

## On the Town with Franklin the Turtle and Patti Caplette



Franklin the Turtle, left, and his director and choreographer Patti Caplette get up close with a fellow shelled creature during a visit Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. Brent Lewin for National Post

**Katherine Laidlaw** October 21, 2010 – 4:40 pm

“The life of a famous turtle — always getting swamped.” Nine words Patti Caplette never dreamed she’d be saying. Now 56, the lifelong classical ballet dancer leads a life-sized, costumed Franklin the Turtle by the hand through the cases displaying suits of armour at the Royal Ontario Museum, stopping to let her charge pose for photos with admiring fans.

On Oct. 23, Franklin and his friends perform in *Franklin and the Adventures of the Noble Knights*, a musical at the Sony Centre written, directed and choreographed by Caplette. Loosely based on the book *Sir Franklin's Squire* (all the Franklin musicals are based on books in the series), the musical begins when Franklin and his friends decide to play a game, and settle on knights.

“The kids go on a quest to try and discover who’s going to win the Silver Shield, they make up this whole story within a story. But in the meantime, they’ve come across this wily, winged beast who’s an enemy at first, but they become friends. And Franklin shows his biggest strength of being a knight is his compassion for this person who’s outside of the group,” she explains.

Six years ago, Caplette and her husband Gilles Paquin had the opportunity to take charge of Koba, which produces shows for well-known series such as *Franklin*, *Caillou* and *The Big Comfy Couch*, among others.

Caplette traded her pointe shoes for critters and now spends her days frolicking with some of the most beloved children’s characters, as something of a puppetmaster for her team of designers, costumers, writers, musicians and choreographers.

“I’ve done so many story-ballets, and things that utilize the kind of theatricality that I now bring into these shows,” she says. “They’re different; we’re talking about turtles and bears and things like that now. But it’s the same principles involved in putting a production together.”

Caplette leads Franklin down to the animal exhibit, where the turtle peers at its likeness through the glass. Kids are the toughest audience, she says, adding that although her job might seem like the coolest, she’s got to work to mix children’s story morals with Laurel and Hardy-style comedy. “They’re tougher in a way that you need to get their attention or they’ll be really loud and wandering about doing anything else, or crying. You really do have to love kids and understand them, but they are tough,” she says. “My favourite moment is when they become the mosh pit at the end of the show and they all run down. We usually have them up dancing and they’re all up there, you know, barely off the ground.”

And just when the pair think they’re in the clear, another group of students comes ’round the bend. Franklin has no trouble holding

these kids' attention today. "Franklin! I want a photo with Franklin!" they cry, breaking out their iPhones for the occasion. "That just made my life," one Grade 8 girl gushes.

Caplette pauses, tilting her head, wondering if it's not her young granddaughter she should be testing out plotlines on after all. "Gosh, maybe we should be marketing to high-school students, too?" she says with a laugh, as the celebrity turtle's day at the museum comes to a close.

*Franklin and the Adventures of the Noble Knights* plays Oct. 23 at 1 p.m. at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts. For more information, visit [sonycentre.ca](http://sonycentre.ca).

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