

# Far, Very Far takes audience on epic trek

Soloist Peggy Baker  
ventures deep  
within herself

BY JENNY JACKSON

It's called *Far, Very Far*.

And less than an hour later, the audience had travelled deep into a countryside at once homely and very strange — like train travellers looking out their windows as scenes of scruffy children at play unfold into cars rusting away in ditches into deep silent forests crowding in towards the tracks.

Soloist Peggy Baker, one of Canada's most respected modern dancers, performed the piece last night at the National Arts Centre. *Far, Very Far* was created for her by Paul-André Fortier, another giant of Canadian dance, particularly in Quebec.

Yet Baker's interpretation felt steeped in the solitude of someone who isn't afraid to venture deep within herself.

The work opened in darkness. She is revealed in the barest light, like a shadow in a dream. The dancer, in her late forties, was dressed in a leather brace and a filmy white pleated skirt. With her hair in a bob, she seemed like Diana the Huntress abroad at night.

Her movements were sometimes wild and sweeping, sometimes at a stand-still, very close to the audience, moving little more than a hand placed carefully at her belly.

The hand would open, revealing, pleading perhaps, and close over again.

Open. And closed. Like the breath of child asleep.

Critics like to say that Baker doesn't look her age but she does — for which she should be thankful. Her body is



BRIGITTE BOUVIER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

**Soloist Peggy Baker, one of Canada's most celebrated dancers, performed *Far, Very Far* at the National Arts Centre last night. The dance was choreographed by Paul-André Fortier.**

wiry and muscles sharply defined in the back lighting. Tendons are clear and stretched tight. Her hands are roped with veins. They are more than just graceful, they are strong and intricate. They look deeply implicated in a life not just long but full of grief and fun and gentleness and strength.

Fortier, also incorporated audible breathing as part of the dance — one sequence of quick thrusts and karate chops with the accompanying, “whew!” and “hah!” raised some quickly suppressed titters in the audience.

Then near the end, Baker lies down

and pants, almost hyperventilating, her hands over her face. She folds one hand back.

Finally, she sits on the floor, spent. The light fades.

Like any journey, we won't really know where we've been until long after we've left.