

The Arts Tonight

CBC  Stereo

I'm not sure why this should strike me so forcefully today. But it seems clear from every moment of Peggy Baker's performance this afternoon that here is one of the greatest artists we have. The classification "modern dance," though accurate, seems altogether too limited, too prosaic for her unparalleled expressiveness. Already her first piece, HER HEART, dedicated to her mother, sends me out of the earth's atmosphere. Wearing a series of beautiful blue dresses, Peggy Baker dances to four solo piano pieces by Brahms, played live onstage. It's almost impossible to find words for what she does: every move seems at one and the same time narrative and emotional and specific and symbolic - yet also natural and inevitable, too. You're drawn to details: Peggy Baker's huge hands, or the heightened quality of stillness as she listens to the pianist. I am reminded of what I felt when I saw Jane Campion's film THE PIANO - that the images were so powerful that you felt yourself being pulled into them. Peggy Baker has a step in HER HEART where she delicately pulls up her long skirt and watches her own feet take tiny steps, as if venturing elegantly into cool water. Something about that instant unlocks memories I didn't even know I had: it's a perfect example of how art can move you beyond your ability to account for why. Tomorrow, at my office, I shall put Peggy Baker's picture on my wall, amid my pantheon of great Canadian performing artists - there among the photos of Martha Henry, Jackie Burroughs, Colleen Dewhurst, Clare Coulter and Susan Wright.

- Urjo Kareda