

At nightfall

TEACHER'S GUIDE



SURSAUT
Dance Company

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This guide is meant to be used to prepare and/or follow-up with children who will be seeing or who have seen *At nightfall*, and to allow them to benefit to the utmost from the inherent cultural and educational elements important for their development. With this in mind, we propose some information about the Sursaut Dance Company, about Francine Châteauvert the artistic director, and about the show *At nightfall*. In order for children to become acquainted with the professions of choreographer and dancer, we have chosen to address ourselves to them in the form of letters. You may use the letters as well as the suggested activities in any way you judge suitable and appropriate for your group.

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THE SURSAUT DANCE COMPANY

Founded in Sherbrooke, Quebec, in 1985, the Sursaut Dance Company is dedicated to the creation, production, and dissemination of dance shows for young and family audiences. The company's productions are presented from coast to coast in Canada, as well as outside the country. Sursaut's joyful and touching creations thrill spectators, young and old alike, everywhere they are presented.

The Sursaut Dance Company receives funding from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the City of Sherbrooke.



THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Since 1987, Francine Châteauvert has been the company's artistic director and choreographer. Her creations are imprinted with simplicity and freshness, offering performances imbued with a poetic realism in a highly physical choreographic style. The depth, beauty and happiness, great and small, that are found in the simplest things and in the seemingly innocuous moments of everyday life, are transmitted through her works. The concepts of simplicity and authenticity are at the heart of her artistic approach. She has created some twenty works for Sursaut; *At nightfall* (2005), *Le jardin caché* (2008), *Boo!* (2009) and *The Best of Sursaut* (2010) are her most recent creations.

Francine has received the *Prix d'Excellence* from the City of Sherbrooke for the professional quality of her productions, the master of her art, and the boldness of her artistic approach. She has also received the *Prize for artistic creation in dance for the Eastern Townships*, from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

AT NIGHTFALL

On tour since 2006, *At nightfall* has been presented in theatres in Canada, as well as in the United States, with performances (amongst others) at the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad, at the Calgary International Children's Festival, at the Northern Alberta International Children's Festival, and at the Ottawa International Children's Festival. In 2011-2012, the production continues to thrill audiences on this Canadian tour, which once again brings us to theatres across the country.

At nightfall is a poetic work celebrating delicacy, sparseness, slowness; a work that testifies to the importance for the human being to sometimes stop, look around and maintain an essential link with nature and its cycles. The capacity for abandon and wonder and the close link that exists between the real and the fantastic are notions broached in this work. The show presents a magical universe. The strong visual aspect (set, costumes, lighting) as well as the music and the sound effects, convincingly support the choreographic theme. There is no dialogue in this production, and there is no story as such, with a beginning and an end as is the case in most theatre productions; it is rather through the poetry of the body that the ideas are expressed. The show begins as Auguste prepares to take the train to go to the water forest. Through his contact with this universe and the creatures that live there, Auguste will be transformed. From being tense, worried, tired, awkward, and narrow-minded, he will become calm, more confident, and will discover the happiness and joy of stopping and looking outside himself.

We believe that *At nightfall* will be a touching and inspiring experience for the children. We hope it will stimulate their creativity, show them the importance of movement as a means of expression and communication, and develop their taste for live arts, particularly dance.

Choreography and artistic direction: Francine Châteauvert

Performers: Stéphanie Brochard, Ocyam Durocher,
Simon Durocher-Gosselin, Adam Dymburt,
Jasmine Inns, Mélanie Lebrun, Nancy Letendre

Music: Michel G. Côté

Sets and lighting: Bernard Langlois

Costumes: Sylvie Baillargeon, Dominique Thériault



At nightfall was created based on a character named Auguste. Here is his story.

The story of Auguste

Auguste is a shoemaker. From his earliest years, he learned this trade at the side of his father Marek. He grew up surrounded by tools, the odor of leather, and the repetitive tapping and hammering sounds of shoemaking. His world was the workshop and the store; he worked, ate, and slept there.

Auguste carried on in the trade after his father died. He worked from morning till night, and then some. He liked work well done; sometimes to exaggeration. He was so preoccupied with his work, that he was at pains to notice people about him. Eventually he needed someone to help him in his store; that is how he met Julia. Auguste didn't notice, but the workshop, which had been a dark and sombre place, was transformed into a place full of light and color. There was no lack of clients.

The years passed and the shoemaker continued his frenetic pace, and began to show signs of fatigue. Julia spoke to him of the water forest, a magnificent place where he could go to get some rest. Auguste had already heard others say of this forest, that it was a place that opened the minds and hearts of people. Some even told of a tiny people that occupy this territory and speak of their elusive beauty and of their nocturnal dances that include rituals in which the creatures turn, jump and frolic in total abandon. Others even say that these creatures exercise an undeniable charm on passersby who venture into their world.

One day, her eyes of green particularly lustrous and her voice like a song, Julia laid a train ticket on his worktable, insisting that he made the trip to the water forest. Spellbound, Auguste took the ticket, packed a valise, and left that same evening. He took the night train, and in the early morning arrived at the edge of this forest. Auguste knew nothing of life outside his workshop, he was worried and tired, and felt very awkward about taking time to rest. Helpless away from his workshop, he was afraid...

LETTER FROM THE CHOREOGRAPHER

Hi,

My name is Francine Châteauvert. I'm 54 years old, and I'm an artistic director and choreographer; it's my profession. For over 25 years, I've been earning my living doing this work. The choreographer is the person who creates the dance show, has the idea for what the show will be about, invents the movements, and puts everything together so it becomes a show for the stage. I'm writing to tell you a bit about how I go about making up a show.

First though, it's important for me to tell you that there is no speaking in my shows; it's through movement that I express myself. I've always loved moving; movement fascinates me. Sometimes, I lie down in the evening. I'm not sleeping and images appear in my head; characters, movements, colors, a specific place, sounds. The images come back often; while driving in the car, while I'm washing dishes, when I'm gardening or when I'm drinking my tea. I write down these ideas of characters and movements. I draw some of the images that keep coming back, those that become most strongly etched in my memory. After some time, these images give rise to an idea for a show to be created for the stage.

To create the show, I choose the artists that I would like to work with; the dancers first and foremost. For a choreographer, they are essential, they are like tools, the materials necessary to create a choreography. Without them, dance doesn't exist. A choreographer without dancers is like a violinist without a violin, or a painter without paint, brushes, or canvas. I work with the dancers in the studio, using my ideas as a starting point. We explore the movements and characters, in order to make them clear and precise. We use a video camera to record everything we do.

All the while, I continue thinking about the show that I want to create. While working with the dancers, I also work with the other artists; the composer for the music, the scenographer for the set and props, the costume designer for the costumes, and the lighting designer for the lighting plan. Each individual's contribution is very important. A little like a conductor in an orchestra, I, as the choreographer, am the one who directs everyone who is involved in the creation of the show. It took many months of work to create *At nightfall*.

I hope that the end result of all this work, the show *At nightfall*, will be inspiring for you; that is my goal. If you like, you can write to give me your comments on the show, or ask any questions you may have about my work; it's always a pleasure to hear from the audience.

Sincerely,

Francine Châteauvert

LETTER FROM SIMON DUROCHER-GOSSELIN, DANCER

Hello,

I'd like to tell you how I got to do this work that I like. When I was 4 years old, my parents took me to see the Cirque du Soleil. When we got home, I immediately wanted to walk across my mother's clothesline like the acrobats in the show. My mother smiled and told me that it took a lot of practice to become a balancing artist... and my adventure began.

Then I wanted to be an actor on a boat and I did my first theatre show in third grade. After the show, people that I didn't know came to tell me that I was very good; it was a warm feeling. Then I wanted to be a tap dancer but there were no classes in my village, so I did rock and roll and swing dance. I liked it a lot, especially when I was out of breath! Then I did some theatre, African dance, capoeira, clown workshops, work with masks, break dancing, gumboot (percussive dancing), zapateo-boleadoras (a kind of flamenco with chains that create a rhythm when struck on the floor), and circus arts.

While taking workshops with the Cirque du Monde, I discovered a passion that would not stop growing over the years. In 2003, I finished my training as an instructor at the National Circus School in Montreal. I taught circus at many elementary and high schools. At the same time, I created shows with my friends, that we presented at summer festivals. I realized that I liked to do shows that combined circus, movement, dance, and theatre. Now, I want to work on shows that highlight my work on stilts and my abilities as an acrobat and dancer, and I want to continue my training by doing workshops in circus arts and dance.

Since 2006, at the same time as doing my personal projects, I have been working with the Sursaut Dance Company. I'm the Creeping Peacock in *At nightfall*. I like this part, because it's a fantastic creature that is often on its head and does acrobatics. In the show, I give my 100% on stage so that the children and the adults will like the show. Working with a dance company has given me the "bug" to seek out other dance experiences. During rehearsals and while touring, I take different classes in contemporary dance and in contact improvisation. My dream (or rather my objective), would be to leave on an adventure with my friends to perform shows everywhere on the planet!

I hope your dreams come true, and that you find work that is fun and fills you with passion.

Simon

LETTER FROM STÉPHANIE BROCHARD, DANCER

Hello,

I'm 29 and I'm a dancer, an actress and a dance teacher. I've always liked dancing, and I started taking dance lessons when I was very young. Later, when I was about 15 years old, I decided that I wanted to be a professional dancer. I began to take classes more intensively in a programme that combined dance training with academic studies. Like you, I would go to regular school in the morning, and in the afternoon, I took dance classes to perfect my dance technique. At first, I wanted to be a ballerina, but I discovered modern dance and I knew that it was exactly what I wanted to do. Actually, I like dance in general; I also do historical dance, more precisely Baroque (a style that dates from the time of King Louis XIV of France, when women wore beautiful dresses!). I also teach dance. I learned to teach at the National Ballet School in Toronto, and have been teaching to children like you. I like the arts and the stage, and I also studied some theatre. I've already performed in some plays, and have even made up my own.

I've been working with the Sursaut Dance Company since the fall of 2008. I was hired to learn (amongst other things) the role of Julia who is also the Snow Antelope in *At nightfall*. It's a special part, because this is a unique creature that orchestrates all the goings in the water forest. She is supposed to calm Auguste, a man who is very stressed by his life.

I have also worked on the creative process with the choreographer and three other dancers on our new show, *Boo!* In the studio, the choreographer showed us new combinations of movements that we tried. Sometimes it worked well, sometimes it did not. Together, we tried to find combinations of movements that expressed what the choreographer was trying to get across. Once we found the movements, we had to do them over and over again many times to memorise them in our bodies, so that we can dance them well.

It's been a tradition with Sursaut from their very first shows, that after a performance the dancers come back on stage (after taking a minute to catch their breath), to meet and speak to any members of the audience who wish to do so... if you feel like it, come and see me.

So, till then, have a nice day.

Stéphanie

LETTER FROM ADAM DYMBURT, DANCER

Hi!

My name is Adam and I'm 60 years old. I'm a dancer-acrobat-actor, and I'm also general manager of the Sursaut Dance Company. I did some studies in theatre and dance, and then I studied and taught acrobatics at the National Circus School in Montreal, Quebec (that's where the first Cirque du Soleil shows were put together by the way). I've been working with the Sursaut Dance Company for 25 years, and have been in every one of the company's productions.

I adore performing, and I love movement. When I was younger, I did a lot of sports at school; I loved physical activity. That's what attracted me to dance.

It takes a lot of work in the studio before getting on the stage to perform in front of an audience. During the creation of the show, as one of a team of dancers, I have to learn the movements as the choreographer makes them up. Sometimes, I help by improvising and trying movements spontaneously. While learning the movements, I need to do them over and over again many times so that my body can remember how to do them. I'm actually quite slow at learning new movements, but once I've learned them I don't forget. I often have to make up a character from the movements I do. In *At nightfall*, I play and dance the part of Auguste. I don't know how long I'll be able to go on dancing, because the work is very exacting physically, and I'm not sure how long my body will be able to keep up.

I love my work on the stage, doing shows, giving to the audience, as well as other aspects besides performing that are less visible but just as important. For over the past 24 years, I've been putting up the sets and striking the show for all our performances. I love doing that. I also do many other things with the company, such as, accounting and selling our shows to presenters in different theatres.

My passion for the stage, for performing for an audience, is the driving motivation in doing all this work.

Till next time!

Adam

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES BEFORE AND/OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1 – THE PRODUCTION

Objective: For the students to become acquainted with the production *At nightfall*.

Preparation: Read to or have the children read “The story of Auguste”.

Process: Open a discussion using comments and questions concerning the story, i.e., discuss the necessity to take a break from routine, like summer vacations for school children.

ACTIVITY 2 – PROFESSIONS IN DANCE

Objective: For the students to become acquainted with the professions of choreographer and dancer.

Preparation: Read to or have the children read the letters from the choreographer and the 3 dancers.

Process: Open a discussion using comments and questions concerning the information in the letter. Have the children speak about their own experience and what they know about dance.

Write a letter to the choreographer or to the dancers to comment on their respective profession in relation to what was seen in the show.

ACTIVITY 3 – MOVEMENT AND BODY LANGUAGE

Objective: To show the importance and the diversity of movement as a means of self-expression and in communicating with others.

Preparation: The teacher helps the children to identify different ways of expressing oneself without using spoken language, i.e. writing, drawing or painting, music, facial expressions, body postures. The teacher elaborates on one of these means, movement and body language, by explaining that by gestures, body positions, facial expressions, etc., one can express different things, invent characters, imitate animals or express an emotion.

Process: Each student choses something he would like to communicate or represent and does so in front of the class. The other students, one at a time, say what they see. Ideas can be written on a slip of paper and put in a jar. The students can take turns pulling an idea out of the jar and expressing that idea to the class.

Examples: An emotion (fear, joy, etc.)
 An animal (fish, bird, etc.)
 A sport (volleyball, soccer, etc.)

Follow-up: Ask the students to talk about the difficulty or ease in expressing something without speaking.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 4 – POSTER

Objective: To create a poster

Preparation: The teacher and the students decide the form of the poster; materials needed, size of paper, type of paper, lettering, illustration, cut outs, written text to get information across (title, date, time, place, price, etc.)

Process: The students can work in small groups of 3 or 4 to create a poster that they feel is representative of *At nightfall*. It can take many forms; a drawing, collage, painting, text. The posters can be exhibited in the classroom or in the school.

Follow-up: Discuss the different posters in terms of: their ability to attract attention, to get the necessary information about the show across, etc.

ACTIVITY 5 – COMIC STRIP OR COMIC BOOK

Objective: To produce a comic strip or comic book based on one or more characters from the show in a story invented by the students.

Preparation: The teacher and students decide how many frames and/or pages the comic strip or comic book will contain (perhaps 1 frame or 1 page per student in a group), the materials to be used, etc.

Process: Students work in groups of 4 to 6 (or more); they invent a story, and each prepares one frame or page of the strip or book.

Follow-up: Each group chooses one member to tell the class what they did. They present the character they chose, how they perceive this character, what he does.

Variant for younger students: Have the students draw a scene or character that they liked.

ACTIVITY 6 - POEM

Objective: To write a poem inspired by the performance

Preparation: The students work in small groups of 3 or 4. They discuss what they remember of the show, what was significant for them, and on a piece of paper they write 10 words that express their reaction. For example, the colors, the costumes, the acrobatics, the mood, a character and his way of moving.

Process: The students write a ten-line poem using their 10 words as a base. Each group reads their poem to the class.

Follow-up: Discuss whether the students were able to express their reactions to the show in the poem that they wrote.

Variation for younger students: The teacher can help the students chose 3 or 4 words from their own vocabulary, that can be related to the show.

ACTIVITY 7 - COMMENTARY AND CRITICISM

Objective: To be able to comment and review a performance, and to teach the students that they each have their own personal reaction to the show.

Preparation: Begin a discussion on how one goes about reviewing or commenting on a performance using criteria such as:

- What they liked or disliked and why
- What astonished, entertained, or bothered them and why
- The character that most impressed them
- The dance style(s)
- The sets
- The costumes
- The music

Process: In small groups, they discuss the show based on the above criteria. Each group presents the results of their discussion in the form of a letter addressed to the choreographer. They read their letters to the class. The teacher can decide to send the letters to Sursaut.

Follow-up discussion: The students express whether they found it easy or difficult to explain their reactions to the show.

The Sursaut dance company is funded by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec,
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