

LE DEVOIR
May 23, 2000

Journey to the end of the Self

loin, très loin

Interpreter: Peggy Baker

Choreographer: Paul-André Fortier

Original Score: Gaétan Leboeuf

Lighting Concept: Marc Parent; Costume design: Carmen Alie and Denis Lavoie. Presented at L'Agora de la danse (840 Cherrier St.) From May 24 to 27, 8 p.m.

By Julie Bouchard

As an interpreter, choreographer and pedagogue, Paul-André Fortier, heralded as the "initiator of dance-theatre in Quebec" by Larousse's *Dictionary of Dance*, created his first choreographies at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. Having come to dance from the world of literature, he hoped to invoke in the spectator's experience the kind of upheaval that he himself sometimes experienced as a reader of novels. He wove his choreographies from theses, themes and pertinences proper to an age strongly influenced by the likes of John Cage, Pina Bausch, and even May '68. Paul-André Fortier thus renounces, at the beginning of the '90s, the connection of his dances to any and all exterior referent; he wants to touch the spectator while refraining from providing further discourse; he struggles in this manner to establish with the spectator a physical complicity which neither one would or could express in words. Now in his early fifties, he would respond to those who ask of him a self-definition that "I am a man that dances."

She is forty-eight years old and is hailed as "one of the best modern dancers in Canada" (Larousse: *Dictionary of Dance*). Peggy Baker is tall, slim, and doesn't look a day over forty. Choreographer and pedagogue, she lives and works mostly between New York and Toronto, and makes rare appearances in Montréal. Her C.V. is impressive: founding member, choreographer and artistic director of *Dancemakers* in 1974, she also danced from 1981 to 1988 for the *Lubovitch Company* in New York City, participated in Baryshnikov's *White Oak* project in 1990 and in the same year launched her solo career; her repertoire today is in large part composed of her own solo creations, but also consists of well-known choreographed works by Christopher House or ... Paul-André Fortier (*Not Guilty*, 1983). The first artist-in-residence at the *National Ballet School of Canada*, Peggy Baker is also and equally known as one of the best dance teachers in the world of modern dance.

After having come on the scene and put things in motion for and by himself during the 1980s, Paul-André Fortier returned in 1996 to group creations with *La part des anges*, a quartet interpreted by -- among others -- Peggy Baker. Paul-André Fortier and Peggy Baker are thus not in their first collaboration, but never, perhaps, have they gone so far as they will have until May 27 on the stage of L'Agora de la Danse: *loin, très loin*. Set to Gaétan Leboeuf's original score and Marc Parent's lighting conception, choreographer Paul-André Fortier and interpreter Peggy Baker deliver an hour of exploration that is refined and exacting. It is an hour worth seeing.

It is dark as night; an almost violent musical energy pierces the space. As the darkness fades, she appears in a nearly naked space -- but one into which she delves, one which she opens up and explores with her long, bare, almost white arms. *loin, très loin* is the laying bare of a woman who is at once energetic, anxious, victorious, fragile and vulnerable; who, with legs veiled under a long pale skirt, takes possession of the world that both surrounds and inhabits her. And this without a word, through the mediation of that part of her that is at once intrinsic and external: her arms. Powerful and precise, as capable of violence as they are of tenderness, Peggy Baker's arms cut through space or caress it with the same expressive force. Like a day that passes by, *loin, très loin* is composed of ruptures, of turbulence, of an urge to abandon, of intimacy. Like *La Tentation de la Transparence*, a solo created and interpreted by Fortier and restaged for the beginning of the season at the Agora of Dance, *loin, très loin*, succeeds with a minimum of gesture, the body approaching the ground: a place of abandon and of rest. Peggy Baker said on opening night that *loin, très loin* "was like a voyage, an inner journey." It is so well conducted that it is impossible not to follow.