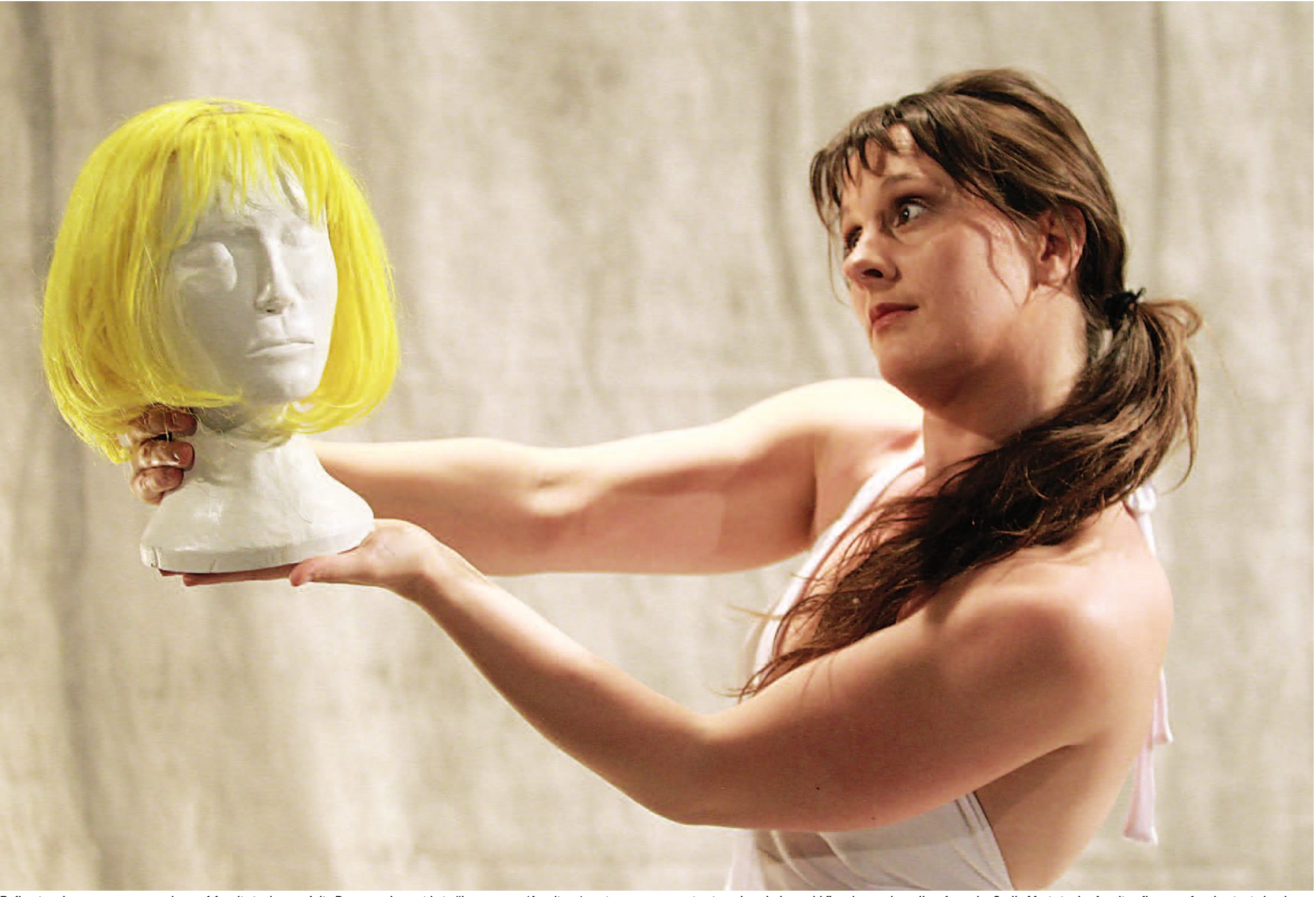


salon focus



Reflecting the contemporary culture of Acadie in dance, Julie Duguay takes pride in "how strong (Acadians) project our expression into the whole world," and uses the yellow from the Stella Maris in the Acadian flag as a focal point in her latest project, 'Mez'elles... Sois Belle et Tais-toi!,' the story of a superstar-in-making. Living between Montreal and New Brunswick, Duguay hopes to move to Moncton in the next year. PHOTO: RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Blonde ambition

After living outside of New Brunswick for the past 12 years, Julie Duguay dreams of returning home to teach and create contemporary dance in Moncton. But first she wants her audience to live the experience of 'Mez'elles.' Story by Kate Wallace

The yellow pops among the mostly white costume pieces on the rack and the black-box walls of the windowless Empress Theatre. The few articles of clothing, the colour of prepared mustard, are the only shots of colour in a monochromatic wardrobe hanging in a studio whose darkness is only broken by a white screen at the back of the room, and a couple of white props.

"It's the star that burns," the dancer and choreographer says from Moncton, where she's in rehearsal for *Mez'elles... Sois belle et tais-toi!*, the third and final piece in a series exploring the dark implications of the drive for fame and perfection. It's being staged at The Empress Theatre, June 14 and 15.

"We talk about how we want to always be more, more, more in every aspect of ourselves, always being better, always being perfect, never giving up and always pushing, pushing until we forget who we are," Duguay, 28, says. "Not only artists, but everybody. Life, our system, makes us want to be better than everybody else, and go faster all the time."

Yellow is the only splash of colour in the otherwise white set. The aesthetic is urban, modern, "very slick, perfect and shiny."

Proud of her culture, "and how strong we project our expression into the whole world," Duguay's contemporary art reflects Acadie of today.

"It's not old culture, it's actual culture," she says. "Acadie is somewhere NOW."

In the two previous installments of *Mez'elles*, Duguay used the other colours of the Acadian flag as cultural references and thematic symbols.

Red is the burning fire of ambition. Blue is peaceful, "the satisfaction, it's the answer at the end for me." White is pure, "what is perfect."

The project began in 2009, as a short video-dance piece for L'Estival Théâtre populaire d'Acadie, during the Acadian World Congress in Caraquet. In 2010, Duguay, who grew up in Bathurst, created *Mez'elles Live*, a family-friendly street show of dance, acrobatics and laughs.

"I wanted to make it more accessible. I really wanted to take that into the street," she says.



Artistic director and choreographer Julie Duguay, left, in rehearsal with Lou Poirier for 'Mez'elles... Sois Belle et Tais-toi,' which is being staged June 14 and 15 at 8 p.m. in The Empress Theatre, Moncton. Tickets, \$18.50, are available at 856-4379. PHOTO: RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The show's genesis was when Duguay crashed in 2008 after the highs of her first theatre production. She and her partner at the time would drive each other from one "mission impossible" to the next. It was heady, and utterly unsustainable.

"I had a really, really crazy, stressful life. And I had a burnout. And after the burnout, I tried to figure out how to become a better person in my career, better connecting my soul to my career — and I think I've reached that point, now. So, I'm really excited to share it soon with the audience."

In her studio research, she found a particular way of moving, "a way to be in control of myself in the whole busyness of the world," she says.

Through *Mez'elles*, she has found peace, professionally, artistically and physically.

"The answers came from my body ... The simplest way, actually, is to start breathing. Breathe. Breathe to get connected with yourself, so you can feel what's happening around you."

Duguay had always been burning, burning. From earliest memory, she was creative, physical, driven. As a girl of four, she was frustrated by her fellow ballerinas at dance school. "I hated it because they were always talking. I wanted to work. Give me some work! It took a long time before I found a school that made me

work. And then I fell in love." At age 10, she began studying five days a week with Justy Molinares, a ballet and Latin dance teacher in Bathurst.



Lou Poirier, foreground, rehearses with Julie Duguay for 'Mez'elles... Sois Belle et Tais-toi!' Poirier, who is from Quebec originally but has Acadian ancestry, has been collaborating with Duguay since the beginning of the project. PHOTO: RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



Duguay's first iteration of 'Mez'elles' in 2009. PHOTO: SARAHBRIDEAU.COM



Duguay wearing her stilts while performing with Cirque du Soleil. PHOTO: 2010 CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

her "fly in class is thrilling!!" one wrote. Others recalled her "effervescent energy and athleticism," the "range of emotional colour in her dancing."

After graduation, she ended up in Montreal, where her roommates included circus artists. She began to explore that form, diving into the world of street performance — stilts, in particular. She loved the accessibility, self-direction and range of stunts. Duguay applied her dance training to her stilts, and vice-versa.

"How can I do what I do normally, but in a different way, to do something better with my stilts than just walk? How could I kick my leg?"

In 2009, she was part of *Les Chemins Invisibles*, a Cirque du Soleil street show, and in 2010, with Prince Edward Island with another Cirque production. Three years ago, she helped found Circus Stella, a circus arts workshop, in Dieppe.

Mez'elles... Sois belle et tais-toi! is a culmination of her dance and circus backgrounds braided with strong theatre elements. Lighting and video, shadow-work, costume and a haunting, electronic score provide entry points into the work, which grows more abstract as it progresses.

"For dancing, it's theatrical, and for theatre, it's dancing," Duguay says.

Duguay calls Lou Poirier, her collaborator in the work from its inception, the "theatre heart of the show."

"I'm an actor, but I want to dance more," Poirier says during a rehearsal break at The Empress Theatre, the little black-box behind The Capitol. "She's a dancer and she wants to act."

Based in Moncton, Poirier is from Quebec originally, but has Acadian ancestry. She studied drama at Université de Moncton, and, later, movement training and improvisational dance in Europe.

She met Duguay in 2007 at the Etats généraux on Arts and Culture in Acadian Society in New Brunswick, and they began collaborating soon after.



Duguay in 'Mez'elles Live,' a family-friendly street show in Caraquet in 2010. PHOTO: MAURICE ARSENAULT

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