

Ten good suggestions for dance

Peggy Baker opens the door to a two-dimensional world of movement

THEATRE PREVIEW ▶▶

MUSIC FOR PIANO AND DANCER

Peggy Baker and
Andrew Burashko
Sunday, May 24
Max Bell Theatre (TAC)

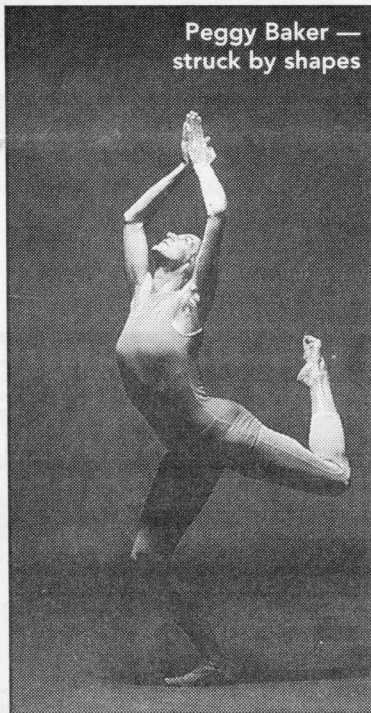
▶▶ By Nikki Sheppy

The fertile collaboration between dancer Peggy Baker and concert pianist Andrew Burashko is more than performance alone. It's a philosophic expression of artistic harmony and equality. Structured as a piano recital with dance, the work offers two elements that could easily stand on their own, but gain immeasurably by the merger.

Baker's preoccupation with the musicality of her performances took off when she was working with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project on a piece called "Ten Suggestions." The evolution of this growing intimacy is symbolized by the changing position of the piano, says Baker.

"With 'Ten Suggestions,' the piano was in the pit. But with the next piece, I had Andrew onstage behind the scrim so he was seen through a veil as though he were a memory. After that, I placed the piano in the right corner of the stage."

Now Burashko's onstage presence has fully evolved, placing him in the very center. The symbiotic relationship has enriched Baker's understanding



of the music to which she dances. Before she begins work, Burashko shows her how the piece is built and reviews the history of the composer.

"Music for Piano and Dancer" centers around a Prokofiev sonata which takes up half of the performance.

"The sonata was written at the outbreak of the Second World War. The music embodies the stress, turbulence and terror of that time in history."

Baker drew inspiration from all around her. While she was working on the piece, she happened to be reading a book called *Creating Minds*, a study of 20th century innovators.

"In the study on Picasso, they focused very much on 'Guernica,' a monumental painting in response to the bombing of

a Basque town during the Spanish Civil War.... I was struck by the shapes in the study because they really reflected the shapes that I was using in response to the Prokofiev music."

One of the things *Guernica* helped her resolve was her use of floor space around the piano.

"That (positioning of the piano) means that I have about a 12-foot strip across the front of the stage. At first I found that extremely limiting and a bit confusing. But when I started working with the painting, it suddenly made sense to me because Picasso as a cubist worked in a very flat perspective."

The result is an opening sequence that exalts in the possibilities of movement in two dimensions.

"In a Landscape" also focuses on elements of containment. Set to music by John Cage, it echoes the idea of a Zen garden where natural elements are paired with compositional effects.

"It's exquisite music," says Baker. "I took it on a very personal level. Each of us exists inside a landscape, and that landscape is created by our family and friends and the places in the world where we live. All those things frame our lives."

Baker doesn't expect the audience to have a literal understanding of her work, but hopes she and Burashko can provide a point of departure.

"My great hope is that the performance act as a doorway to people for their own revelations about what it is they believe about the world and about who they are."