

Baker, Navas highlight day celebrating the solo dancer

BY WILLIAM LITTLER
DANCE CRITIC

OTTAWA — Whether by happy accident or careful design, day five of this year's Canada Dance Festival turned out to be a celebration of that rarest of birds in the aviary of Canadian dance, the solo performer.

True, the best known of these feathered friends, the soul-baring Margie Gillis, may have been conspicuous by her absence, but her sister in kinetic solitude, the versatile Peggy Baker, was very much present at the National Arts Centre Theatre to highlight a Wednesday full of eye-seducing solo dancing.

An alumna of the Lar Lubovitch Company and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, Baker has in recent seasons formed a particularly interesting relationship with pianist Andrew Burashko, with whom she appeared once again on this occasion.

Initially, however, she appeared alone, dancing a solo by Molissa Fenley titled *Savanna*. Abstract, lyrical and beautifully balanced, it seemed to embody the dancer in a state of grace, self-sufficient and at peace with herself.

Nor did she ever fully abandon that persona in the works that followed, although when the curtain rose again, it was to exhibit a stage half given over to Burashko's piano. The symbolism of equality between movement and music could hardly have been more graphically established.

In her half, Baker moved to her own choreography, surrounded by a tightly circled sculptural landscape as Burashko played the early John Cage score that gave the piece its title, *In A Landscape*, music of meditative simplicity and softness.

Restricted as she was in space, she moved through her body more than she moved across the stage, but as in her final work, *Why The Brook Wept*, an emotionally outgoing dance to *Ophelia*, one of Cage's most emotional-

ly outgoing scores, there was a remarkable sense of oneness between movement and music.

Something of the same sensation identified the dancing of José Navas in an afternoon performance in the National Arts Centre Studio.

José Navas shows uncommon intensity and control

An alumna of Marie Chouinard's Montreal-based company, Navas devotes himself primarily to choreography these days but he commanded the stage as a solo dancer of uncommon intensity and control, whether performing his own steps or those of William Douglas, who died recently of AIDS.

Given sufficient charisma, solo dancers seldom need the crutches of decor and elaborate costuming. In his own work, *Postdata*, it took no more than the ominous sight of four coiled ropes stretching to the ceiling to surround Navas' alternately slow and sustained and sudden and angular movements with overtones of anxiety.

And in his performance of Douglas' *In Lavender*, Toronto's Bill Coleman needed no more than a flickering spotlight, a static-ridden Timothy Sullivan score and his own muttering voice to complete a vivid sketch of a performer journeying toward mental disintegration.

No more vivid, however, than the friskily danced sketch Crystal Pite presented in *Two Dances For Jane* of the frustrated female of the species confronted by the unfeeling male. Unhappily for the men of Canada, the former Ballet British Columbia dancer has already taken her revenge on them: next season she will join the Frankfurt Ballet.