

Baker's dancing a class act

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A dancer who commissions a dance from another choreographer is like an artist who has her portrait painted by another artist. Imagine if Picasso sat for John Singer Sargent. The results would in no way resemble a Picasso self-portrait.

The Peggy Baker who emerges from the shadows in *loin, très loin*, created for her by Montreal choreographer Paul-André Fortier, is similarly an unfamiliar creature, differently composed than in her own solos. Fortier studied her and found the hidden Peggys in that tall, majestic figure.

The first is youthful: compulsive and wild as a teenager, running and circling the stage, her arms windmilling through the air to the hard-rock electric guitar music of Gaétan LeBoeuf. Another is a high priestess, slow, deliberate, conferring a solemnity on the space around her. Another is a warrior queen, slicing the air in karate chops to the sound of her own expelled breath. Another is a shaken, grieving woman. And at yet another moment in the lengthy solo, performed through last night at the Betty Oliphant Theatre, Baker is in a mood for self-examination. As she places her open palms over her midriff and then opens them toward us, it's as if she's saying, "Here, read my story."

Baker's talent is twofold. She's rarely just the dancer interpreting the choreography. She crafts a character out of the movements and wrings a narrative element out of the slightest of gestures. As her appearance in Rina Fratlicelli's short film *Iron Hill* demonstrates, she is an actor in every sense of the word.

Long sections of the dance occur in total silence. When LeBoeuf's energetic score cuts in again, Baker doesn't so much dance to it as dance in a dialogue with it. The music goes from rock to honky-tonk to jazz and, quick-change artist that she is, Baker transforms herself before our eyes.