

Intense movement explores landscapes

WITH a varied career extending more than 20 years, mainly in Toronto and New York, Peggy Baker invariably sets a high standard of performance. Now resident artist at the National Ballet School, she began a solo career in 1990 that has been much praised for the finely crafted and inventive contemporary work she brings to her audiences, and as well for the high calibre of her collaborators in music, stage design, lighting, and costuming. Her own choreography is augmented by that of



DANCE REVIEW

Peggy Baker Solo Dance

At the Betty Oliphant Theatre
of the National Ballet School, until today

Reviewed by Lewis Hertzman

many Canadian and American notables, including James Kudelka, Annabelle Gamson, Patricia Beatty, Paul-André Fortier, and Christopher House, among others.

The present program continues an earlier pattern of performances, with two works set on Baker by New York choreographer Molissa Fenley, and two of her own with the presence on stage of her accompanist. Each piece is distinguished by fine craftsmanship and careful articulation through a range of emotions. Always there is an incisive, trenchant clarity to Baker's movement.

Both of Fenley's compositions are performed on a bare stage almost too vast for even Baker's characteristic wide, long-limbed gestural vocabulary and almost non-stop runs, skips, and pivots. In *Inner Enchantments* her dancing runs a colourful gamut of attitudes from coy to defiant, in strong contrast to the monotony of Philip Glass's insistent accompanying score, *Music in Twelve Parts*, Part One. From the circular shapes of that piece, she shifts to angularity in *Savanna* — a figure of kinetic orange against a great pale green background.

After intermission, in her own work, Baker moves in more constrained space that concentrates further the intensity of her movement. Andrew Burashko is there with grand piano to accompany, play an avant-garde piece on his own (John Cage, 1953) and, in a subtle way, add dramatic presence.

In *a Landscape* sees Baker on the floor at times, legs entwined, almost in knots, yet soon free to explore her world, in this instance a sacred grove, a powerful place. In fact, the whole evening is an implied exploration of landscapes, as much of the inner as of the outer world.

Why the Brook Wept, a premiere, takes Baker briefly into the tragic character of Ophelia and a moment of pathos. Her head shakes furiously in despair, she rages, finally a lifeless body rolls towards the piano. As she writes in a program note, "Perhaps nature does not remain indifferent to human tragedy."



Peggy Baker: over the span of a career extending for more than 20 years, the resident artist at the National Ballet School has earned praise for the finely crafted contemporary work she brings to her audiences.