

Le Studio 303 perd sa future maison

Catherine Lalonde

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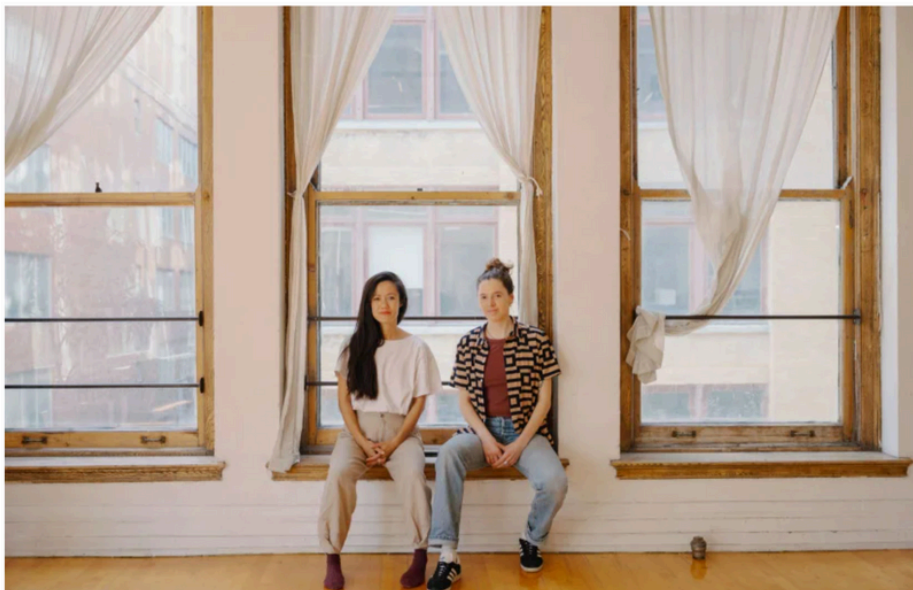


Photo: Adil Boukind Le Devoir La direction du studio 303, Kim-Sanh Châu et Mari Deckers cherchent à quitter l'immeuble Belgo, où leur studio se trouve actuellement.

Le Studio 303 perd sa chance d'avoir sa maison consacrée à la danse contemporaine. Une cofondatrice avait accepté la promesse d'achat de son immeuble en plein Plateau-Mont-Royal, bien en dessous du prix courant, pour léguer un lieu à la danse du Québec. Mais le remaniement du programme Aide aux immobilisations (PAI) du ministère de la Culture (MCC) met tous les projets sur pause et crée de nouveaux délais. Résultat : la propriétaire n'attendra plus pour vendre. Même pour cette bonne cause.

« C'est inacceptable ! » s'insurge Martha Carter en entrevue vidéo. L'ex-chorégraphe, qui se consacre maintenant à l'art-thérapie, était en 1989 une des trois fondatrices du Studio 303. L'endroit, avec son grand studio, offre depuis des services aux danseurs à Montréal.

« Je suis prête à faire beaucoup moins d'argent avec la vente de mon immeuble parce que je veux que ça revienne à la communauté, à la danse, explique M^{me} Carter. Je sais que je peux vendre deux fois leur prix, au moins, très rapidement. » La propriétaire acceptait du Studio 303 son offre de 1,7 million de dollars, un excellent prix pour ce type d'édifice dans le quartier.

« On travaille sur ce projet de bâtiment depuis cinq ans », soupirent les directrices Kim-Sanh Châu et Mari Deckers. Le PAI, programme qui vise à permettre à toutes les régions du Québec de « disposer d'un parc immobilier et mobilier à caractère culturel qui soit accessible et de qualité », est nécessaire à leur financement. Impossible d'aller chercher des sous du fédéral (Patrimoine canadien) sans cette première aide.

Or le PAI a fermé tous les dossiers fin avril, dont celui du Studio 303, pour effectuer des modifications au programme. Le cas du 303, croient ses directrices, illustre le gaspillage d'argent, de ressources, de travail et d'occasions patrimoniales, philanthropiques et artistiques provoqué par cette décision.

« Je suis prête à faire beaucoup moins d'argent avec la vente de mon immeuble parce que je veux que ça revienne à la communauté, à la danse.

– **Martha Carter**

« Le processus d'acquisition par financement public prend du temps, huit ans en moyenne, ajoutent-elles. C'est une durée bien trop longue pour le marché immobilier. Avec ce changement abrupt, le MCC nous fait perdre toute crédibilité vis-à-vis du marché et de tout partenaire que nous souhaiterions approcher. »

Le coût du travail invisible

L'adresse que visait le Studio 303 est la première House of Pride à Montréal. Elle « représente un pan vital de la mémoire LGBTQIA2S+ », qui incarne aussi le travail d'inclusion fait par l'organisme. L'édifice comprend déjà un studio de danse privé, le White Wall. Louise Lecavalier aime y travailler.

La propriétaire de l'immeuble, qui a déjà attendu trois ans, n'a plus de patience. Sa bâtisse a besoin de rénovations pressantes, qu'elle ne veut pas gérer. Système de chauffage, fenêtres et toit ont besoin de soins. Si le Studio 303 l'achète, les rénovations à faire ne seront pas du tout les mêmes, mise aux normes oblige. « Si au moins j'avais une garantie du ministère, je pourrais patienter... Mais là, on n'a aucun signe », indique M^{me} Carter.

Depuis 2021, le Studio 303 a fait changer le zonage de l'édifice. L'équipe a cumulé les rapports d'experts et bossé pendant un an pour préparer le dossier de 44 pages déposé au PAI... qu'il faudra au moins remanier pour répondre aux modifications quand le programme sera rouvert.

Cette préparation, indiquent au *Devoir* les directrices, a coûté jusqu'à maintenant 83 406 \$. Le projet total a exigé 138 582 \$. « Ce sont de vraies dépenses. » Même si le Studio 303 a eu de l'aide financière pour ces frais, les deux directrices estiment que la dissipation inutile de cet argent public est insensée, surtout pendant la crise financière des arts que vit le Québec.

Les inspections, les études et le travail préparatoire des architectes et des ingénieurs constituent les plus grandes dépenses. Avec le temps que l'équipe interne a passé à monter le projet – évalué à huit heures par semaine –, pour 14 560 \$.



Photo: Adil Boukind Le Devoir

la direction du studio 303, Kim-Sanh Châu et Mari Deckers cherchent à quitter le Belgo où leur studio se trouve actuellement.

Mémoire et avenir

Locataire de l'immeuble Belgo, rue Sainte-Catherine à Montréal, le Studio 303 doit déménager. « Le bail se renouvelle tous les ans, avec un préavis d'un mois. » Cette vision à court terme restreint les possibilités de financement pour améliorer et rénover le studio, toujours dans le même état qu'en 1989. Les danseurs s'y brûlent parfois les mollets sur les vieux calorifères à eau chaude quand le mouvement les fait reculer avec trop d'entrain...

Le projet sur le Plateau Mont-Royal permettait d'avoir un studio de même grandeur, des bureaux, et d'ajouter une résidence à long terme pour un artiste en situation de logement précaire.

« J'en vois beaucoup, des artistes qui se font évincer. On aurait choisi des artistes avec un projet, qui peuvent utiliser le studio pour créer et avoir pendant un an un logement vraiment pas cher, le temps de se retourner », explique M^{me} Châu.

La Presse rapportait début mai que le Théâtre de la Ville, à Longueuil, subit également cette pause du programme. C'est le trop grand nombre de demandes – plus de 200 projets – et leurs montants, estimés à plusieurs centaines de millions, qui forceraient le réajustement. L'enveloppe pour le PAI est d'environ 80 millions, toujours selon *La Presse*.

En 2022-2023, 114 demandes ont été déposées, pour 38 millions de dollars, précise le ministère de la Culture. En 2023-2024, il y en avait 154, représentant 93,5 millions de dollars. Rappelons que les projets ne se finalisent pas dans l'année.

Dans sa précédente version, « les projets pouvaient être déposés en continu », a expliqué la direction des communications du MCC. « Cela créait une accumulation de demandes, d'allers-retours avec les partenaires », une méthode inefficace « qui ne donnait pas de visibilité aux partenaires, ni au MCC », poursuit-on.

« Les projets qui étaient analysés au moment de la fermeture du PAI pourront, s'ils respectent les critères, être redéposés dans la nouvelle mouture du PAI. Le travail effectué par les partenaires jusqu'ici n'est pas entièrement perdu », continue le MCC.

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Faire de meilleurs spectacles

Le Studio 303 est un pilier pour la danse contemporaine, pour la création et pour la formation continue. C'est le lieu d'accueil pour les danseurs qui arrivent d'ailleurs. Les artistes aux parcours atypiques y sont mieux accueillis qu'ailleurs.

« On sait qu'on est moins visible qu'un théâtre », concède Kim-Sanh Châu. « La création est un processus en deux temps ; nous, on est vraiment en amont », dans la partie invisible aux spectateurs. « Si tu n'as pas de centres de création qui peuvent offrir de bons contextes de travail et de développement, les pièces que tu vas voir en salle seront moins bonnes », analyse-t-elle.

Comment pérenniser ces lieux et assurer assez de studios spécialisés pour la danse à Montréal ? La question reste ouverte.

Montreal's arts scene faces 'huge threat' with sale of Belgo Building, artists say

By Brendan Kelly

Updated July 25, 2025 3:50 PM



Mari Deckers, administrative director of Studio 303 (seated), with staff members, from left, Liam Gover, Abigail Michel, Dominique Boisvert and Krystina Dejean in the dance studio's office in the Belgo Building on Ste-Catherine St. The building, a centre for galleries and artist-run spaces, is for sale. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

Jamie Wright loves coming in to work at the Belgo Building, and she's worried she's going to lose that privilege.

Wright is co-director of Art Circulation, an agency that represents choreographers and dance companies and is located in the storied building on Ste-Catherine St., between Bleury and St-Alexandre Sts. She and the agency have been there since 2007.

The Belgo is said to have the biggest concentration of art galleries and artist-run studios of any building in Canada. Hugues Charbonneau, who runs a gallery there, said there is nothing else like it in the country and that the Belgo is known in art circles in New York, Paris and London.

The Belgo is for sale, and that has many of the artistic tenants worried that the new owner will jack up their rents and force them to move out.



Jamie Wright in her Art Circulation space in the Belgo Building on Ste-Catherine St. "Everybody in the arts world knows the Belgo, even across borders," she says. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

Sitting on a worn couch in the funky offices of Art Circulation, Wright talked about how much she likes working in the building.

“I can go see art on my coffee break and do yoga on my lunch break,” said Wright. “The front door is open seven days a week and you can just walk in and the galleries are there — and there are people to greet you and tell you about the art. And no one in here charges a fee. Everybody in the arts world knows the Belgo, even across borders.”

There are more than 25 art galleries in the Belgo, including Skol, Galeries Bellemare Lambert, B-312 and Galerie Hugues Charbonneau. There are also dance studios, offices of arts organizations including the Orchestre Métropolitain, a yoga studio, a barbershop, a Latin dance studio and a kung fu studio.

The building is on the edge of the Quartier des spectacles, but it couldn't be more different than all the giant condo towers that now dominate that area around Place des Arts. It was built in 1913, renovated in the late 1950s and still has a somewhat scruffy old-school feel. It was originally home to an upscale department store called Scroggie's, and from the 1920s till the '80s it was mostly rented out by companies in the garment business. Then in the late 1980s, the artists took over.



The Belgo Building on Ste-Catherine St. in Montreal runs the entire block between St-Alexandre St. and Bleury St. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

Mark Sinnett, executive vice-president at Avison Young, the real estate company handling the sale of the Belgo for the Dubrovsky family, insisted the arts vocation of the building is a selling point for the property.

“It's definitely what we believe is one of the value-adds in this building,” said Sinnett. “Beyond just being an office complex ... the fact that this building has a cultural vocation, artistic, we believe and we think ... that potential investors will see what we see.”

“The location, given that it is part of the Quartier des spectacles, certainly (helps).”

Sinnett likened the Belgo to Maison Alcan, which was bought by a company with ties to Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté. It has a number of arts-related companies under its roof.

One of the oldest tenants of the Belgo is Studio 303, a dance space. Its artistic director Kim-Sanh Châu is extremely worried about the studio's future there.

Studio 303 only has a one-year lease, and she feels they might be forced to pay a much higher rent. Châu said they pay \$14 per square foot, which she said is a good deal compared to other buildings in the area.

“They might ask us to leave,” said Châu. “We're a dance studio. We make noise. I don't think we'll be able to stay no matter what.”

Châu said losing the unique arts scene in the Belgo would be a big loss for Montreal.

“It’s really kept this vibe and I think it’s essential because you need to keep a variety of models (of arts centres),” said Châu. “It’s very important that these spaces exist. It’s OK to do experimental, not-so-polished art, and it’s actually the beauty of Montreal. That’s what makes us different.”



Mari Deckers, administrative director of Studio 303 in the Belgo Building: “It’s one of the last places downtown that has managed to keep that unique, more artist-run scene,” she says. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

The potential sale “is a huge threat to the arts scene,” said Mari Deckers, administrative director of Studio 303. “It’s one of the last places downtown that has managed to keep that unique, more artist-run scene. It would be a huge change to the ecosystem in Montreal.”

Charbonneau remembers going to the Belgo as a visual-arts student at Concordia in the 1990s and discovering “this beautiful place where there were art galleries next to artist co-ops and artist studios. And it felt reachable. The Belgo felt very warm. It’s a place where you feel welcome. It’s not pretentious. As a young art student, I could relate to that.”

Galerie Hugues Charbonneau is meant to sign a new five-year lease later this summer, but Charbonneau says he’s not sure he’ll stay.

“Maybe other galleries I like will leave,” said Charbonneau. “That’s what the Belgo is. It’s a place where everyone meets. If in two or three years, if everyone is no longer there, I don’t need to be there. I’m staying here for now because I find it fun.”

He says the people who would lose the most by a change in vocation of the Belgo would be young up-and-coming artists.

“The fact that my rent is so low has helped me take on these young artists,” said Charbonneau.



The Belgo Building on Ste-Catherine St. The city of Montreal has had discussions with the owner, but says it has limited power in a private real estate transaction. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

The arts tenants are looking to the city to help maintain the building's unique arts scene, but Ericka Alneus — who is responsible for culture, heritage, nightlife and gastronomy for Mayor Valérie Plante's administration — said they are limited in what they can do, given it's a private real estate transaction. She said Ville-Marie city councillor Robert Beaudry has had a discussion with the owners of the Belgo.

"It was important for us to send the message that it is an important place for artists, especially visual arts," said Alneus.



Jamie Wright arranges promotional material in her Art Circulation space in the Belgo Building on Ste-Catherine St. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

Wright feels the timing couldn't be worse, given the general instability in the arts world. And she doesn't want the city to lose the history wrapped up in the Belgo.

"A lot of the organizations accept the grittiness of the building," said Wright. "The old radiators that go clink and clank in the winter. It gives charm to our working environment. It keeps us rooted in the history of the neighbourhood. I feel it every time I come down here."



Cast iron radiators and creaky hardwood floors are among the charms of the Belgo Building. "It keeps us rooted in the history of the neighbourhood. I feel it every time I come down here," says Jamie Wright. John Mahoney *Montreal Gazette*

She said one of the members of the Dubrovsky family had a real interest in supporting the arts and keeping the rents reasonable.

Canadian Dance Studio Cancels Israeli-created Gaga Style Classes Over 'Genocide in Gaza'

Studio 303 will stop using the dance method created by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin and taught worldwide, joining 15 other dance groups from the U.S. and Canada who are meeting the BDS movement's call to boycott



Mass Gaga class in support of human rights in Tel Aviv, in 2019. Credit: Asraf Abraham

Talia Banon Tsur

May 30th, 2025

A Canadian dance studio has announced that it is canceling its Gaga classes, a dance technique developed by an Israeli choreographer, in support of a cultural boycott of Israel.

World-renowned former artistic director of the [Batsheva Dance Company](#), [Ohad Naharin](#), is credited with developing the Gaga movement language. Batsheva has used Gaga as its primary method since 2008 for training its dancers. Instructors from across the world train in Israel to teach the method.

Studio 303, based in Montreal, offers a range of dance classes to professional and amateur dancers. The Gaga classes, taught by Canadian teachers who had undergone training in Israel, were cancelled after the studio decided to join the [Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#), which is part of the broader BDS movement.

"For Studio 303 – both its team and board of directors – joining PACBI is a simple yet meaningful first step," the studio announced, referring to the campaign's acronym. "It is a concrete way to support an initiative led by Palestinian civil society, which now has international resonance."

"Arts and culture play a key role in the normalization and [artistic whitewashing](#) ("[artwashing](#)") of the ongoing Israeli genocide in Palestine," the studio continued. "We believe that arts and culture can also be tools to support resistance to colonial oppression and the liberation of Palestine."

"By refusing to collaborate with the Israeli government or its funding bodies, and by boycotting all cultural and academic products that normalize the State of Israel, we affirm our commitment to Palestinian self-determination," it added.

More than 15 Canadian and U.S.-based dance organizations have joined the PACBI campaign calling for a cultural and academic boycott of Israel. The campaign, associated with the group Dancers for Palestine, has attracted institutions such as the Vancouver International Dance Festival.

"I've been dancing Gaga in Studio 303 for eight years. When I saw the announcement about the cancellation, I was somewhat shocked. I didn't get the connection," said Osnat Ita Skoblinski, an Israeli who has lived in Montreal for the past decade. "I wondered if I was annoyed only because it was inconvenient, but I think that it's not only that. I see here an action that doesn't serve the goal. Gaga has therapeutic value for the body and soul. It is also a source of income for the teachers."



A scene from the 'Anafaza' show, in which the Palestinian flag was among dozens used on stage. Credit: Avraham Ascaf

She said that if the studio wants to discuss Gaza, there are many more effective ways to do so. "I believe the decision makers have good intentions," she said. "They feel helpless as innocent people are killed and want to do something, and they think that preventing Gaga classes is taking a step. However, they are effectively hurting their diverse community."

She recalled: "After I posted something short about this, someone wrote to me, 'Children are dying in Gaza and all you write about is this damn dance class?' And I answered her: 'You're right. But a damn cancellation of a dance class is the thing that's going to help this?'"

Ohad Naharin developed the Gaga method after suffering an injury. It is intended for dancers, but has evolved into a comprehensive approach to dance, movement and training that strengthens the body while addressing physical weaknesses and injuries.



Naharin leading a mass Gaga session in Tel Aviv in 2024. Credit: Askaf Abraham

In an interview with Haaretz, Naharin described the language of Gaga as "an enabling system, like a sound system through which one can hear music, but it's a thing unto itself: the dancer who is helped by Gaga."

He noted, "Gaga doesn't define people, rather it helps them be themselves ... I want to allow freedom and diversity, intimate and personal and private striving."

This isn't the first time that Batsheva employees, and Naharin in particular, have run into the BDS movement. Protesters have often protested outside its performances abroad. Although Naharin agrees with the agenda of the movement opposing occupation, he is careful to stress that he doesn't support BDS and doesn't see boycotting as an effective action to achieve its goal.

"When BDS people demonstrate, it doesn't help the Palestinians, unfortunately, but it does add drama," he [told Haaretz in 2024](#).

"Discussing how much we at Batsheva are affected is not important. We try to navigate amid the changes, but we are not a victim."

Montreal dance studio joins Israel boycott, drops classes in Ohad Naharin's Gaga technique

The decision by Studio 303 has triggered debate among its attendees, including Israelis, who question whether boycotting the pro-Palestinian Israeli choreographer 'misses the mark'

By [GRACE GILSON](#)
5 June 2025, 1:02 am



Ohad Naharin, center, teaching a Gaga class, the body movement concept that he created. (Courtesy Gaga)

JTA — When Ita Skoblinski learned that a favorite dance studio in Montreal was boycotting a movement style that originated in Israel, she wasn't sure what to think.

An Israeli designer who moved to Canada a decade ago, she was sympathetic to efforts to add pressure against the Israeli government over its war in Gaza and occupation of the West Bank. But she was also increasingly uncomfortable with how opposition to the war was manifesting itself where she lived.

"I find myself in a very weird and confused situation in which something that I worked a big chunk of my life towards, awareness to the Palestinian people and their plight, is now happening," Skoblinski said in an interview. "But it's also coming at this unexpected price of hatred... hatred towards Jews, and a lot of misunderstanding and lack of context."

So Skoblinski took to social media, [inviting](#) her Facebook followers to weigh in on her reaction to the announcement by Studio 303 that it would boycott Israel and drop Gaga dance classes, which she had enjoyed.

“As someone who stands against the routine killing of children, the starvation of civilians, and public declarations of ethnic cleansing... As someone who left Israel, in part, because of its moral collapse... As someone who stands in full solidarity with the civilians of Gaza, I still feel, as a person and as a dancer (and I believe we are all dancers), that this boycott might be missing the mark,” she wrote. “I’m open to being convinced otherwise.”

The response was stark. In comments, some accused the studio of “virtue signaling” while another called the boycott a “principled decision.”

Soon, the conversation had ricocheted out of Skoblinski’s circle to include pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian voices beyond Montreal — and to highlight how an escalation of anti-Israel sentiment in the dance world is pitting pro-Palestinian voices against some of Israel’s most vociferous internal critics.



Illustrative: Palestinians and anti-Israel Jewish groups stage a rally walking from Times Square to the United Nations Building in New York, September 15, 2011, calling to end all US aid to Israel, end the occupation and support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. (AP Photo/David Karp)

Studio 303 announced on May 21 that it was joining the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. It said it was no longer programming classes such as Gaga Movement that are associated with the “Brand Israel” strategy, an official Israeli public relations campaign launched in 2005 to highlight the nation’s cultural exports.

“By refusing to collaborate with the Israeli government or its funding agencies, and by boycotting all cultural and academic products that normalize the State of Israel, we affirm our commitment to Palestinian self-determination,” the studio [announced](#) on its website.

Founded in 2004 by a group of Palestinian academics, PACBI is one of the founders of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, known as BDS. It calls for a boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, even those that might be sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

PACBI has recently called for boycotts of “No Other Land,” the Oscar-winning Israeli-Palestinian documentary about Israeli demolitions in a Palestinian West Bank village, and Standing Together, a prominent Israeli-Palestinian anti-occupation group, saying that any collaboration with Israelis reflects “normalization” of Israel.

The group and its affiliates have long protested touring by Batsheva Dance Company, an Israeli company that draws some funding from the Israeli government. In February, with Batsheva on another US tour, one of the affiliates, Dancers for Palestine, ramped up its campaign against the company. It also drew attention in [an essay](#) to Batsheva’s ties with Gaga Movement, a dance form created by Batsheva’s house choreographer Ohad Naharin.



Choreographer Ohad Naharin instructs his students at the Batsheva Dance Company's studio in the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv, on June 10, 2014. (Hadas Parush/Flash90)

“Many in the dance field are instinctively against boycotting any movement form,” Dancers for Palestine wrote in a February essay. “But the BDS boycott only targets official Gaga classes — which are financially connected to Gaga Movement Ltd. — not any aesthetic principles dancers might associate with the form.”

Both Batsheva and Naharin are left-wing and have advocated against the war and in favor of the Palestinian cause. Last year, Israel’s right-wing culture minister [asked for a review](#) of Batsheva’s government funding after the company included a Palestinian flag on stage; it had also recently called for a ceasefire in the Gaza war. And Naharin has said he supports the goals of the Israel boycott.

“If the act of cancellation would have helped the Palestinians’ cause I would boycott my own show,” he said after an Irish company canceled a performance of one of his works last year.

He added, “It is obvious that this cancellation does nothing to help reduce the suffering of people in our region or to reduce anger and frustration of the people in Ireland over the wrongdoing of the Israeli government and army in the Gaza Strip.”

The Dancers for Palestine essay acknowledged Naharin's politics, saying that his dismissal of the boycott's effectiveness undercut any solidarity he might have expressed. "Naharin has expressed sympathy for Palestinian suffering but undermines Palestinian political agency when he repeatedly misrepresents the BDS movement," the essay said.

Studio 303 shared the essay in response to a request for comment from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Its announcement post also used a Dancers for Palestine image that highlighted nine other studios across the United States and Canada that recently joined PACBI.



Illustrative: Dancers groove in the Gaga dance style at a gathering with its creator, Ohad Naharin. (Courtesy Gadi Dagon)

Studio 303 said it had not seen Skoblinski's Facebook post but would "take the time necessary to address any questions from participants of Studio 303 if addressed to us."

For her part, Skoblinski said she was glad she had written the post in the first place. "It feels like a very small thing to write about, it's a dance studio while people are dying and being bombed," she said. "And the reason I decided to write it anyway is because... it really touches my life and my friends and community life."

But she said the firestorm she ignited had not left her with a clearer perspective. She said she had not been won over by either Studio 303's critics, or its defenders. "Both sides I disagree with," she said.

"Many people said they're antisemitic," she said about Studio 303. "I don't think that's the case. I think it's complex. And I wanted to start this conversation and hear what people had to say about it."

Ultimately, Skoblinski said, she had drawn one firm conclusion — that the debate spilled far beyond her Montreal dance studio. "The conversation," she said, "is more interesting than the actual case."

JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY

EST 1917

Montreal dance studio joins Israel boycott, dropping classes in Ohad Naharin's Gaga technique

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A dancer performs on stage during a rehearsal of the "2019" ballet by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin at the Opera Berlioz le corum in Montpellier, France, on June 23, 2022. (Pascal GUYOT / AFP via Getty Images)

BY [GRACE GILSON](#) JUNE 1, 2025 2:02 PM

When Ita Skoblinski learned that a favorite dance studio in Montreal was boycotting a movement style that originated in Israel, she wasn't sure what to think.

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"Many in the dance field are instinctively against boycotting any movement form," Dancers for Palestine wrote in a February essay. "But the BDS boycott only targets official Gaga classes — which are financially connected to Gaga Movement Ltd. — not any aesthetic principles dancers might associate with the form."



Choreographer Ohad Naharin instructs his students at the Batsheva Dance Company's studio in the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv, on June 10, 2014. (Hadas Parush/Flash90)

Both Batsheva and Naharin are left-wing and have advocated against the war and in favor of the Palestinian cause. Last year, Israel's right-wing culture minister asked for a review of Batsheva's government funding after the company included a Palestinian flag on stage; it had also recently called for a ceasefire in the Gaza war. And Naharin has said he supports the goals of the Israel boycott.

"If the act of cancellation would have helped the Palestinians' cause I would boycott my own show," he said after an Irish company canceled a performance of one of his works last year.

He added, "It is obvious that this cancellation does nothing to help reduce the suffering of people in our region or to reduce anger and frustration of the people in Ireland over the wrongdoing of the Israeli government and army in the Gaza Strip."

The Dancers for Palestine essay acknowledged Naharin's politics, saying that his dismissal of the boycott's effectiveness undercut any solidarity he might have expressed. "Naharin has expressed sympathy for Palestinian suffering but undermines Palestinian political agency when he repeatedly misrepresents the BDS movement," the essay said.

Studio 303 shared the essay in response to a request for comment from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Its announcement post also used a Dancers for Palestine image that highlighted nine other studios across the United States and Canada that recently joined PACBI.

Studio 303 said it had not seen Skoblinski's Facebook post but would "take the time necessary to address any questions from participants of Studio 303 if addressed to us."

For her part, Skoblinski said she was glad she had written the post in the first place. "It feels like a very small thing to write about, it's a dance studio while people are dying and being bombed," she said. "And the reason I decided to write it anyway is because ... it really touches my life and my friends and community life."

But she said the firestorm she ignited had not left her with a clearer perspective. She said she had not been won over by either Studio 303's critics, or its defenders. "Both sides I disagree with," she said.

"Many people said they're antisemitic," she said about Studio 303. "I don't think that's the case. I think it's complex. And I wanted to start this conversation and hear what people had to say about it."

Ultimately, Skoblinski said, she had drawn one firm conclusion — that the debate spilled far beyond her Montreal dance studio. “The conversation,” she said, “is more interesting than the actual case.”