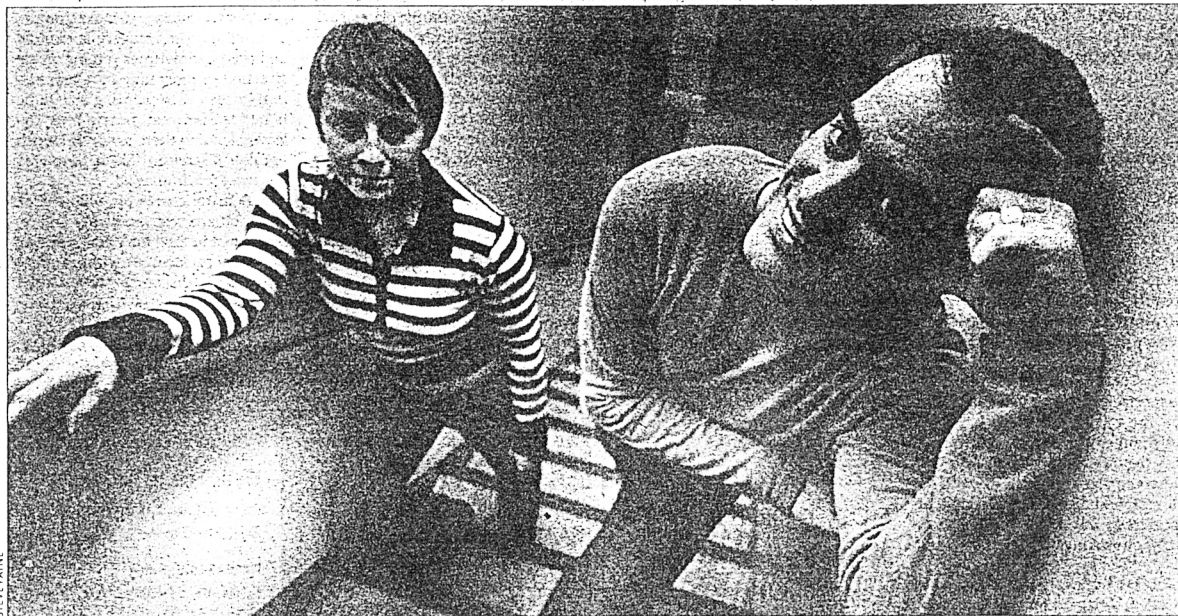


stage

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Dancers Sasha Ivanochko and Rex Harrington take turns dancing Peggy Baker's difficult 35-minute solo, *Brute*.

dance preview

Moving the work around

This weekend, Peggy Baker passes on her acclaimed 1994 solo, *Brute*, to two vastly different dancers **By GLENN SUMI**

MUSIC FOR PIANO AND SOLO DANCER

choreography by Peggy Baker, with guest artists Rex Harrington and Sasha Ivanochko. Presented by Peggy Baker Dance Projects at the Betty Oliphant Theatre (404 Jarvis), Saturday (February 5) at 8 pm w/ Harrington, Sunday (February 6) at 4 pm w/ Ivanochko. \$28, stu/srs \$22. 416-504-7529.

I'M WATCHING SOMETHING PEOPLE will never get to see onstage. The tall, lithe Peggy Baker, with her impossibly long and expressive arms, is dancing in unison with former National Ballet superstar Rex Harrington and Toronto Dance Theatre dynamo Sasha Ivanochko.

For a few moments, these three vastly differently dance artists are ex-

ecuting the same steps, but each is communicating something slightly different. This is a trio of solos.

When they stop, they communicate in a shorthand that only dancers seem to understand.

"Sometimes you get fast right near the end," says someone.

"Count to six and then two more," suggests someone else.

"We need," says Baker, "a little more electrocution happening."

What?

Baker is bestowing her acclaimed 1994 solo piece, *Brute*, on Ivanochko and Harrington. The piece is inspired by Picasso's painting *Guernica*, an anti-war statement filled with disturbing images of brutality.

It's the sixth time Baker has given

away her work to dancers she admires, kind of like a world-class distance runner passing the torch. Last year, she gave her piece *Unfold* to dancers Kate Alton and Andrea Nann, with absorbing results.

"My model comes from a solo that Mark Morris had made for himself at the White Oak Project," explains Baker, a member of White Oak's inaugural season in the early 90s.

"I'd seen him perform it many times, but then he taught it to me and Mikhail Baryshnikov. I loved that idea of a choreographer who has made a work for himself giving it to two dramatically different people who are in turn dramatically different from the choreographer."

The image of Morris, Baryshnikov

and Baker is almost as startling as that of Baker, Harrington and Ivanochko.

But that's Baker's point. Even artists with vastly different bodies and training can take a work and make it their own.

"I'm nervous for my own paranoid reasons," laughs Harrington after a difficult rehearsal in which he jokingly likened the piece to a torture session.

"It's a brute of a solo, like doing *The Four Seasons*, a full-act ballet. It's a new vocabulary for me. And it's performed barefoot, so I'm working my feet open daily. In a way, I feel like I'm putting myself out to slaughter."

Ivanochko, a choreographer herself – a new piece debuts this weekend at Toronto Dance Theatre's *Four At The*

Winch – is more used to this kind of collaboration. She knew about Baker's ongoing project and secretly wanted to be asked to participate.

So when Baker approached her at the gym, she was thrilled.

"I remember seeing Peggy dance it 10 years ago," says Ivanochko, "and have clear images in my mind from that."

Harrington points out that Baker was 42 when she first danced the piece, the same age he is now.

"So I guess I should be able to do it." Not that the two are going to be copying every move. In fact, several sections in the 35-minute piece call for movement storytelling and improvisation, none of it tied to the rhythm of Prokofiev's sixth piano sonata, played onstage by Andrew Burashko.

"There are sections where you have to tell as much of the story as you can fit in until a certain cue in the music," says Baker.

"There's another sequence where you're staggering across the stage in a structured improvisation. You know what the rhythm is, and know where you have to finish, but the shapes are all improvised."

Harrington says initially he's trying to imitate Baker as much as possible, and then eventually make the dance his own.

Ivanochko is more used to working like this and is up to the challenges of the structured improvisation.

"Much of the performance is going to depend on how fatigued I am on a particular day," she says. "I enjoy bringing that aspect of my life to the work. If I'm feeling particularly energetic, I'll start at a really high point and see where I can go from there and how that informs the piece."

The program is rounded out by Baker herself dancing her repertory pieces *In A Landscape*, furthermore and *Why The Brook Wept*. But all eyes will be on the guests, performing on separate days. The two aren't nervous about audiences comparing their performances.

"We've both been in pieces that have been double or triple cast," says Ivanochko. "You can't think about how you'll compare to someone else. That will drive you crazy." ©

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