

Peggy Baker not alone with Doug Varone

► dance

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IN THINE EYES, choreographed by **DOUG VARONE**, performed by Varone and **PEGGY BAKER**, at Harbourfront Centre's Premiere Dance Theatre (207 Queen's Quay West) through Saturday (April 24) at 8 pm. \$20-\$34. 973-4000.

By **DARYL JUNG**

New York modern dance dynamo Doug Varone hasn't danced with his old friend Peggy Baker since 1989, soon after they'd both left the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company to pursue brighter artistic horizons.

It was then that she commissioned him to create a duet for her, which became known as *The Volpe Sisters*. It was also then that Varone realized how profoundly he was hankering to spice up his terpsichorean stew with some new moves.

Human work

And while *Sisters* was trademark Varone — a very human work rife with pedestrian, gestural choreography — he saw in Baker the qualities he might need to pursue his expanding, less human-influenced vision.

Her approach to dance, he found, was not just about learning the steps and performing them. When Baker tackles a piece, she instills even the tiniest movement with intense emotion and immaculate articulation.

So Varone's delighted to have another shot with Baker for her run through the weekend at Premiere Dance Theatre. The pair join forces in his physically demanding duet in



Doug Varone relishes another chance to dance with Peggy Baker in his demanding duet *In Thine Eyes*.

Thine Eyes, which represents the realization of his search for something completely different.

"It's really thrilling," says Varone of the reunion. "Not only is it wonderful to dance with her again, it's great to be doing it as mature artists.

While we're getting the chance to relive certain ideas and moments,

this piece is a very different way for Peggy to present herself.

"When we were together in Lar's company, we were working within a shared vocabulary and with a shared vision — which, of course, was someone else's.

"Since then, we've each gone our own way. In my own company, I've

cultivated a movement vocabulary and a way of working. And Peggy went her own way, which very much involves speaking in her own voice.

"So to bring those two divergent paths together — and their consequently divergent ideas — in a work of mine has been a fascinating experience for both of us."

In *Thine Eyes*, Varone concedes, has a deliberate cinematic feel, due in part to the score by Michael Nyman — the first scene of an operetta called *The Princes Of Milan*, including text from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* — and to Varone's desire to portray a jarring, shifting, oft seemingly irreconcilable relationship between a man and a woman.

"In many ways the two dance pieces are complete opposites," he says. "But they also possess a kindred spirit. I created *In Thine Eyes* specifically to get away from the kind of human movement I used in *The Volpe Sisters*, which is based on the way we actually walk and speak and gesture. And you're definitely meant to see two real, live human beings up there on stage.

New moves

"In *Thine Eyes* was a way to try to figure out how to explore a personal relationship between two people — two beings or two things or whatever they are — without the immediacies that make us human. So the vocabulary is quite different from how we actually move.

"Some people have referred to the pair as robotic birds. The piece begins in an abstract way but culminates in great emotion. My task as a

choreographer was to figure out how to work from something that feels so cold — almost like stone.

"I wanted to touch people's emotions, and take them on a journey that is revelatory to them, without their necessarily seeing that these are actually two people."

Varone also wanted to create the feeling that the characters are being "flipped around" through rapidly changing situations. The audience is taken visually through their emotions, with the help of lighting design, as they come to terms — or not — with their relationship.

Emotional shift

"I don't believe they even look at each other for the first half of the piece!" Varone muses. "They share the same space and the same dialogue, to a certain extent. But it isn't until the work begins to shift in an emotional way that they actually confront each other."

And he's happy with that. It's all part of his quest to take his creations to a higher plane. Thanks to Baker and his own adventurous spirit, he's accomplished what he set out to do.

"As a dancemaker, I knew what I could do well," he says. "I'm good at crafting works based around human experience. You can do that up to a certain point, but after a while you inevitably end up making the same dance over and over again.

"So I had to find something new about dancemaking. In *Thine Eyes* was my jumping-off point — a way of slamming the door on what I knew I could do and finding another way to accomplish it." ●