

Folk dancers' joy is contagious

By **DAVE CHENOWETH**
of The Gazette

An evening with Les Sortileges, Quebec's masterful amateur folk-dance troupe, is a joyous experience — and a depressing one.

The joy starts on stage, as these brilliantly-costumed dancers, mostly teenagers, switch from swirling cotillions to staccato step-dances, sweeping the audience into an eye and ear-filling world of happy movement and light.

It is impossible to imagine an audience that cannot be captivated by Les Sortileges, and the Saturday evening crowd at Theatre Denise Peltier was no exception.

Few adults could resist adding their own toe-tapping rhythm to the measures that sparkled on stage, while the youngsters — and many were present — seemed entranced. The applause was

constant, the evening-end ovations were guaranteed, and there is no doubt the same held true for Sunday's closing performance.

It is this very pleasure Les Sortileges offer that also gives rise to a feeling of quiet sadness. Their art is that of the folk dance — from Quebec and a dozen other cultures — and these are dances of participation, measures that sing of community and sharing, of people celebrating their joys and sorrows together.

As we watch Les Sortileges, it sad to realize how our contemporary pop dancing — the frenetic and individualistic jerks of rock and disco — reflects the nuclear isolation where individuals are so alone, so unsharing, amidst cities of crowded millions. No wonder these young dancers seem to enjoy their art; it must be as much therapy as it is performance.

This weekend's performances saw the group performing dances that ranged from Quebec quadrilles and cotillions, through Scottish jigs, and English Rapper Sword Dance, to steps from Israel, Romania, Croatia and Italy, as well as comedy numbers ranging from a group of inept moose hunters to an arm-wrestling extravaganza at a lumber camp. With masterful use of logistics and costumes changes, the stage was constantly alive, as one group of colorful characters would sweep off to be immediately replaced by another band from another culture — with only the rare solo or duet.

The performances that drew the loudest applause — understandably — were numbers that involved Les Sortileges' stunning group co-ordination.