

# A&E News

The arts & entertainment section of The Riverfront Times

## SINGULAR DUALITY

**The Edison Theatre's Ovation!**  
**Series unites revered modern-**  
**dance soloists Margie Gillis and**  
**Peggy Baker**

BY DEBORAH COTTIN

**Score a victory** for the St. Louis arts scene and pat the directors at Dance St. Louis and the Edison Theatre's Ovation! Series on the back. They've succeeded in orchestrating a one-of-a-kind event that's luring audience members from around the nation and Canada.

Soloists Peggy Baker and Margie Gillis — Canadian natives — have stretched themselves creatively, emotionally and spiritually by agreeing to fulfill the two local performing-arts organizations' request to pair up. "We don't usually trust that," says Gillis of the request for the shared performance. "The implication generally seems to be that solo dance can't stand on its own, but it was presented to us in such a beautiful way by your artistic directors there in St. Louis, we agreed — still with some trepidation. Now we are so very thankful. Truly thankful."

Baker and Gillis embraced the innate challenges of the project, including highly distinct artistic approaches and conflicting work schedules, and have emerged thrilled with both the creative process and the creative product that will be performed this weekend. "We adore working together," says Gillis. "Rehearsals have become a celebration, and the show has become one of the major events of the year."

The whole experiment in collaboration could have easily faltered with the common ground between the artists so minimal. Gillis has made a lifelong career as an internationally acclaimed solo dance artist. Her very musical dances express deep emotions and spirituality. "Postmen, barmaids — their courage and struggles are what I translate into movement," she explains. "It's catharsis. Is it possible for two people to feel the same thing at the same time? How does our sorrow become our wisdom? A million questions from my tiny little brain, and I use my body to understand. I see this body as a great gift with a knowledge of its own."

Whereas Gillis has been a longtime solo artist, Baker spent most of her dance career in company settings, including the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project. It's only been since 1990 that Baker's gone the solo route. With a Martha Graham foundation, Baker's dancing is largely based on pure form and shape, the movement usu-

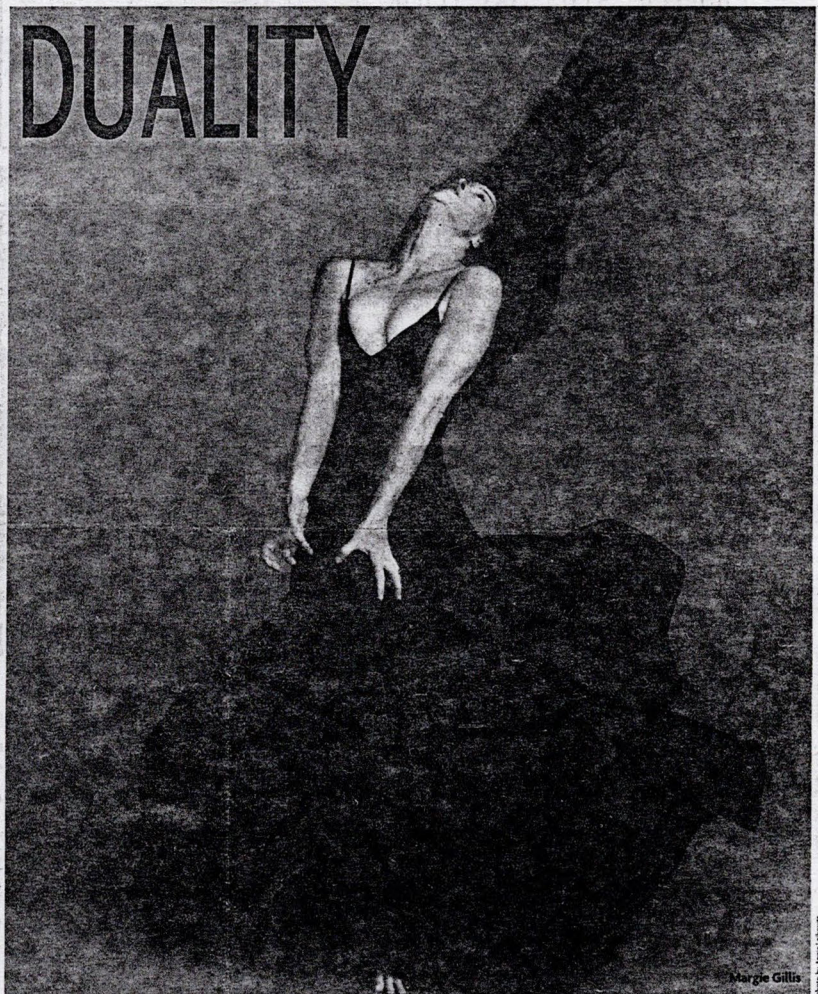
ally designed before the music is added. Although emotionalism is at the core of Gillis' work, Baker offers just a hint of it with her more formalistic approach.

Differences notwithstanding, a heartfelt mutual respect has made it possible for these women not only to present their works together but to share two duets: "Vers la Glace," choreographed in 1986 by Gillis, James Kudelka and Gillis' brother, the late Christopher Gillis, a former Paul Taylor Dance Company principal dancer; and

"Spasitil," choreographed by Baker in 1993. "I saw the video (of 'Spasitil') and I broke into tears," says Gillis, who will be dancing the role Baker usually performs in the piece, being the shorter of the two dancers. "It's just beautiful." Baker explains that the German word *spasitil* refers to "a state of mind, an inner peace and quiet sense of completion that very often characterizes final works of a great artist." The work appropriately closes the show, a fitting finale for two great artists nearing the ebb of full and vibrant careers.

As fulfilling as putting the show together has been, Gillis bemoans the fact that the coordination and scheduling between their two performance schedules has been exasperatingly complex. "I feel like a tumbleweed. That's why we're just doing this the one time," she says. "And that's why people are getting plane tickets."

Gillis and Baker perform at 8 p.m. Jan. 30-31 and at 2 p.m. Feb. 1 at the Edison Theatre. Call 935-6543 or 534-6622 for tickets.



Margie Gillis

Photo by Anne LeBout