

Peggy Baker throws a fine party

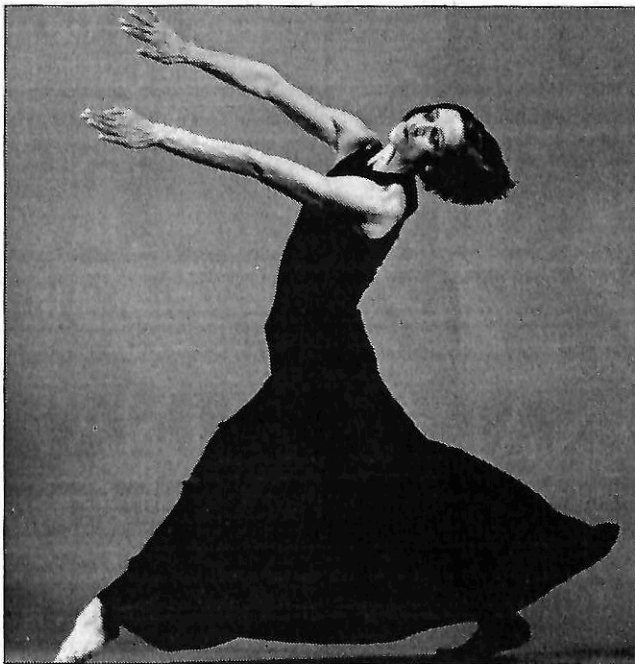
BY SUSAN WALKER
DANCE WRITER

Peggy Baker's generosity makes her a good hostess. So when she throws a birthday party, you want to be there.

Her evening of dance to celebrate the National Ballet School's 40th anniversary, is just such an occasion, continuing through Saturday at the Betty Oliphant Theatre.

The drawings of Calgary artist Ina Levitsky speak first in *Words Fail*, a piece Baker choreographed for last year's Dancers For Life show. Cellist Shauna Rolston performs the music of Chan Ka Nin as Baker dances, giving forceful expression to a sadness that flows from her strong, muscular movement.

What if a woman choreographer created a solo for a man? Would it resemble Steve Martin possessed by the spirit of Lily Tomlin in *All Of Me*? Baker's *Yang*, created for dancer Sylvain Brochu, does a bit of that, and quite a lot more for the compact dancer. The Taoist notion of yang, notes Baker,



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includes "all that is bright, dry, warm, hard, masculine, round, odd-numbered and upward moving." She expands the definition with some distinctly female hip movement. Thierry de Mey's music is pure percussion and quite tribal. The choreography skirts the

world of Robert Bly, but Brochu is clever enough to imply a certain mockery of maleness.

New York choreographer Doug Varone created *The Volpe Sisters* in 1989 for Baker and dancer Jaimie Brandel. This dance drama depicts a mentally chal-

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lenged woman and her care-giving sister. Baker performs the piece here with actor Jackie Burroughs, their acting and dancing talents merging as their movements describe a touching scene on the steps at twilight. In silence except for Baker's struggling song at the beginning and single verbal utterance — "Mary" — *The Volpe Sisters* is as eloquent as a John Steinbeck short story.

Last year Baker performed *In Thine Eyes* with its creator, Varone. This time around she has paired herself with the much larger Larry Hahn, the original male in the duet. A long relationship, difficult, full of yearning, coming together and falling apart, is condensed into 20 minutes of naked emotion to Michael Nyman's operatic score. It's one of those works, like *The Volpe Sisters*, that reveals another side of Baker's art. Generosity has its own rewards.