



CYLLA VON TIEDEMANN

Peggy Baker and cellist Shauna Rolston in a new dance by Ottawa choreographer Tedd Robinson.

Home is where the art is

DANCE

Home
Peggy Baker Dance Projects
At Betty Oliphant Theatre
in Toronto on Thursday

REVIEWED BY REBECCA TODD

What does it mean to be an artist for a whole lifetime? Our culture celebrates the romantic ideal of brooding, young bohemians wrestling with tormenting creative compulsions. But artists who survive into middle age watch TV, write grant proposals, teach classes and clean bathrooms. They go into the studio year after year, honing craft, trying out new ideas, bickering and forging lifelong friendships out of shared work.

It is just this kind of friendship that lies at the heart of Peggy Baker's *Home*. An evening featuring choreography and performances by several of Baker's long-time collaborators, *Home* quietly honours working relationships that date as far back as the 1970s. *Person Project* (1991) is a solo created for Baker by New York choreographer Tere O'Connor; *Home* (1988) is a duet choreographed by another New Yorker, Doug Varone, performed by Baker with National Ballet artistic director James Kudelka. And *The Transparent Recital* is a new dance made for

Baker and cellist Shauna Rolston by Ottawa's Tedd Robinson.

Throughout the evening Baker inhabits three very different characters, whose dancing is the outward sign of their inner lives. In *Person Project*, Baker dances in silence in a red velvet party dress, moving with great clarity and conviction through a landscape we can't see, performing tasks we don't understand, and responding passionately to thoughts that aren't spoken. But then, at the very end of the dance, the frame shifts suddenly and it all makes sense — a small lighting change and the noise of a cocktail party offstage indicate we've been watching a young woman's preparty longings and agonies.

Doug Varone's *Home* is a more familiar psychological study of a marriage. Danced with naked, subtle intimacy by Baker and Kudelka (who is very rarely seen onstage these days), *Home* is set to a live string quartet by Dick Connette. In this duet, the couple's rhythmic attunement to each other speaks of the unconscious physical synchronies of marriage, as well as the shifting balances of power. The choreography trusts basic elements of dance — pushing/pulling, moving towards/moving away, synchrony/dissonance, movement/stillness — to convey fundamental principles of human behaviour. For this reason, the characters' emotional struggles

are immediately recognizable.

Choreographer Tedd Robinson, whose work has been described as "Zen clown," is known for his odd silent-movie humour as well as his attention to physical detail. *Transparent Recital* exhibits both of those qualities. Baker, dressed in a geisha-inspired velvet dress, is a birdlike diva who fans and ripples her articulate hands and displays the huge bow at the back of her dress.

The other partner in this duet, cellist Shauna Rolston, has the difficult job of musically satisfying the artiste's whims — a job that includes migrating from chair to chair while playing a score that morphs from a Bach cello solo to music by John Oswald. Finally, Baker's character requires Rolston to sit in a doll-sized chair, playing a tiny cello while Baker plays an antique wind-up phonograph.

Clearly, all of the evening's works live in the domestic realm of everyday life — even the quirky *Transparent Recital* deals ultimately with the prosaic challenges of artistic collaborations. As one dance follows another, it becomes clear how daily transactions with long-time friends and collaborators are the stuff of lifelong art-making.

Home continues at Toronto's Betty Oliphant Theatre through tomorrow.

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