

INTERVIEW SERIES: THE FACES OF THE ECQ

Interview with Vincent Dubé, co-founder of Machine de cirque, and Francis Gadbois, a 2013 graduate of the DEC in Circus Arts

École de cirque de Québec / CKRL

August 16, 2024

Françoise Boudreault - Hello, everyone. To celebrate its 30th anniversary, the Quebec City Circus School is conducting interviews with circus artists who helped build the school or who attended it. Educators, artists, and administrators, students, and facilitators are invited to share their experiences, their appreciation, their contributions, or their journey at the Quebec City Circus School. Today, we welcome two artists who were there at the school's inception. For one, it's mainly about the school's origins and the training sessions at ExpoCité, while the other is part of the first cohort to earn a DEC (diploma of college studies), a program offered by the Quebec City Circus School starting in 2011 in collaboration with Cégep de Limoilou.

Let's start with Vincent Dubé, who has an impressive track record. He studied engineering, performed as an acrobat with Cirque Éos, among other things, and founded the juggling quartet Les Tous risques, and he also created the duo Les Vitaminés. He is a co-founder as well as the artistic and general director of the company Machine de cirque. Along with the five other co-founders of this company, he was the creator and director of the company's eponymous show. Machine de cirque celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2023 with Grand Mess, a show created specifically for the Église Saint Charles, which has become the creative hub where the company is permanently based. Vincent also directed the show Changes, currently in Germany at the GOP Variété in Bad Oeyhaus through November and then in Bremen, also in Germany, through December. The company is currently touring with other shows, first, Machine de cirque, the eponymous show, which is soon heading to China; Robot infidèle, a trio consisting of two musicians and an acrobat; Kintsugi with eight performers; the duo Ghost Light, centered around the Korean plank; and finally La Galerie, with six performers and a musician. Hello, Vincent!

Vincent Dubé – Hello!

And then there's Francis Gadbois, aka Gadbike, who, as the name suggests, performs acrobatic cycling. This acrobat can also juggle cigar boxes while rollerblading. Let's hope it all goes smoothly! A graduate of the first cohort of the DEC program at the Quebec City Circus School, between 2011 and 2013. He is a co-founder of the company Les Dudes and has worked in German cabarets such as the GOP, where he directed a show titled Sailor in 2000. During the pandemic, he was part of PCU (Performances circassiennes d'urgence), a quartet of acrobats who performed outdoor shows around

a car. He has also appeared, among other places, at the Cabarets de Carmagnole, Cirque du Soleil, L'Impro Cirque, and in the theater production *Camping* by À Tempo. More recently, throughout the Montréal Complètement Cirque festival in July, he was a guest artist at the surprise party for Sophie's 29th birthday. A lovely long-standing tradition for...

Francis Gadbois – Sophie's surprise 29th

FB – This show by the British company Three Legged Race featured two local guest performers. We'll soon see Francis in the show *Machine de cirque*, which is heading out on tour in China very soon. Hello, Francis.

FG – Good morning. I'm really happy—I needed to update my resume, and there were a couple of things I couldn't remember anymore.

FB – I'll send you this paragraph by email. First, a question to get to know you a little: what's your earliest memory of the circus? Vincent, what's your earliest memory of the circus?

VD – My first memory of the circus is a bit fuzzy; I was down by the river and there was a traditional circus performing in the arena; I think there was even more than one ring. Afterward, we could ride the elephants. But that memory isn't all that significant. The most significant memory is of Marc André Coallier, on *Le club des 100 watts*, a kids' show, juggling a bit and riding a unicycle—that really stuck with me. I thought it was cool.

FB – What about you, Francis?

FG – Vincent is part of my earliest memory of the circus; he's actually part of it. That's significant because I'm sure I saw others before that, but they didn't leave any impression on me at all. I saw the Cirque Éos in 1999. I saw the show once; I was 9 years old, and there are acts that I can still see very clearly in my mind—who was where... A few years later, I found out who played which role. Today, I hang out with most of the acrobats who were in that show. When they tell me they were such-and-such a character in such-and-such a costume, I tell them I remember that they did that joke or that somersault at such-and-such a moment. That's my first memory.

FB – A large-scale circus, Cirque Éos, which lasted a few years.

VD – From 1998 to 2002, maybe into early 2003.

FB – A company based here in Quebec City that produced large-scale shows. Vincent, why did you become a circus artist? What inspired or motivated you?

VD – I never told myself, "I'm going to become a circus artist." I did circus work because I loved it, and I threw myself into it with a lot of passion. I could have been on the national volleyball team, but for me, my serious hobby—the one I put just as much energy into as my studies was the circus. Then it was all about pushing the limits, doing

international festivals, putting on shows. I was studying at the same time, and one thing led to another—there was always a show project that came before an internship and I became a circus artist. I had to realize that this is what I do for a living. But I never set out with the idea that I was going to become a circus artist.

FB - OK, it just happened to you

VD - It just happened to me

FB - And you, Francis?

FG - The turning point really came when I saw the 7 Doigts show *Loft*. Patrick Léonard is on stage in his underwear, walking through the audience, and then he asks if anyone needs anything something to drink, something to eat—I'll bring you whatever you want. I raised my hand and said I'd like a Coke and a bag of chips. He replied, "Perfect, I'll be right back." There I was, with a man in his underwear bringing me a Coke and a bag of chips, and after that, he was back on stage, telling jokes and doing acrobatics. I asked my mom, "Is that his job? Does that man get paid?"

VD - He has unlimited access to chips and Coke.

FG - That really was the turning point: that's how I want to make a living. If he can pay for groceries and rent by doing that, that's what I want to do.

FB - You realized it was a profession

FG - Yeah, yeah.

FB - When there's a school for something, it means there's a profession in that field. Once a school is called a school, it implies a profession. You, Vincent, were there at the very beginning of the Quebec City circus school. What was it like? When I interviewed Danielle Barbeau, she talked about a school with a gym, and when classes were over, someone would come and open the gym on the sly—not exactly in secret, but it was clandestine—so that a group of people could train there. That's how, one thing leading to another, the Quebec City Circus School got started.

VD - L'école de cirque de Québec est partie d'un amuseur public qui s'appelle Michel Rousseau. Il a eu un accident en faisant un salto en dehors d'une échelle : il a essayé de faire autre chose en même temps et s'est cassé les 2 poignets. Il n'était plus capable de performer et s'est mis à donner des cours de cirque à temps plein. Il offrait ses services dans les différentes paroisses. À l'époque, les paroisses offraient des cours de natation, arts du cirque, escrime... Michel était très ambitieux. Il a réuni les meilleurs de ses différents cours pour les regrouper dans un gymnase le week-end pour des séances beaucoup plus longues. Il connaissait un professeur d'éducation physique, monsieur Dionne, qui lui laissait les clés du gymnase pour qu'il puisse y aller la fin de semaine, mais l'école n'était même pas au courant de ça. On avait accès aux matelas de l'école. Si le système d'alarme partait, on était en panique là parce qu'il n'y avait pas

d'assurances, rien de ça là tu sais, c'était vraiment très très brocante... Ça a grandi, ça s'est organisé pour devenir officiellement l'école au cirque avec un conseil d'administration, en 1995. Mais moi j'ai commencé le cirque avec Michel. Rousseau, dès 1991. Dans j'ai suivi un cours dans ma municipalité, puis après il a vu que j'étais motivé, puis que j'avais le goût d'apprendre. Il avait besoin d'entrer et de sortir le matériel qu'il transportait sur le top de sa voiture. Comme il avait besoin d'aide, il m'a dit : si tu viens dans les autres cours avec moi les autres soirs pour entrer et sortir le matériel, m'aider à l'installer et à le ramener, tu pourras t'entraîner gratuitement. Comme ça, j'en faisais tous les soirs.

FB – Acrobatic mover.

VD – Every day of the week, I was an acrobatic mover.

FB – There were those classes, and you also told me about gigs with his students who performed at events.

VD – Yes. Quickly. Michel was a practitioner. With his elite group, he already had a small troupe; it was called Cirque POP. He put on shows in parks; we were booked for festivals. For me, it had been six months, a year since I'd joined the elite group, and already I was part of the troupe; we were even getting paid. There was a fee, and he split it among the different kids.

FB – What kind of acts did you perform? What disciplines?

VD – It was a very traditional lineup. We did bicycle pyramids, juggling acts, clown acts, we brought in a trapeze frame for a trapeze act—all sorts of things. There was a little bit of everything

FB – At first, the classes were held in the school, and after that, did it move to Expo Cité?

VD – We started illegally in the gym at Charlesbourg. After that, we managed to get a gym that we shared with the gym classes next door; it was at the Centre Louis-Joliette. Then we moved to the Youth Pavilion because Michel had big ambitions—he wanted to put on a show with a flying trapeze, so he set up a flying trapeze at the Youth Pavilion, and everything moved there. But the Youth Pavilion is still used in the summer for ExpoCité, and we used it the rest of the year. It was dusty, and it smelled a bit like cow manure.

FB – A farm-like atmosphere...

VD – Yes, and it became less and less agricultural as the year went on. It went back to being agricultural in the summer, and when we came back in September, was it still agricultural then? Eventually, it moved from the Youth Center to the Holy Spirit Church, where the school is located today.

FB – Were there any memorable moments during the school’s early days? Or any mentors?

VD – Well, there was one. I spent a lot of time with Michel Rousseau. We’d be with him in his van; he had a way with young people, he’d tell us all kinds of stories. We considered him a friend. That really made an impression on me as a young person...

FB – The work atmosphere

VD – Also, with Michel, it felt like there were no limits. We’d watch a video of a festival, see someone doing something, and the next day we’d try it out with safety lines everything was possible. We didn’t set limits like something was unattainable; that’s something that left a mark on me: that openness to the world and the idea that anything was possible.

FB – Like starting a company, but we’ll come back to that later.

VD – Exactly

FB – Francis, how did you first hear about the circus school in Quebec City? You had seen, you had seen Vincent perform with Cirque Éos...

FG – It all started for me at Geronimo, the outdoor circus camp in the Laurentians, for kids ages 8 to 12, only in the summer. So, circus there. I heard about the circus school in Verdun; I’m from Châteauguay, on the south shore of Montreal. I went there a little bit during the school year, one night a week, then it became two nights a week. A circus school opened in Châteauguay and I took circus classes in Châteauguay four days a week. I got to 9th and 10th grade and I wanted to be a circus artist. Where was I going? I really wanted to leave the family nest. I wanted adventure. I wanted to go to ESAC (the Higher School of Circus Arts) in Belgium. Yes, I would have liked to go to the national school, but at the same time, if I had gone to the national school, my parents would have made me sleep at home and I would have had to travel a lot. Since I was going to be traveling anyway, I thought about going to ESAC. My mom said: “It looks like there’s a circus school in Quebec City.” I thought: “That’s just enough.” So, it was kind of my mom’s decision to send me to Quebec City. I’m joking, but I was really torn between the two schools. My teachers, both at Geronimo and at the circus school in Châteauguay, often told me: “Based on your profile, Quebec City will suit you.” From what they’d heard. My teacher at the Châteauguay Circus School, Marc André Lavoie, had attended the national circus school and told me, “Honestly, Quebec City suits you better.”

FB – It’ll be a better “fit” for you. Did you audition for the circus school in Quebec City? How did it go?

FG – The first time, really badly. But really well at the same time. When I did the audition, I wasn’t ready; I had no idea what a school was like. Verdun and Châteauguay are

preparatory, even recreational. I had no idea of the level; I had no clue what I was getting myself into when I came to the audition. When I saw the level of the others, I thought to myself: I can't perform... Let's say, in the evaluations for juggling, acrobatics, and all that, I wasn't the best, but I wasn't the worst either. The act I'd prepared I wasn't ready to perform it. I saw the others: they could really work on it, you know. And I'd just prepared: "Hi, I'm here, did you see?" Then finally, yeah, the first, the first time I auditioned, the school director at the time, Normand Beaumont, the director of training, told me, "You have a lot of potential, we can see you're eager, but you've got work to do. You know how to do everything but you're good at nothing." And to get into a school, you still need to have a certain specialty. So don't give up, and come see us again next year. In my head, I'd planned to finish high school to get into a circus school, but I didn't have a Plan B. So, I'm moving to Quebec City, even if I don't get accepted, and I'm going to teach myself. I saw that there were evening classes. I saw the gap between preparatory schools or recreational schools and vocational school. I told myself: to be able to get in next year, I have to be there.

FB - Back then, the circus school in Quebec City already offered various programs that weren't professional programs.

FG - Is that right?

VD - I think that with the preparatory programs at L'École de cirque, if you attended them intensively, you could get closer to the level required for admission to the professional training program than at other preparatory schools.

FG - Also, you get out there and people see your personality. Throughout the year, they see your acrobatic potential, but also who you are as a person and whether you stand out over the course of the year. Back then, the same coaches often handled professional training during the day and recreational classes in the evening. So I came to Quebec City for a year to take evening classes, get my own training, then audition again, and in the second year, it went well. Oh yeah! In all humility, it was the complete opposite of the first year. There were quite a few people from abroad, including Jacob Deustachio, who always told me, "You intimidated me at the audition; your routine—you were so good." He's not the only one who told me that, but he reminded me recently that my audition routine had impressed him.

VD - What did you present?

FG - I presented a cyclist; in the end, that became my final project five years later. A slightly eccentric cyclist in the Tour de France who goes through all sorts of adventures.

FB - That's how you aced your audition at the Quebec City Circus School. How did your journey go? It was the first cohort of the DEC, and when we say DEC, we're talking about academic content—not just circus classes, but also philosophy classes...

FG – A DEC is a college diploma affiliated with Cégep Limoilou. We had our core courses: French, English, philosophy, physical education. We were required to take courses outside the program; I took courses in film communication. There were courses on the history of the circus and marketing courses that were part of the program. A lot of theoretical courses took place at the Cégep. When I say I'm part of the first cohort, it's like the first official one. There was a cohort right before me...

FB – There were specializations like animation...

FG – There was a cohort—the ones who graduated in 2012—that was the pilot program, and they received their official diplomas a few years after graduating, once the program had been approved by the Ministry of Education. But I'm part of the first real graduating class.

FB – How many of you were there?

FG – There were 11 of us who graduated. Before that, the school offered a school certificate attesting that you had completed a two-year specialized program. You spent two years in your specialty, you graduated with a certificate, and the school gave you a piece of paper saying: yes, you're a professional. Now the DEC is a pre-university program. If you finish the program at the circus school in Quebec City and ultimately don't feel like touring, you can go to university to study something else with that diploma—that's the advantage.

FB – But in both cases, you're ready to start your career. During your time at circus school, how did it go? Your audition was perfect, but then, in terms of circus skills, how did it go?

FG – It still took me a long time to find my footing. I was happy to be at the school. I started relatively young. I did two years of preparatory classes and then three years of the DEC program—that's five years of training. Which was one or two years too many. I went a little crazy toward the end. Sometimes too much information is like not enough. But I don't regret a single one of my years in school—that's for sure. You choose three disciplines; I changed them often, and I had fun with a lot of different things.

FB – That explains why you're such a jack-of-all-trades today—you could say that.

FG – In the end, what people had, so to speak, criticized me for at my first audition—being able to do a little bit of everything but not excelling at anything—ended up following me throughout my academic journey and my career. So far, it hasn't hurt me. That's right, I'm a jack-of-all-trades.

FB – Have there been any memorable moments, coaches, or teachers who left a lasting impression on you, or students who influenced you?

FG – A memorable coach, Director Normand Beaumont, told me my first year that I had to specialize in something. When I arrived, I toured the school and rummaged through

the lockers to see which circus discipline I didn't know and could start doing. I saw a bike that was all chrome. The bike was magnificent; it was a beautiful object. Who knows how to ride that? Can I? I had no idea what was possible to do with it. One day, I ran into Yoann Trépanier riding that bike. I asked him if he could show me some tricks. He replied: I'm busy, I'm working a lot these days, but the training director, Normand, is a former world champion at this and he might be able to guide you. So I put two and two together... The guy who told me I needed to find a specialty, I asked him: "Will you coach me in your specialty?" And that, it worked out well. I had private coaching sessions with that man, and then Yoann too, later on, who had come back from his contracts. Those two people in my discipline really influenced me. There was also Philippe Dreyfus who taught me. He's the co-founder of Les Dudes with me. He was my teacher in school; we became friends, and when I finished school, we founded a company together. It's true that his teaching left a bit of an impression on me, let's say...

FB – In a good way, of course. Vincent, when you were in school, was it actually called a school?

VD – It was officially called the Cirque de Québec School when it was founded in 1995. Before that, I don't actually know what we called it. We had a school troupe with Cirque Pop, so I think we identified more with Cirque Pop, if I recall correctly.

FB – Was it really a troupe that became more professional over time?

VD - It started out as an amateur troupe, operating without pretensions, but it eventually turned professional. In fact, Cirque Éos was a continuation of Cirque POP. After founding the Cirque de Québec school, Michel still had big ambitions; he wanted to go further, and the quality kept improving. He wanted to launch a truly professional show to tour internationally, so he founded Cirque Éos.

FB - ...which trained in the same facilities as the Cirque de Québec school.

VD - The separation between Cirque Éos and the school, Cirque de Québec, was very, very close...

FB – It was porous...

VD – It was a bit loose at first, but eventually it split into two very distinct entities. But in the beginning, it was pretty loose.

FB – Francis, during your time at circus school, you took part in events outside Quebec, including workshops and trips in collaboration with FEDEC, the Federation of European Circus Schools.

FG - Yeah, the word "European" is in the name. The National School of Montreal and the Quebec Circus School are part of this group, since they're on the North American continent. Yes, there's a festival in the town of Auch in France. A contemporary circus

festival that showcases emerging acts, and also every year there's FEDEC—I don't want to make things up, but let's say there are 30 schools that are part of it. Well, every year, 10 of them send a small contingent, and everyone presents a 25- to 30-minute show to represent the unique style and signature of each school. There are symposiums held there, and exchanges. For me, it was the first time I was exposed to circus outside of Quebec.

FB – Had you seen *Loft* by Les 7 Doigts back then?

FG – Yeah, yeah, Les 7 Doigts was before I started circus school.

FB – Okay, like in 2002.

FG – Yeah, way back at the very beginning, I saw *Loft* at Sam's loft; I saw the very, very early days.

FB – So you went on a trip to Auch, a festival event, basically.

FG – That's a festival. It was a student trip, but a circus one, you know, so it had all the fun parts of a student trip—hanging out with friends and discovering the world—but with clowns thrown in there. And the fact that you're traveling, but you meet, you know, it's not just your crew; you go with other groups who are on the road, and there's a professional exchange.

FB – Peers, colleagues.

FG – It was a huge experience, both personally and artistically. It lasted a week, but there are people I stayed in touch with afterward whom I hadn't seen for 10 years, and then I ran into them again while on tour. In fact, Vincent's brother, Raphaël, was part of the group from the Montreal school. There were the two Quebec schools, and some real friendships were formed there. People who were at the school in Châtellerauld were hesitating: which audition, which school to choose. And then it was a competition: come audition with us. A lot of young people from French schools came to audition in Quebec because they thought we Quebecers were really funny. Now these are people I hang out with every day.

FB – Vincent, was it the school that inspired you to found Machine de cirque? How did you come to found Machine de cirque? Was there a connection between the school and Machine de cirque? You could say there is one because you're both in churches in Limoilou.

VD – What led me to found Machine de Cirque was that after I graduated and earned my bachelor's degree in engineering, I started working as a full-time artist.

FB – How would you describe yourself after finishing circus school?

VD – Well, that's it. I was involved; I saw the circus school grow, but I saw it while it was still getting organized. I went to the circus school to find resources and key coaches

who were passing through. But I was kind of creating my own curriculum. I'd think, "I'd like to learn this," so I'd go up to a coach and ask, "Can you show me this?" Then I'd work on my own, and when he had five minutes, he'd watch me and give me some feedback. I became a coach at the circus school later on. I was involved with the circus school in a more organized way, more as a coach than as a student. Then there was Cirque Éos, there were all my personal projects, and I pursued my studies alongside all of that, even though I took a break to tour with Cirque Éos between Cégep and university. I went on tour for two and a half years. After that, I went back to college, where I kept up a crazy lifestyle: I was a full-time artist and a full-time student. I'd be on the road all summer performing, and even during the school year, I'd travel to international festivals; I was always studying—in the dressing room, on the plane—and when I came back, I'd take my exams. After that, I toured full-time with the duo Les Vitaminés, after finishing my studies. But then I wanted to be part of something bigger. I wanted to bring in some engineering concepts, so I applied for individual grants for research and development, then integrated automation into the circus and ran tests with it. Then it started with two (2) of the three (3) co-founders of Machines de Cirque: Yohann, Raphaël, and Frédéric Lebrasseur, who conducted the first sessions. We even put on something like a one-hour show at the end of that, as a wrap-up of the residency. I wanted to produce a show afterward, so we co-founded Machines de Cirque with those three (3) guys and two (2) additional artists who joined us: Maxim Laurin and Hugo Dario. It was kind of along the lines of, "OK, now I've seen what it's like to put on shows as an artist, I wanted to be part of something bigger, have collaborators, work with engineers, set designers." It was really because of that desire that I founded Machines de cirque. To take things further artistically as well, I wanted to explore certain themes. The connection with the school... I saw Michel Rousseau start a circus company; he really instilled in me that beautiful naivety that anything was possible. And if you want to expand into the Asian market, if you want to go to the United States, it's possible. It's really that beautiful naivety, that aspect of not setting limits for yourself and not being afraid to take the plunge, that I took away from my experience with the circus school.

FB - Francis, what do you find most useful today out of everything you learned at circus school?

FG - It's funny because I saw Yves Neveu during the Festival in Montreal—Yves Neveu, who was the school's director while I was there. I learned a lot of things that help me every day at school. But one thing really stuck with me from my entire time there. We were in the middle of creating the end-of-year show, and at one point, we felt like we weren't going to be ready—we were panicking. Yves had everyone sit down and said: I'm going to ask you a question. How long do you think it takes to put on a good show? Someone tried to guess: "Well, three (3) months." Another said: "No, no, two (2) weeks—it has to go fast." Then Yves just told us: "A show takes three (3) days longer." No matter how much time you have, you'll always be three (3) days short. That's something

that really stuck with me and has been very helpful. You'll never be ready, but just go for it and it'll be fine. That's "the" phrase that made the biggest impression on me during my studies. Otherwise, I was lucky—unlike Vincent, the school was well-structured. We had contemporary dance classes and ballet classes. Flexibility classes were mandatory, as were strength training classes; we were supervised, and we had acting classes, voice classes, and music classes. The training was very comprehensive. We were given a schedule; it was all set. Even though it was public—a public program—we paid very little, but it's a program that still has a certain cost; the government covers a good portion of it. We're very lucky; it's a comprehensive program. All of that helps me today. The theoretical classes on marketing, the theoretical classes on how to recover from an injury, the theoretical classes on how to do rigging... All of that, yes, in my day-to-day work as a circus artist, it helps me. There are also ways to prepare, to do spots. In acrobatics, sometimes you have a teacher with whom you've been trying a move for months, you can't get it right, it frustrates him because he wants to see you improve, he sees that you're stuck and he has to be creative. On the rope, he's holding on too tightly; with one hand, he's not holding on tightly enough—how can I... Seeing the creativity of certain teachers in building a student's confidence so they can perform this or that move—that helped me a lot in my own artistic creative process later on. We're stuck, suffering from writer's block or whatever you want to call it—"think outside the box." You've been doing things the same way for years, and now you're facing a problem where you can't use the solutions you've already tried. That's something I learned in school: "think outside the box," definitely.

FB - Vincent, you as an employer, but first Francis as a performing artist, now that you're on the outside, how do you see the school's progress up to today?

VD - What I find interesting is that the students who come to the school are "challenging" the status quo more and more: What is the circus? What can we say through the circus? I think that is clearly reflected in what comes out of the school. I think there are several artistic advisors who have the courage to support certain students in these adventures, leading to truly bold proposals that move the discussion forward. I find it fun to see the discipline flourish and blossom like that.

FG - Personally, I only set foot in the school for about an hour a year these days. I live in Montreal and work a lot outside the country. This year, I had the chance to see the comprehensive exams; as soon as I get the chance to see anything going on at the school, I come by—that's for sure. And I like coming; I like seeing former teachers again, seeing the level. The strengths and weaknesses of the school today, compared to my time: there were very few of us students, so whether it was the specialized seniors, those in high school studies, or the people in preparatory classes, all of us would do group warm-ups. We were really a family, all of us. But there were at most thirty (30) of us in the school at any given time. It was truly a family. We'd warm up, hang out together, and then after that, we'd split up to go to our respective classes, and at the end of the day, we'd do a little wrap-up where we'd all come back together before

heading home. That was really the hallmark of the school back then: the school in Quebec City is a family. Well, like it or not, because the school has gained more and more renown, there are more and more people applying, more and more state grants, and so on, which means there are more and more students, and we end up with cohorts—now a cohort is 15, 20, 22, maybe 25—I don't want to get ahead of myself... Each cohort is like a family, and families might mix a little less. But that's just my outside perspective...

FB – The whole pandemic has exacerbated that a bit too...

FG – On the one hand, it means there are more and more talented artists coming out of Quebec City, which is a strength because the school is renowned and people want to come study there. But I feel that perhaps the family-like aspect has been lost a bit due to the scale the school has reached.

FB - That makes for some big families...

FG - But still, there's something special here in Limoilou: there are so many apartments around the church that everyone—all the students—lives no more than four (4) minutes' walk from the school. So when the day ends, they end up at one person's apartment or another's. That's for sure, having the school in a residential neighborhood like this...

FB – It's friendly; there's a school, businesses...

FG – There's definitely something going on, that's for sure. Back in my day, Machine de cirque didn't exist yet, and neither did FLIP Fabrique. There weren't any shows at the Agora or under the overpasses yet. In Quebec City, not much was happening in the circus world back then. We aspired to work for companies elsewhere. Now, the young people in school—well, there are several major companies in Quebec City, and the young people perhaps identify a little more with what the Quebec City circus scene is all about.

FB - As an employer, Vincent, how do you view the graduates of the circus school from the past few years? You hire graduates from the circus school.

VD - What's struck me in recent years is that I feel like women in the circus are becoming more assertive; they're taking up more space. I noticed this last year when I left a graduation show and hadn't realized it, but it was practically all girls. It's funny that I didn't realize it because if you go back a few years, it seemed like girls were more pigeonholed into certain disciplines, certain styles in the circus world too, whereas now, I saw such a variety of acts, disciplines, styles—comedic stuff, dramatic stuff, more provocative stuff—with girls who dare to take risks, that gender didn't jump out at me, you know. I find that really exciting; I think there's something happening here, and it's fun. It's something that's been pointed out for a few years now—that in contemporary circus, in shows and everything, there was a lack of women—but now it

feels like the message has gotten through after all. Now, there are women coming up, taking the initiative, daring to do things, and it's really fun to watch.

FB - Do you find that depending on the year or the era, certain disciplines are more "in style"? At one point it was silks, then straps, now it's hair suspension. Have you noticed that too? In your opinion, are there disciplines that will become trendy, trends?

VD - There are always disciplines that are in vogue. When someone new comes along and breathes new life into a discipline, giving it a fresh perspective. OK, it seemed outdated to me, but all of a sudden it becomes relevant and interesting. The Chinese pole, for example (FB - it's getting a makeover), in traditional Chinese pole acts, we all did the same moves, a bit like in **Saltimbanco**, and people were like, "Yeah, that's what the Chinese pole is." Then, you saw people who started dancing in a contemporary style (FB—contortion and Chinese pole), managed to break the mold, and that really got people excited to try it. Same thing with the fixed trapeze. You know, at one point, there was a surge toward all kinds of shapes. We wanted to innovate with aerial apparatus by changing the apparatus: it would be a cube, a diamond, a hoop, a silks, all that. Then eventually people came back to the trapeze; they elevated the fixed trapeze to see what it could do. And here's what I'm capable of doing with a trapeze. So it's actually quite interesting—we forget the apparatus and see the artist. It's always like that; there's always a little spark that makes people reclaim an apparatus and want, themselves, to help push it further.

FG - Absolutely, it's a cycle. Take the fixed trapeze, for example: there comes a point where you think, "OK, that's enough, we've done it all, it's old-fashioned." And then there's also the idea of wanting to make a name for myself. If there are six of us doing trapeze, well, it's going to be the best one who gets the work. But if, instead of doing trapeze, I do the hoop, it's not the same. New disciplines are created, everyone does their own thing, and there's one person who excels, who works really hard, and there's a demand for that discipline. Well, then a lot of people will say to themselves: I'm going to do that too. And then, because too many people are doing it, at some point it's over—we've seen it all. I think it's cycles. I ended up taking on two (2) disciplines that are old-fashioned, so to speak. Cigar box was a big discipline in the '70s and '80s, but it disappeared. Éric Bates came along and reinvented the discipline. He trained some students, and I'm one of them. Same thing with acrobatic cycling: in Quebec, in the early 90s, there were quite a few people doing it, and it disappeared for about fifteen years. Yohann came back, I came back, we brought in new people, and cycling became a discipline again. But I think it's cycles, definitely.

FB - Cycles, like on a bicycle.

FG - Exactly, everything is in everything...

VD - I think it was Robert Lepage who said that in an interview; I found it so relevant. He said that wanting to be the best in the world is so fleeting. Being the best in the

world—how long does that last, a week? Some people will stay at the top for a long time, but it's difficult, whereas if you try to be unique... Being the best... Being yourself, you're always reinventing yourself. Well, you're going to be the best at being Francis Gadbois with your own style and everything instead of trying to be super specialized. There's that too... We, as a circus company, are looking for those kinds of personalities—unique ones who reinvent themselves, who are always bringing something special to the table. We're not against performance; we love performance, but managing to give it a unique touch, a language, meaning, and personality—that's what makes it come alive and speak to people.

FB – In conclusion, how do you see the future of the Quebec Circus School? Because it is, after all, the school's anniversary. If you had to look ahead for the school, based on what you know, of course.

FG – That's a big question. Predicting... One thing's for sure: long live the school! Since it's been so long since my training, personally, I don't know how much the school has evolved; I don't know where it stands today...

FB – What do you wish for it?

FG – One thing's for sure: more space, that's for sure. Because there are more and more innovative disciplines that require space, and there are more and more students. To be able to perform properly in their acts, they often need space. I really wish the school more space, that's for sure, and I think they're already working on several projects related to that, so they're on their way. More multiculturalism. There's already a lot of it, but even more, even more. Diversity of people coming from different backgrounds. It's already the case, but I'd like to see even more.

VD – Actually, that's already the case, but for many people coming from outside the province, I think we need to make the school a tool for bringing people together and fostering social development for those with immigrant backgrounds who are already in Quebec, or for families with immigrant roots, or to promote diversity, inclusion, and so on in Quebec. I think that would be the next step to develop with the circus school, and I think that can really happen because everyone can find something for themselves in the circus arts. Some codes are already in place, but we're always adding to them, reinventing new ones, I think. With the strengths you have, you can find your niche.

FB – It's in the circus's DNA to mix genres, races, and peoples, to never stay in one place but to bring people along for the ride...

VD – I think the school, the circus, can continue to be and become even more of a tool for social cohesion.

FG – I've had a little more time to reflect, but the school has always attracted collaborators, teachers—whether in dance, music, or theater—top-notch people. I was surprised during my training to see just how many top-notch people from every field

came to give us workshops or teach us throughout the year. I hope the school continues to have such excellent teachers and collaborators. When I was in school, I was young; I didn't realize I had quality people telling me to do things. Then I'd do them, but half-heartedly, like a student does. Now that my training is over, I tell myself: that person—I should have listened to them.

FB – You can make that comparison with a career, too.

FG – Yeah, that's right. A lot of the instructors at school—once I'm out in the real world, I think, “Man, I wish they were the ones making those ____ (predictions),” but they're still at the school. Young people, take advantage of your teachers; they're awesome, and sometimes we don't even realize it.

FB – We'll wrap it up there. Thank you so much for your generosity, for sharing your experience and your journey for the 30th anniversary of the Quebec City Circus School.

FG – Thank you very much.

VD – It was a pleasure. Thank you.