

T H E G L O B E A N D M A I L  
**ARTS WEEKEND**

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**DANCE** / *This alternative festival showcased some mainstream choreography, but it never felt like a sell-out*

## Broader scope boosts festival

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**M**AINSTREAM can be a dirty word, especially when it's applied to an event that it is supposed to be focusing on new work. It can sound especially dirty in Vancouver, where the split between "alternative" and "mainstream" seems to attract considerable attention.

It's not surprising then that when word spread that Dancing on The Edge, the 11-day festival designed to showcase new choreography, had

gone "mainstream" by including established groups such as Ballet BC and such well-known figures as Toronto dancer/choreographer Peggy Baker, the organizers felt compelled to defend their decision in the program notes.

As it turned out, they needn't have. The inclusion of mainstream groups broadened the scope of the festival, but it never felt like a sell-out. Not unless you were lining up for tickets for Baker's show Thursday night.

Baker's performance was marvelous. It ranged in tone from the ceremonial-cum-ecstatic movement of her work *Sanctum*, through the cool, trance-like explorations of space in Melissa Fenley's *Inner Enchantments*, and concluded with Paul-André Fortier's *Non Coupable*, which required Baker to dance with two rocks attached by rope to her wrists. Confined by the rocks, she strains against them, then freed, seeks first to nurture them, then to find sexual gratification from them. It's a gripping exploration of the complexity and contradictions of desire, and Baker's performance made tangible the pain, power and perversity of the piece.

Baker's was the only solo show in the festival. Other evenings featured two or three shows, each with a program of three or four pieces by assorted choreographers. As might be expected from a festival that involves very little curatorial intervention, the quality of the work varied widely. The bad are best forgotten, but among the better works were some memorable pieces. What follows is a small sampling of those.

Barbara Bourget of Kokoro Dance presented *Bats Part 1*, a stark piece for three dancers that uses the bat figure to striking effect, evoking vampirism and fascism in a dance of death and resurrection.

Peter Bingham's opening-night contact improvisation — Bingham, Jaci Metivier and Phillippe Damiano also performed on several other occasions — was marked by both deadpan humor and physical daring. Watching the three dancers tumble, spin and launch themselves off one another, it was hard not to think of them as slapstick comics trying to play jazz with their bodies. And succeeding.

There was humour too in Cornelius Fischer-Credo's *Building*, but here it was used to balance a tortured sense of angst. Using a split set — in the foreground, dancer Virginia Corcoran plays a working woman beset by boredom and loneliness, while in the background, Fischer-Credo, seen through a window, plays a man struggling comically through his kitchen cupboards — the piece captures the isolation of urban life with humour and empathy.