

# Baker's satisfying double portions

## DANCE

### Inside the Choreographer's Trust: Year Two

Peggy Baker Dance Projects  
Betty Oliphant Theatre  
In Toronto on Saturday

REVIEWED BY PAULA CITRON

Inside the Choreographer's Trust is an extraordinary audience experience.

During the three-year project, Peggy Baker is handing on her choreography to others, and kudos to the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation for giving Baker the funds to hire the dancers and lighting designer, plus a filmmaker, choreologist and dance historian to record the process. Through Baker's insightful commentary, the audience was taken deep inside a choreographer's creative process, and the evening was particularly satisfying due both to the richness of Baker's choreography and the charisma of the dancers she chose to keep her work alive.

Each year of the Trust, Baker gives away two of her works to two different artists. Thus, the structure of the Trust concert involves each work being performed twice. For year two, Baker chose two solos with percussion scores, and the fascination lay in seeing how different dancers interpret the same work, coupled with lighting designer Marc Parent's equally dramatic yet subtly different lighting plots for each.

The very moving *Sanctum* (1991) was created with Baker's husband, talented percussionist Ahmed Hassan, who is physically disabled. Both the dancer and musician are bound within separated squares of light, and the haunting piece is a rage against physical limitations, and a celebration of escape through imagination.

The fascination lay in seeing how different dancers interpret the same work, coupled with equally dramatic yet subtly different lighting.

Both Nova Bhattacharya and Helen Jones, and their respective musicians, Ed Hanley and Debashis Sinha, captured the work's despair and hope, but differed in intriguing ways in their interpretation. Where Jones was the emotionally inward mother/crone, bending her supple body in prayer and supplication, Bhattacharya was the contained goddess, casting her formidable power outward. The many prayer-like gestural movements, punctuated by agitated hands playing with the dancer's long skirt and violent spurts of vertical energy, became, with Jones, an intensely personal moment and, with Bhattacharya, a formal worship. Both Hanley and Sinha were beautifully sensitive to their dancers.

*Yang* was commissioned by Sylvain Brochu in 1998, and the dancer was on hand to recreate his performance. Baker's interesting choice for the second interpreter was Shannon Cooney, one of the wild-child tomboys who populate the female side of the Dancemakers company. Set to a driving, rhythmic score by Belgian composer Thierry de Mey, *Yang* is not only male testosterone overtaking the entire stage, it is also non-stop, diagonal, angular physicality, sudden on-the-floor gymnastics, dramatic pauses and sharp gestural patterns.

Brochu was a fighting bantam cock, and his magnificent performance was all about combat-readiness, underscored by caution and alertness. When Cooney performed the piece, the changes were both surprising and astonishing. Her "feminine" take softened the lines, and the intense physicality of the dance became alluring and teasing. Nonetheless, she remained masterfully in control, a strong woman in both body and mind, and a poster girl for today's "don't mess with me" feminist.

For an encore, Baker had Brochu and Cooney perform their *Yang* as a duet.

Because Baker had changed the order of how Cooney executed the work, the two echoed each other but were only synchronized at the very end. Thus the dance became an intriguing his/her version of the same events, and although they never communicated with each other, the piece became a delightfully contradictory revelation of an explosive, yet tender, relationship.