



## DanScene

by Krista Manson

“I hate to tell you this, but it’s really beautiful here”, says Peggy Baker, on the phone from a teaching residency gig in Santa Barbara, California.

Nevertheless, Baker is excited to be returning to what she calls home - Edmonton - despite a thriving 20 year career based in the East.

# D A N C E

42 year old Peggy Baker is another one of this country’s modern dancers than can actually survive on a solo career. Survive - on a grand scale. The **BALLET REVIEW** critique for her New York solo debut performance read in part, “There are good dancers. There are great dancers. And then there is Peggy Baker. From the essence of gesture to the unrestrained explosion in space, Baker moves with eloquence and force.”

Coupled with a fantastic performance career, Baker is also a renowned master in dance instruction. She was the director of dance for the Contemporary Arts Summer Institute at Simon Fraser University for four years and is presently the first Artist-In-Residence at Canada’s National Ballet School.

And this artist grew up in *our* city.

The Brian Webb Dance Company is presenting Ms. Baker’s first solo performance in her home town March 7 and 8 at the John L. Haar Theatre.

Baker first started her training as an actor in the U of A’s BFA program. Inspired by one of her teachers to try modern dance, she went to Toronto in 1971 and hasn’t turned back since. Yes, this dancer’s career has definitely moved forward.

After dancing with Toronto Dance Theatre and Dancemakers, Baker performed with the Lar Lubovitch Company for seven years. Instant profile followed when she became one of the original company members of Mikhail Baryshnikov’s **White Oak Project** and performed with the company for one year. “White Oak was a great experience for me and opened many doors”, explains Baker. “But by then my real calling was to do my own work.”

Beyond Baker’s honed physicality and

finely crafted contemporary work, it seems destiny has invited her artistry into a musician’s world. Her recent (within the last five years) and most arresting work has come out of the result of a collaboration with concert pianist Andrew Burashko as well as with other noted musicians, including Edmontonian Michael Baker. Burashko performs live with Baker which is partly why she considers him an equal partner on the stage. “Andrew isn’t a dance accompanist”, says Baker. “He has a concert career, and my work is seen in relation both to the piano and the pianist himself.”



Peggy Baker - WHY THE BROOK WEPT

Ironically, too, it’s Burashko’s unsophisticated movement which inspires Baker to dance. “The movement of a musician is completely unstudied. Andrew just concentrates on his music. His physicality is inherently authentic and beautiful. If I’m the least bit phony, I look ridiculous because he’s so genuine. I want to look like I suit being on stage with him.”

Baker compares phony dancing to *dahncing* (*dahling*). “There is *dahncing* - a self-conscious way of acting like you’re dancing; and there is dancing - unaffected movement with a developed style. I hope they will see me dancing with clear attitudes.”

They say that when the hockey and football teams started to lose, our city didn’t warrant the nickname, “City of Champions”. Once again, artists have proven the naysayers wrong. Edmonton welcomes Peggy Baker/Solo Dance home.



Also performing this month is The Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. Their show, is entitled **The Emergence of Volya** (Volya means “freedom” in Ukrainian), and the ensemble of 40 volunteer dancers performs March 21 and 22 on the Shoctor Stage at the Citadel Theatre.