

Dancer's performance miracle of imagination

By DENIS ARMSTRONG
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When Peggy Baker dances alone, the stage becomes crowded. Not with people, but with feelings and action.

Her new solo piece *loin, tres loin* at the Canada Dance Festival last night filled the NAC Studio to bursting

Choreographed by Paul-Andre Fortier, *loin, tres loin* fits Baker like a glove.

It's a miracle of imagination. Combining dance with mime and the wordless language of gestures and postures, *loin, tres loin* is dance going beyond itself into spectacle of theatre.

Dramatic vision

This ambition requires more than limber body and good timing in its performer. It takes enormous imagination and dramatic vision.

Enter Baker.

The Toronto-based dancer has been a guiding, creative force of Canadian dance for 30 years. The capacity house was filled with dancers and dance people, here to acknowledge Baker's reputation for venturing into unexpected directions.

Dressed in ribbed halter and sheer skirting with an enormous leather wrap around her waist, Baker was a commanding visual presence, her long arms pumping the air like wings,

her long legs skipping, stepping, running in a style more athletic or animal than choreographed.

In Fortier's choreography, dance is child's play but has the dramatic potential of a Chekhov or a Moliere and in this swelling, wordless comic-tragedy, Baker the dancer and actress played every role in this hour-long performance.

Playing action off inaction, light off shadow, noise off silence, she was

both victim and victor, doctor and patient, antagonist and protagonist.

Beginning with conventional jumps and runs, set to piercing and distorted guitars a la 1970s experimental rock band King Crimson, Baker established the tension of pure movement.

But this was only a perfectly executed setup.

Coming to rest but in character, Baker mimed the set-up through movements of getting dressed, fighting, the dread of a nightmare, a carress.

Wild sensuality

It was dance as theatre, her body communicating all dialogue in this thrilling performance. Her wild, hair-in-the-face sensuality and melodramatic expressions turning what began as a solo dance vaguely resembling the excesses of contemporary dance into a wordless Theatre of the Absurd worthy of Ionesco.

Review

Peggy Baker

At the NAC Studio
Canada Dance Festival



(out of five)