



Colliding Worlds

by [DEBORAH JOWITT](#)

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Excerpted from the original review.

I've always thought of Peggy Baker as an Amazon. Tall, lean, and long-legged, she has the strong back and wide shoulders of one used to drawing a bow. But this marvelous Canadian soloist is also a subtle performer, capable of investing whatever she performs with nuance. She opened her recent Danspace program at St. Mark's Church with a piece Tere O'Connor made for her in 1991, just after she left Lar Lubovitch's company to return to her native Canada. Twelve years later, at 50, Baker performs it with an artistry that has only increased over the years.

O'Connor plays on her abilities as a chameleon. Dancing in silence, wearing a red party dress, she keeps shifting shapes. Now she's bent over, a wading bird charting the space with her long legs and beautifully arched feet. Now she's backing up, her hands making dithery little ladylike gestures. Like an East Indian soloist, she holds many selves. We see her giddy, demonic, perturbed, wound up, slyly flirtatious, wary, and so on—all at a second's notice. This goes on for so long that we begin to wonder about her. Then a din of voices grows louder, a door opens behind her on a lighted space, and, forlornly, she exits. Has she been envisioning herself at the party, or all the dreadful people she would meet there?

Ottawa-based choreographer Tedd Robinson also draws on Baker's acting abilities, but somehow the attitudes he asks her to adopt are swathed in a kind of attitudinizing. Being self-consciously cute and whimsical does not become her. *The Transparent Recital* quizzes

the effect of music on dancing, and, maybe, vice versa. Masterful cellist Shauna Rolston segues from snippets of Bach to more contemporary music (mostly by John Oswald), moving to various of the chairs that are set about the church. In her garnet velvet pantsuit with a strappy top (costumes by Caroline O'Brien), she looks more dressed for dancing than Baker does in a long-sleeved matching velvet tube dress with something resembling an obi gone poufy around her waist. Clearly, Robinson is minimally interested in her legs.

Between walking around with a little suitcase, and responding to—or sometimes perhaps cueing—the music's moods, Baker seems to be playing affected little games with Rolston. The ending is sweet—emphasizing that Rolston was a child prodigy and Baker loved music from an early age. They both sit on child-sized chairs, and while Rolston plays a pint-sized cello, Baker opens the “suitcase” (of course!), cranks it up, and drops a needle at the end of a 78 rpm record. Above the scratching, we hear the cello sing Bach's music.

Set between these two pieces was one that gives Baker a chance to be a woman whose every move is connected to the thought or act that came before it. Doug Varone's remarkable *Home*, which Baker performed here with former Varone dancer Larry Hahn, reveals, through the most economical everyday moves on or around a pair of chairs, a despairing relationship between two people who grate on each other in small ways, yet are bound together by some kind of need. Dick Connette's music, played live by an string quartet, endlessly circles its resigned, bittersweet melodies, as if to say “This is the way it is” over and over and over.

Hahn and Baker's superb performances give the duet a blue-collar edge I haven't seen in previous casts. Although at one point she obliquely knocks him from his chair, he's the one in charge, restraining his aggression, inarticulate in his tenderness. She's drab, repressed, almost numb with misery. The push-and-pull of their daily lives is expressed in myriad mute, heart-breaking maladjustments. When they kiss, one of them places a hand between their two mouths.