

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

They'll go far, very far

Together, dancer Baker, choreographer Fortier reach new heights

When Peggy Baker leaves for work, her husband tells her, "Dance who you are today." It's a sweet story. But I doubt that she needs reminding.

Adulated by critic and fan alike for radiating integrity in her dancing, Baker has been called "the most magnetic and majestic modern dancer Canada has ever produced." She invests every moment with honesty and illumination, writing new chapters in the annals of contemporary dance in the process.



LINDE
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DANCE

So it doesn't take a crystal ball to know that an important moment in Canadian dance will happen next week when Baker premieres a work choreographed for her by another major artist, Quebec dance guru Paul-André Fortier. *Loin, Très Loin* (Far, Very Far) reflects the intense relationship between dancer and

choreographer, one that has taken each into new realms.

The first evening-long solo of Baker's long career, *Loin, Très Loin* is also the first big solo Fortier has made for anyone but himself. An hour in length, it is twice as long as any single work the 46-year-old Baker has performed in an illustrious career.

That career took her to New York in the early 1980s to dance with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company and to be a charter member of Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Projects. A decade ago, she returned to Toronto to teach and establish herself as a solo artist.

For her, *Loin, Très Loin* is a kind of journey. Dancing it, she says, makes her feel like she's packing for a year-long trip because there are many changes and many phases in the dance. Fortier, she says, "took me to new places and challenged ingrained responses in me."

"One of Paul-André's musings was (to think) of the floor as a map. It's an epic journey - like Ulysses'. (Dynamically) there are places that become monumentally slow and other places which are like avalanches."

After dancing together in Fortier's *La Part des Anges* a couple of seasons ago, the two of them knew they must team up again. Their creative process for *Loin* was intense. Baker says Fortier's method of improvising for 10 minutes at a stretch while she tried to imitate him "was like you'd listened to an entire monologue and then have to paraphrase it."

Loin, she says, is a very female work and quite unlike any of Fortier's own solos that exude masculine energy. "At the heart of the dance, there are a series of stories. They are women's stories. It's almost as if this person could have been me if I'd made other (life) decisions."

✦ Peggy Baker Dance Projects presents *Loin, Très Loin*, by Paul-André Fortier at the Agora de la Danse, 840 Cherrier St., starting with a fundraising benefit for the Agora on Wednesday (tickets \$100). Admission is \$12 and \$20 from Thursday to May 20 and May 24-27. Following Thursday's performance, Fortier



MICHAEL SLOBODIAN, L'AGORA DE LA DANSE

Dancing *Loin, Très Loin* feels like packing for a year-long trip, says Peggy Baker, who premieres the work by Quebec dance guru Paul-André Fortier next week.

and Baker will hold a public discussion in English. Call (514) 525-1500 or (514) 790-1245.

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Attracted by Montreal's acclaimed choreographers, dancers from all over the world are making their homes here, increasing dance-watching options. But while the range of dance is broader than ever, improvisational dance has not caught on here as it has in Europe, the U.S. and other parts of Canada.

Nine senior dancers, whose origins span the continent, have decided to showcase improvisation by forming a new organization and producing the first of a series of different-evening performances called *Fragile*.

The Improvisational Movement Fund was born out of a show staged last fall and initiated by dedicated Montreal improvisationalist Andrew de Lotbinière Harwood.

"We all have a passion for improvisation, and that seems like a rare thing among Montreal dancers," says Pamela Newell, a former Bostonian who joined Marie Chouinard's company here in 1992. The loosely knit group - Bob Bergner, Wil-

son Blakley, Tom Casey, Deborah Dunn, Benoit Lachambre, Torja Livingstone and Lin Snelling, along with Harwood and Newell - have been meeting weekly since November to work on specifics or just have fun. They explored music, ensemble relationships, solos, duos and trios - or simply let "whatever happen happen," says Newell.

They got to know each other so well that today marks the first actual rehearsal of the show, which opens Wednesday. Their familiarity with each other, coupled with the fact "we don't want to be anywhere yet," means these free-flow performances are extensions of their working process.

Newell says IMF offers audiences new dance experiences by letting them in on an on-the-spot decision-making process. "It's a very delicate thing that improvisation is trying to do. It doesn't always succeed, but when it does, it's very rewarding."

✦ *Fragile*, by the Improvisational Movement Fund, is at Usine C, 1345 Lalonde St., at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Friday. Tickets cost \$12 and \$15. Call (514) 521-4493 or (514) 790-1245