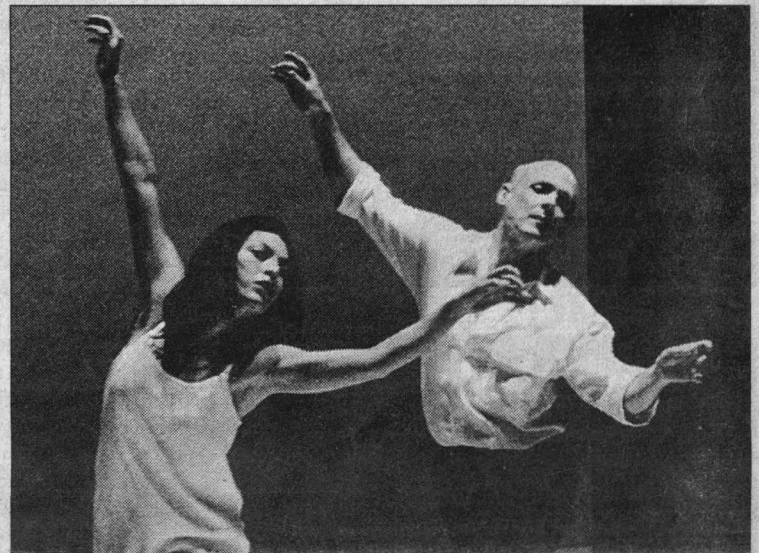
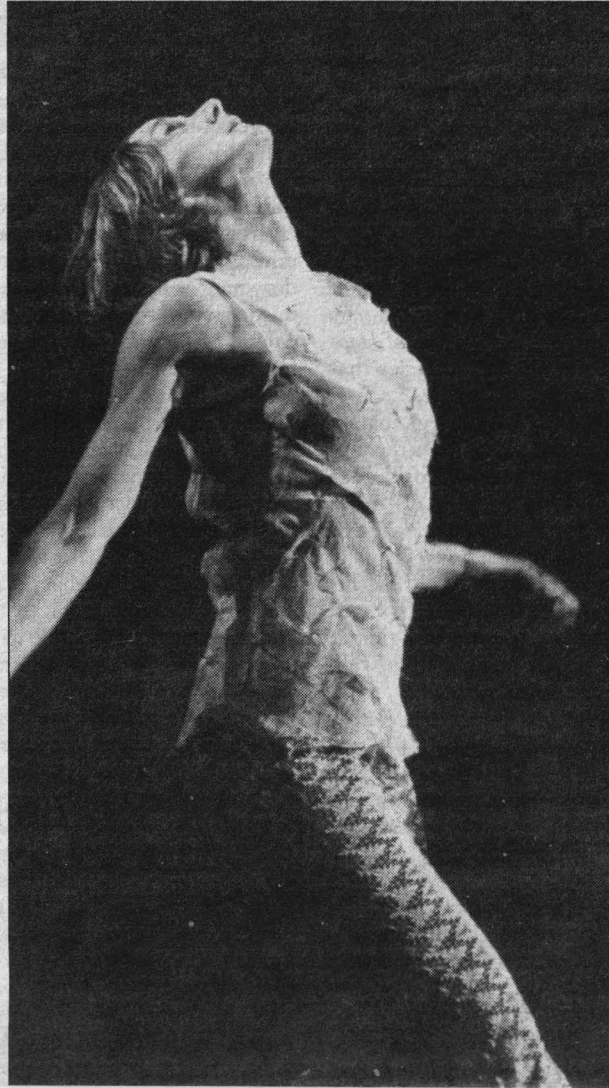


# arts & entertainment





(Clockwise from left) Canadian dance legend Peggy Baker, Crystal Pite, and Tania Alvarado and Brian Webb are four of the 40 choreographers appearing at the Dancing on the Edge Festival, which runs until July 14.

# Literature inspires dancers

By Kaija Pepper

BOOKS PLAY A SUPPORTING ROLE in the 14th annual Dancing on the Edge Festival, July 4-14 at the Firehall Arts Centre and other locations. For a handful of the contemporary dance festival's more than 40 choreographers, the world of literature provides general inspiration or even actual characters.

Tania Alvarado and Brian Webb found the characters for their full-length duet, *A Summer Evening... seems to be at the heart of the affair* (July 11 and 13) in Marguerite Duras' novel, *Blue Eyes, Black Hair*. On the phone from her Edmonton home, Alvarado describes the attraction and repulsion that fuels the relationship between a gay man and a young woman, performed by Webb and herself. "Both may be in love with somebody else and are in the same state of vulnerability. That's how they found each other and started a perverse ritual that goes on night after night."

Alvarado began this collaboration about a year ago, shortly after completing a three-year mentorship with the Brian Webb Dance Company. Before that, Webb had

been her teacher in the Grant MacEwan College Dance Program. "As a student, I was in awe of Brian," admits the emerging choreographer, "but we feel a mutual respect for each other now." The multi-talented Webb—teacher, artistic director, choreographer, dancer and presenter—was at the helm for the first time at this year's prestigious Canada Dance Festival in Ottawa.

Peggy Baker and Crystal Pite, sharing a double bill as the festival's first headliner (at the Playhouse July 5-6), have also been reading. Pite, born in Terrace and an ex-dancer with Ballet B.C., read several books on writing as part of her research for *Field: Fiction*, her choreography about the creative process.

Among Pite's reading material was Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*. One issue the American author discusses is the painful necessity of letting go of ideas during the writing process. In a telephone interview from the studios of Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, where she is currently resident choreographer, Pite described how this need to purify your work, to strip away the layers of ego and agenda, struck a chord. "It's one of the big things I learned from working with

Bill," she says.

"Bill" is William Forsythe, the master of off-balance ballet and the artistic director at Frankfurt Ballet, the company Pite was dancing with when she made *Field: Fiction*. Frankfurt Ballet, who presented the work in 2001, were also generous producers. They made the set, designed by Pite, which features 50 small soldiers with concrete bottoms and foam tops. Pite wanted Cori Caulfield to perform with her in this duet, and the Vancouver dancer was flown in for almost a month. Caulfield portrays a character in an "out-of-control narrative" while also embodying the archetypal muse. As for Pite: "Sometimes I'm a character and sometimes I'm the author so my relationship to Cori changes."

Canada's modern dance legend, Peggy Baker, was inspired by American poet and novelist May Sarton's journals in *Strand*, the second section of her four-part *Intimate Gesture*. Set to Toronto composer Ann Southam's "Spatial View of Pond," *Strand* explores the life of a solitary woman at middle age. It's an intimate investigation, as is the whole choreography.

See MUSICIAN, page 16

# Musician accompanies Baker in 'human gesture'

## From page 15

"I open the evening by walking to the front of the stage and telling people about myself," Baker says over the phone from Maryland, where she's currently teaching. Baker's intention is to let the audience know that the work is going to be about life and human relationships. "It becomes more abstract as the evening goes on, but it never stops being about human gesture."

On stage with Baker throughout is

longtime collaborator, pianist Andrew Burashko. Burashko's role is not an accompanist in the traditional sense: Baker wants him to play like he would if she wasn't on stage with him. "I want him to bring all of his creative power to the music, and to respond to his inspiration in the moment." *Intimate Gesture* includes music by Alexander Scriabin and John Cage, as well as Southam.

There are other literary inspirations. Cori Caulfield opens the festival with

her first full-length work, *Eve*, based on biblical and mythical stories about women. Deborah Dunn performs *Burnt Norton*, her solo inspired by the opening poem in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, appearing on the first of seven mixed bills. With Dunn on Edge One (July 6) is Toronto's Company Blonde in *Written in the Body*. The title, for this year's Dancing on the Edge, is apt.

Call 604-689-0691 for tickets.