

KEITH GAREBIAN - STAGE AND PAGE WEBSITE

THE HEART MOVES

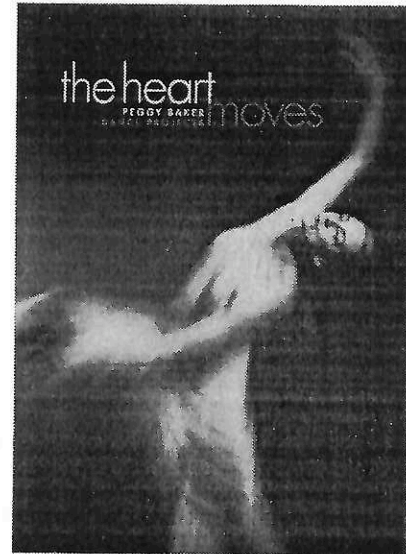
Peggy Baker Dance Projects
at the Betty Oliphant Theatre
February 9-12, 2006

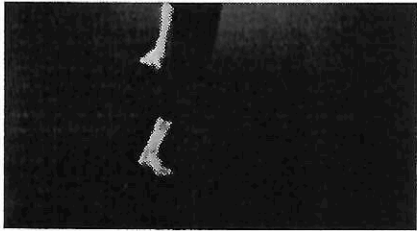
Peggy Baker's *The Heart Moves* is a stunning display of this formidable dancer's durable versatility. In the three-part program, Baker goes from a lyrical dance of primal symbolism to dramatic mime, before demonstrating her stunning ability to fuse passion and sensuality with abstraction. Only the first dance is a new work by Baker herself; the other two works are by Paul-Andre Fortier (*Non Coupable*) from 1983 and Doug Varone (*In Thine Eyes*) from 1996. Baker has danced the Fortier and the Varone years ago, but she makes them seem glimmeringly new.

Krishna's Mouth is Baker in free, lyrical movement. Based on a Hindu story of Lord Krishna as a baby, the dance is set to a brief text composed and spoken aloud by Baker as she dances to a recording of the beautiful *The Song of Songs* by Karen Tanaka. In the story, baby Krishna is in a garden with his mother, and as he's crawling on the ground, he grabs a clot of earth and puts it in his mouth. "His mother slaps his hand away, and when she reaches in to clean out the dirt, she sees the entire universe in her baby's mouth." Baker, however, does not attempt a literal or close translation of the myth into dance. What she performs is an abstract reaction to the story, with subtle and small references to Indian *Bharatnatyam* and with a lyricism that is free without being sloppy. Her long, powerful arms—surely the most identifiable ones of any female Canadian dancer—create a force field as if the myth were somehow resonantly alive in her mode of expression. By an attitude or a crook of a hand, thumb, or forefinger, or by a bent-leg position and suggestions of yoga, she incorporates suggestions of Indian dance, without making a specific connection to Indian mythology. The symbolism of the brief anecdote reverberates in Baker's superbly supple arabesques and deep knee bends, but Baker actually aims at something cosmic, her windmill arms suggesting the whole world spinning on its axis. Her eyes focused either on the sky or on the ground, she seems to be locked into her own meditation, and Tanaka's extraordinary musical loop complements the holy beauty of Baker's movements.



Non Coupable shows us Baker the actress. Paul-Andre Fortier's piece, that Baker first performed in Winnipeg in 1990, presents woman as a prisoner to desires that she is incapable of realizing. However, the title suggests more than incapability—and, frankly, more than the actual choreography describes, for the French word "coupable" means "guilty" of an offence against God, as well as an unpardonable weakness. Wearing a black tape over her eyes, and limping on bare feet as she drags two heavy stones bound by rope to





her wrists, the woman is hunched over with oppression. Seemingly defeated by circumstance, she moves on slow, stuttering feet, zigzagging, sinking, then rising painfully. Often, her movements seem to have summoned arduously out of memory, as the strain of the present prevails against her. The stones don't remain stones; they become other things for her—a baby that she suckles at her breast, a pillow for her weary head, or masochistic instruments for self-violation. Baker is totally transformed in this dance from the Baker of the Krishna myth, but the piece is really dramatic mime more than dance.

Partnered by the splendid Larry Hahn, Baker shines in Doug Varone's *In Thine Eyes*, a powerful, sensual duet to the dynamically shifting music of Michael Nyman and with the marvelous lighting of David Ferri, as adapted by Marc Parent, who is also responsible for the lighting of the preceding pieces. Both dancers display an emotional range that is astonishing in a repertoire of movements that span the sculptural, the staccato, the erotic, and the sinister, and the personalities of both dancers are as dramatic a contrast as is the subject of incompleteness of a human quest for spiritual connection. Hahn's powerful musculature and Baker's elongated plasticity balance strikingly, and both dancers move easily from taut stillness or vulnerability to bursts of physical and emotional changes. He makes jagged angles with his arms and feet; she seems to bend, almost break, but it is he who falls prostrate at the end, so it is not absolutely clear that he has full control of their dynamic as a duo of lovers. The dance is a fertile exercise in connotative complexity, and it is performed with spellbinding force.

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