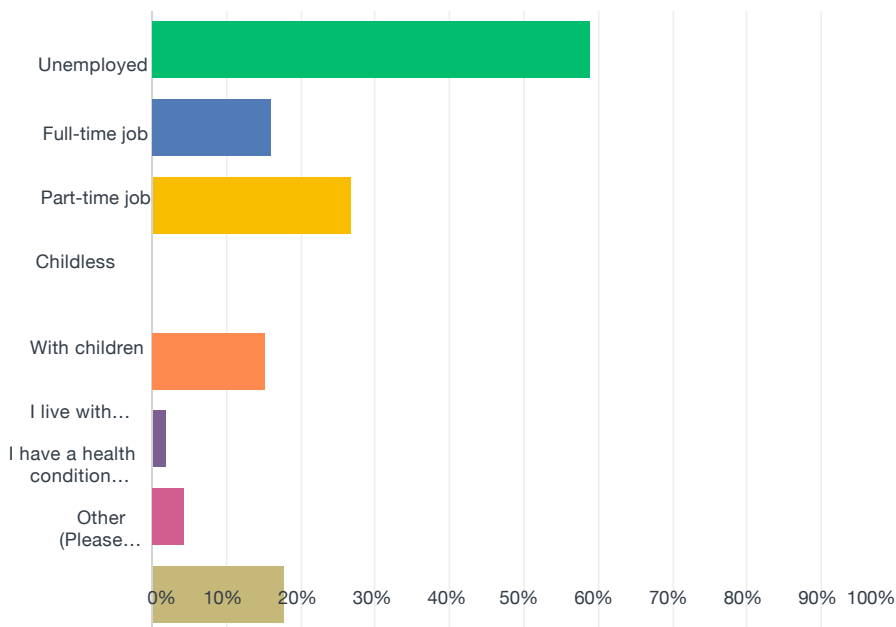
*Expressing oneself in an anonymous fashion is perhaps one of the best options, combined with group conversations that can make it possible to shape a broader opinion based on testimonials and input.*

*A mediator or someone impartial would help. I think the dance field should avoid as much as possible doing these negotiations on an individual basis, aiming instead for national (driven by CDA and/or Canada Council) or using the divisions and collaboration of CADA/West, CADA-East and RQD. As stated above, I think it gets tricky very quickly if we are attempting to negotiate as individuals or even by projects.*

# APPENDIX A

## Profile of Respondents

Responses obtained: 112      Question(s) disregarded: 4



RESPONSE OPTIONS	ANSWERS	
Unemployed	58.93%	66
Full-time job	16.07%	18
Part-time job	26.79%	30
Childless	0.00%	0
With children	15.18%	17
I live with a person with a precarious state of health	1.79%	2
I have a precarious state of health	4.46%	5
Other (please specify)	17.86%	20
Total number of participants 112		

•+ 36 participants reached by telephone

# APPENDIX B

## Survey Questions

1. According to you, what are the appropriate conditions to return to the studio under the current situation?
2. With regard to your personal situation, what are you ready to agree to do in order to comply with an artistic proposal? What limits are you putting on yourself? (touching, proximity, number of people, etc.)
3. In view of returning to the studio, what essential ethical practices should be adopted by all given the current context? (protocol, contracts, consent, etc.)
4. According to you, whose responsibility is it to establish and make everyone respect the new health measures and if applicable, an ethical protocol? AND WHY?
5. Based on your experience in the dance environment, do you feel comfortable with the idea of expressing yourself freely with your employers and colleagues on ethical questions related to the current crisis?
6. Are there other topics that you would like to highlight concerning a possible return to the studio in the context of COVID-19?

This survey was conducted in June 2020 during the confinement imposed by the COVID-19 virus pandemic by:



in collaboration with



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