



Dance becomes an Intimate Gesture

PREVIEW

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY PRESENTS INTIMATE GESTURE, A BENEFIT CONCERT BY DANCER/CHOREOGRAPHER PEGGY BAKER, 8 P.M. THURSDAY AT THE ROZSA CENTRE. PROCEEDS ARE EARMARKED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW DANCE CENTRE IN CALGARY. TICKETS: \$25, \$15 STUDENTS/SENIORS, AVAILABLE AT THE CAMPUS TICKET CENTRE (220-7202).

BOB CLARK
CALGARY HERALD

Peggy Baker didn't set out to become a dancer.

The well-known teacher, choreographer and performer was studying acting at the University of Alberta when she met Toronto Dance Theatre co-founder Patricia Beatty at a drama seminar in Drumheller in the early 1970s.

"Trish was really my introduction to modern dance," Baker recalls. "And I just fell in love with it — I felt drawn to it like a magnet."

Part of the attraction was the medium's portrayal of women as "strong, sensual, poetic and independent — an image unlike anything I'd ever seen (as a young person) growing up in suburban Edmonton," Baker says.

After moving in 1971 to study at the Toronto Dance Theatre's school, Baker eventually became a founding member of the Toronto modern dance company Dancemakers. In 1981, she joined New York's Lar Lubovitch Dance Company where she remained until embarking on her current career as solo dancer/choreographer.

"Lar is the biggest single influence in my artistic life," says Baker, who presents her new show *Intimate Gesture* at the Rozsa Centre on Thursday.

"He was part of a generation that wasn't drawing lines anymore between ballet and modern." The choreographer's intense, high-energy style draws on everything from ballet and all the modern forms of movement, to ethnic and club dancing as well as jazz.

"A lot of people found it very upsetting, while others found it very liberating." She proudly includes herself among the

Lubovitch enthusiasts. In 1990, Baker toured with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, which

the famed ballet star co-founded with American choreographer Mark Morris, himself a former member of Lubovitch's company.

Morris, known for his "crazy" sense of humour, decided Baryshnikov and Baker would share their parts because "Baryshnikov was like the tiny perfect male and I was this big raw female."

Accordingly, the great dancer "took a special interest in my performances because I was doing the same work he was.

"He is incredibly inspiring and totally serious about working, but also extremely generous."

For her Calgary performance, Baker will showcase her work *Intimate Gesture*, which the dancer performs with Regina pianist David McIntyre. It comprises four pieces, "all of which are based on gestures that speak of intimate aspects of one's life."

An autobiographical opening solo work — danced with text but no music — is followed by *Strand*, set to piano music by Canadian composer Ann Southam. This piece is based on the journals of American author May Sarton.

"She speaks of daily life with tremendous articulation and

poetry in her language," Baker says. "*Strand* is a character study — a kind of intimate, slow-moving portrait of Sarton — with a very surprising ending."

A third work uses seven of the 24 piano preludes written by the Russian composer and mystic, Alexander Scriabin — music that Baker characterizes as "wide-ranging emotionally and deeply beautiful."

The final work within *Intimate Gesture* is described by the dancer/choreographer as a "duet for David and me," with music by American composer and theorist John Cage.

By playing inside the piano, as Cage's score requires, "David is reaching and bending and actually creating a lot of movement vocabulary for which I've orchestrated my own part in relation to his movement.

"We almost become two dancers."

Music is the doorway through which audiences prefer to approach modern dance, which often seems difficult to audiences, Baker says.

"Lars would always say to us, 'When I actually lift your arm and arc it through the space, don't ask me what it means. That's what it means.'

"The movement itself — that's all it is. The meaning totally comes from the viewer. It doesn't matter what's going through our minds when we're dancing. The audience can only read our bodies."

For some reason, she says, audiences often try to analyse dance "as if it's American sign language or something. "It isn't."

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