

OBITUARY

Impresario Guy Latraverse introduced Quebec artists to the world

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Guy Latraverse, left, holds up his honorary Félix Award from ADISQ, with a little help from Yvon Deschamps at the Adisq awards gala in Montreal, on Oct. 27, 2013.

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Guy Latraverse, often referred to as “the father of Quebec show business,” was one of his province’s greatest entertainment agents, producers and show designers for half a century. He represented some of Quebec’s most prominent artists and conceived and produced legendary tours, events and television specials. He also became a champion for understanding the ravages of bipolar disorder, from which he suffered.

After Mr. Latraverse’s death, in Montreal on Oct. 14 at 84 years of age, musician Diane Dufresne told Radio-Canada, “There was nothing that was impossible for Guy. There were no barriers. He gave an identity to Quebec. When you think of our history, there are politicians, hockey players ... but Guy Latraverse changed our world.”

Guy Latraverse was born in Chicoutimi, in Quebec’s Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, on July 5, 1939, a ninth-generation descendant of Norman immigrants to New France. He was raised in Arvida, a company town where his father was a manager with Alcan.

Like many small-town Quebecers who came of age during the post-Second World War period, Mr. Latraverse saw his future in the big city. By 1962 he was installed in Montreal where he began, but did not complete, graduate studies in business and law. He was working at an accounting firm when he met musician Claude Léveill  , a friend of his sister, the actress Louise Latraverse. He became Mr. L  veill  ’s manager and employed innovative strategies while representing him, including producing shows for Mr. L  veill   at the prestigious Place des Arts, a first for a popular Quebec performer. Mr. Latraverse found his true path in business as an impresario and producer championing the province’s entertainers.

By 1968, he was organizing concerts and tours for a who’s who of Quebec artists including Louise Forestier, Jean Lapointe, Monique Leyrac, Robert Charlebois, Pauline Julien and Yvon Deschamps. He would become the agent for Mr. Charlebois and Mr. Deschamps. He also brought French artists such as Charles Aznavour, Johnny Hallyday and V  ronique Sanson to Quebec.

In the 1970s, Mr. Latraverse became a leader in the industry, bringing major international anglophone acts as well to Montreal, including James Taylor, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Joni Mitchell and Peter Frampton. Meanwhile, he was also presenting new Quebec acts such as Beau Dommage and Harmonium.

He was among the founders of ADISQ, the provincial association for music, concert and video industries. In 2013, Mr. Latraverse was honoured with ADISQ's first honorary Félix Award for his body of work.

Ms. Forestier believes Mr. Latraverse had a unique talent. "He was a businessman with an instinctive understanding of artists. He had incredible energy and the knowledge that Quebec and its artists were flourishing in the 1960s and 1970s and needed to be brought to the world's attention."

The artists Mr. Latraverse represented gained renown throughout the francophone world. Commercially the tours and recordings of his Québécois artists broke through into the French market.

"He moved mountains to connect peoples who were like distant cousins: the French and Québécois," said Ms. Forestier, a singer, songwriter and actor. "He also built bridges for artists from both countries to work in each other's country. All this from a guy from Chicoutimi. He wasn't afraid of anyone; he was a good salesman, very convincing, but always a gentleman."

During this extraordinarily productive period, Mr. Latraverse was struggling with his mental health. A particularly audacious 1984 production called *Magie Rose*, featuring Ms. Dufresne, at the Olympic Stadium in front of an audience of 55,000 people mostly dressed in pink, proved to be a life-changing moment for Mr. Latraverse.

Mr. Latraverse helped conceive and deliver the unprecedented spectacle while on a prolonged manic high, as he acknowledged in his 2013 memoir *Guy Latraverse: 50 ans de showbiz québécois* (written in collaboration with journalist Daniel Lemay). But by the time the concert took place, he was suffering from a deep depression, and hid from people in a dressing room. Mr. Latraverse later attempted suicide. He was hospitalized and diagnosed with bipolar disorder (then called manic-depressive illness).

Mr. Latraverse was prescribed lithium to temper the roller coaster of very productive highs and increasingly dangerous lows he was experiencing. He wrote in 2013, "Before the discovery I was manic-depressive I suffered unknowingly. The effects were not always negative, let's admit: Without the manic phases in which everything

seems possible, I would not have been able to conceive and then combine my madness with another's to do certain projects which surpassed the ordinary.”

With his mood stabilized, Mr. Latraverse continued his business activities, winning several awards for his productions, but he also dedicated himself to an organization now known as Relief, which is committed to mitigating the suffering of individuals with bipolar disorder. Mr. Latraverse was chairman of its board from 1992 until 2013 and intrinsic to the creation and building of the organization. Relief continues to support people at its facility in Montreal and online throughout Canada, in both French and English.

“I was intimidated to meet him because he was very famous in the entertainment industry, but he was actually very humble,” said Jean-Rémy Provost, Relief's current director, who first met Mr. Latraverse in 1994. “He was a great mentor and we became friends even though there were 30 years between us.” As he observed Mr. Latraverse over the years and contemplated his friend's cultural career, Mr. Provost reckoned Mr. Latraverse's illness was perhaps an asset to his clients. “A lot of managers would be saying, ‘Okay let's tone things down’ [but] Guy would have been saying ‘The sky's the limit!’ ”

Mr. Latraverse produced fundraising galas for Relief and acted as its ambassador to governments in Quebec and Ottawa. “He gave a great deal of time and energy,” Mr. Provost said. “He was the first prominent person in Quebec to speak openly of his condition. He told me he wanted to speak for those who continue to suffer in silence and to encourage them to speak about their condition and to get help.”

In his 2013 memoir, Mr. Latraverse wrote of his own journey, “How have I been useful for 50 years? Perhaps by creating happiness and putting people in contact with song and humour, on stage or on television ... I don't want to stop because that's my life. ... What I am passionate about, what I have always been passionate about, is having projects to conceive and to produce, gathering people together and putting them in the right places, and seeing an idea become reality. I have never known how to do anything else.”

Mr. Latraverse was named a Knight of the Order of Quebec in 2003, an officer of the Order of Canada in 2013, a member of the Club of Ambassadors of Arvida in 2015

and an officer of the Order of Montreal in 2020, and won several Félix and Gémeaux awards for his productions.

He leaves his spouse, Monique Dufresne; children, Monica, Rose, Simon and Zoé; grandchildren, Noa, Clara and Philippe; and sisters, Louise and Michèle.