

Peggy Baker's dancing captivates

BY SUSAN WALKER
DANCE CRITIC

Perhaps it was stage fright. Never has a dance audience been so frozen into rapt attention as the one on stage with Peggy Baker for her show *Interior View*, running through Nov. 19 at the Betty Oliphant Theatre.

From two rows of seats lining the back of the bare stage, Baker appears paradoxically more alone than she does from the usual position of an audience. The stage becomes a metaphoric studio and the viewer a participant in the act of creation.

Joining Baker is concert pianist Andrew Burashko, her collaborator in numerous works over the last decade. His playing of Alexander Scriabin's *Preludes Op. 11* in the Canadian premiere of *Unfold*, is as much a performance to watch as to listen to. And at such close proximity to the performers, one is sometimes torn between watching the pianist or the dance.

Baker's angular, constructivist choreography seems a part of the music, another instrument playing the melancholy themes. Sometimes she dances in silence, with nothing but her own breathing and the rustle of Caroline O'Brien's layered costume to accompany her. Sometimes Burashko plays alone. In those passages the ghost of the music and the after-images of Baker's movement are ever-present.

Without leaving the stage, Baker and Burashko segue to a series of works to the music of John Cage and

Late review

Baker's remarkable solo to her own text, a *true story*. Like a full-body form of sign language, this dance of vigorous gestures accompanying a story told piecemeal illustrates the notion that dance is a form of speaking.

In A Landscape, to Cage's music of the same name, is a 1995 piece that, seen so up-close, forms a Baker signature. The crossed and coiled legs that spring the dancer upward, the 90-degree bends of ankles and knees, the hieroglyphic movement of arms: these are the images of Baker that will remain as if carved in stone. Book early: there are only 64 seats on stage.

C10 THE TORONTO STAR Friday, November 10, 2000 ★