

DANCE REVIEW / While their performing styles differ, the colouring that Peggy Baker achieves is the direct result of her contact with Andrew Burashko and his fervently played piano

An interplay of rhythm and line

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LAST winter Peggy Baker danced in a packed house on a cold night at Toronto's Premiere Dance Theatre. The occasion was a solo performance, a celebration of Baker as a dancer's dancer. Her movement was long, sinewy, lean. Each step, concentrated, conscientious, was tinged with the subtle colouring of the music.

Baker is back, sharing her three-night performance at the Betty Oliphant Theatre with pianist Andrew Burashko in a program called Music For Piano and Solo Dancer. Concluding tomorrow night, the 90-minute presentation features two pieces, both choreographed and performed by Baker: *Black Border with Moving Figures*, set to a score of piano pieces by Liszt and Chopin, and *Brute*, inspired by a Prokofiev sonata. In addition to accompanying Baker throughout, Burashko played solo with John Cage's *Music For Piano* #2. He was studied and dramatic where Baker was loose, spontaneous, graceful. While their performing styles differed, Baker and Burashko's partnership gave vivid expression to an evening based on an interplay of rhythm and line.

When Baker dances she is the dance: liquid, light, mysterious. Her movements are strong and determined; her presence focused and confident. She flows but also cuts sculptural figures in the space around her. Dance references abound in a movement vocabulary that combines the composure of ballet with the carnal energy of modern dance. When she wants to quote other choreography, she bypasses the pretty and reaches for the archaic poses of Nijinsky's *L'apres midi d'un faun*.

Precision is what characterizes her movement choices the most. That, and a penchant for asymmetrical patterns. Baker likes to create flowing lines only to cut them off with the sharp flex of a foot or a tight rosette curl of the wrist. The painterly aspects of Baker's dancing are especially apparent in this show which derives inspiration from master painters of the 20th century. *Black Border With Moving Figure*, for instance, is dedicated to the spirit of abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky. Baker created its movement patterns in silence. The colouring that she achieves in performance is the direct result of her contact with Burashko and his fervently played piano.

While the choreography uses repe-



Baker is sharing her three-night performance at the Betty Oliphant Theatre with pianist Andrew Burashko.

(TIBOR KOLLEY/The Globe and Mail)

titution of key movement patterns to reinforce structure and internal rhythm, the dancing itself looks continually varied. Baker, as if she were Kandinsky or even one of his admirers, the American abstract painter Jackson Pollock, gives the sense that

she is taking a line of movement, pulling it, weaving it and knotting it through the spatial frontier of the stage.

Where *Black Border With Moving Figures* is pioneering and romantic in its exploration of wide open space,

Brute is heavy, confined, existential in outlook. Baker's costume, a white leotard designed by Jane Townsend after Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, gives striking visual expression to the pain and anguish of the modern age. Recalling Shakespeare's Caliban, the

monstrous character who is too rooted to the earth for his spirit to soar, Baker mirrors the age-old conflict between body and soul. But as a first-rate dancer she solves the problem with an image of muscle and mind flawlessly combined.