

The Riverfront Times

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THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF ST. LOUIS — NOW IN OUR 21ST YEAR

112 PAGES IN TWO SECTIONS

NORTHERN DANCERS

MARGIE GILLIS & PEGGY BAKER

Solos & Duets
Edison Theatre's OVATIONS! Series
and Dance St. Louis

Two Canadian dancers, Margie Gillis and Peggy Baker, performed a full program of lucid, highly physical dance last weekend at Edison Theatre. One might think that a dance program composed almost entirely of solos and performed by two dancers of the same sex would get tedious, like an evening of Sousa marches, 12-bar blues or a Handel opera.

But because Baker and Gillis each has her own style and — at least as important — a distinct physique, the evening seemed as varied as a repertory program by an entire dance company. Oddly enough, the two duets (one choreographed by Gillis, her late brother, Christopher Gillis, and James Kundelka; the other by Baker her-

self) struck me as the two most similar pieces of all 10 performed.

Gillis — solid, firm of creamy skin and possessed of a head of long, deep-red hair — tended to dance more theatrically. She also depended heavily on whatever fabric her costume was made of, as well as her hair. She is a skilled mime, as she demonstrated by dancing her 1989 "Bloom" to Siobhan McKenna's reading of Molly Bloom's soliloquy. She moved particularly well to the counterpoint of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Baker, although muscular and taller than Gillis, is willowy, and, unlike Gillis, she moves along with, not to, her music. Accompanied by Andrew Burashko at the Steinway — how intrinsically arresting a piano and a dancer together are! — Baker made one dance from a fascinating piece of minimalism by Ann Southam and, later, another to some charming John Cage.

The first, "Strand," kept Baker on a 5-by-8-foot oriental carpet, seemingly confined both by it and by the music. But Baker was not confined as she moved beyond both music and space while never leaving either. The Cage piece, "Why the Brook Wept," an abstract reflection on the story of Ophelia, had Baker in an androgynous costume, still suggestive of the Renaissance. Baker eschewed mime — no floating away with hair streaming behind her. Indeed, "Why the Brook Wept" had the same feel as Jose Limon's "The Moor's Pavane" — the play is there but translated into a kind of algebra of movement. I thought it was a triumph and high point of a most satisfying evening of modern dance.

Peggy Baker

