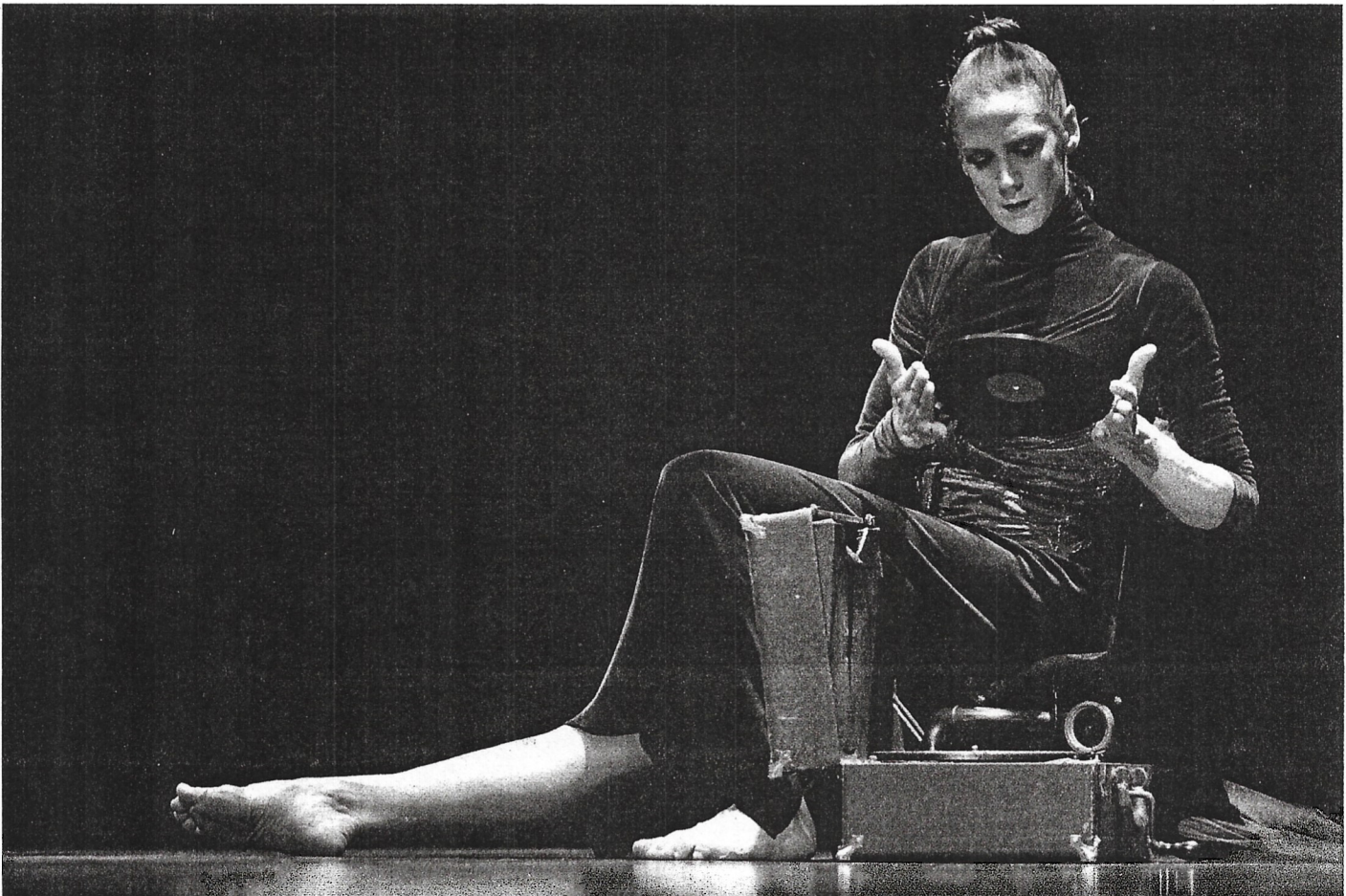


# what's



Hugo Wolf's life may have been a mess, but his songs are pure inspiration. G4

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PETER POWER/TORONTO STAR

A fanciful creature who is swept off into imaginary worlds by the music, modern dancer Peggy Baker rehearses for one of the three dances in her new show, *Home*, which opens tonight.

# Peggy Baker lives here

"Don't worry, Peggy, the nude scene will be done with a lot of taste." Tedd Robinson's joke during rehearsal reveals the level of camaraderie among the artists involved in *Home*, the show Peggy Baker presents from tonight through Sunday at the Betty Oliphant Theatre. A gift for friendship, which translates in theatrical terms into a gift for creative collaboration, has been a hallmark of Peggy Baker's dance career. Her friends and partners in life have frequently occupied equally important roles in her art. "These are people who've been in my life for a long time — since the '70s," says Baker of a core group of performers and choreographers contributing to the

**Friendships the source of continuing inspiration for the doyenne of Canadian contemporary dance**  
Gift for collaboration across generations graces the Betty Oliphant stage this week, *by Susan Walker*

show. "That's partly how the title *Home* applied. This is my world. This is where I live." She met Robinson, for instance, in the '70s, when they were both studying dance at York University. They're both 50. Both *Libra Dragons*. Yet they've never done a dance piece together. The title has just been decided: *Transparent Recital*. But the discussions for it began two years ago, the completion of the work getting delayed as Baker had surgery done on both of her knees.

The other performer in *Transparent Recital*, cellist Shauna Rolston, considerably younger, also made her first appearance in Baker's life in the '70s. As a little girl, a musical prodigy, Rolston was at the Banff Centre for the Arts with cellist Amanda Forsyth when Baker was there in 1973 training with Patricia Beatty, co-founder of the Toronto Dance Theatre. Rolston and Baker also share birth circumstances. They are both from Edmonton. James Kudelka is another old friend of both Baker's and her

first husband, the late composer Michael J. Baker. Kudelka, artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada, is rarely seen on stage. He'll dance with Baker in the duet *Home*. That piece, never before performed in Canada, was created by New York choreographer Doug Varone. Baker and Varone go back to the early '80s, when they both danced for Lar Lubovitch. And Tere O'Connor, the New Yorker who choreographed the third work in the show, Baker's first solo piece, *The Person Project*, is another member of Bak-

er's American family. She and O'Connor are related dance-wise, through Mikhail Baryshnikov, for whom Baker danced in the first season of the White Oak Dance Project in 1990. Baker spent 10 years in the United States. That was after dance training with Toronto Dance Theatre and at York University. She was one of the original members of Dancemakers and for a short time that company's artistic director. But Lubovitch wooed her to New York in 1980. She danced with his company until 1989, when she began

to realize that she was meant to be a solo artist. Baker's Toronto homecoming show in February 1991 was *The New Romantics*, in which she danced *The Person Project* and *Ten Suggestions*, a solo created by Mark Morris for the White Oak Dance Project. O'Connor danced on that program too, as did another New York colleague of Baker's, Mollissa Fenley. Fenley would later choreograph a solo for Baker. > Please see **Dance, G8**



# Peggy Baker a prolific dancer in '90s

## ► Dance From G1

Over the next dozen years, Baker became one of the most prolific dancers around, pushing the boundaries of her own art by dancing with musical collaborators, especially pianist Andrew Burashko, and commissioning work from choreographers such as Fenley, Varone (whose *The Volpe Sisters* became one of her signature works), and Paul-André Fortier. During the same time she created nearly 20 dances of her own.

The choreographers from whom she's commissioned dances have often been artists whose work is markedly different from hers, people who can take her someplace she wouldn't have found on her own.

Robinson, in one way, was an obvious choice — he is a solo artist himself. But he's a very different dancer/choreographer, short and compact where Baker is tall and expansive, given to humour where Baker tends to the serious side of things.

"It's very much not in my grain to make choices like he does. That collision (of choreographic styles) really interested me," says Baker.

Robinson was surprised by what came about after their first sessions in the studio. "I would show her what to do, but it wouldn't look like me. It was my vocabulary, but on her body." They worked a lot with hand movements, because Baker has awesomely large hands.

A fanciful creature who is swept off into imaginary worlds by the music, Baker displays touches of the trademark Robinson goofiness as she rehearses *Transparent Recital*.

Rolston, playing music composed by John Oswald, moves from one chair to another, her cello so much like a dance partner that the piece could almost be viewed as a trio. There's an *Alice In Wonderland* quality to it, too, with the presence of tiny chairs and — an inspired contribution — Rolston's own miniature cello, made for her when she was 2 years old.

Staging the evening has been a big concern for Baker, who designed it as a kind of progression from the 20 minutes of silence

in which she performs *The Person Project*, through the playing of the live string quartet seated below stage in *Home*, to the chairs and musician on stage in the Robinson piece.

In each piece in the program Baker assumes a distinct character. Wearing a scarlet cocktail dress in *The Person Project*, she's a female morphing through different stages of life.

In *Home*, she's one half of a middle-aged couple. "It's a movement play," says Baker, in which she and Kudelka reveal the shape of a long marriage. "It's so interesting to have this rapport with him. He has so much emotional resonance," says Baker of Kudelka.

*Home*, which will tour to New York after the performance here, is only one of several projects Baker has on the go. Grateful for the works that were set on her and allowed her to grow as a dancer, Baker has been passing on her own works, giving them to younger dancers under the heading The Choreographer's Trust, a plan to teach six of her dances to 12 different dancers.

Baker is encouraging new interpretations of her work, a lib-

erty she's enjoyed working with Varone's duet. "What I'd really like is for people to do covers of my work," she says.

In June, dancers Sylvain Brochu, Nova Bhattacharya, Shannon Cooney and Helen Jones, among others, will perform works by Baker. Bhattacharya will perform *Sanctum*, a solo Baker created, with music by her husband Ahmed Hassan.

Dance is a two-way generational street for Baker, who as the National Ballet School's modern dance teacher is in frequent contact with younger dancers. Later this year she'll perform a solo she has commissioned from a dancer who's a generation younger than her, Sarah Chase.

Passing her 50th birthday hasn't brought Baker any trepidation. Quite the reverse: "Once you turn 50 you're bullet-proof," she says with a laugh.

## Just the facts

**What:** Home

**Where:** Betty Oliphant Theatre, 404 Jarvis St.

**When:** 8:30 p.m. tonight through Sat., 4 p.m. on Sun.

**Tickets:** \$19.50 to \$27.50 @ 416-504-7529



PETER POWER/TORONTO STAR

Peggy Baker rehearses *Transparent Recital* with Shauna Rolston.