

## TRANSLATION

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Peggy Baker's *Portal*: Bodily Contradictions

[caption of photo:] Peggy Baker and Michael Sean Marye are the unusual duo of *A Woman by a Man*

photo: André Tremblay, *La Presse*

Stéphanie Brody

*La Presse*

special correspondent

Peggy Baker is a magnificent dancer. Graceful, with sharply-defined outline and well-toned body, she moves with assurance. That said, her unending arms, her square shoulders, her strongly-defined joints and her angular features lend her a striking, almost androgynous aspect. And it is this that makes her so fascinating.

Moreover, *Portal*, which Baker created for herself, and which she is currently presenting at the *Cinquième Salle*, as part of *Montréal en lumière*, exploits her special physique to great advantage.

Alone on stage, in the most absolute of silences, she juggles with the contradictions inherent in her physical form, tests the limits of her tall body, explores its tensions and its flaws, and constantly redefines her relationship with space, with the help of lighting designer Marc Parent. Baker is at once violent and tender towards her "instrument," and towards herself. Beginning from clear and simple premises, Baker generates a rich and abundant expression that suggests a thousand and one questions of identity. A great success, all the more so since one loves to watch the movement of that strange body.

In *A Woman by a Man*, an unusual duet choreographed by James Kudelka, and a world première, the tall Baker assumes something of the aspect of Olive Oyl, the companion of Popeye. Kudelka presents a strange little couple, a man and woman dried-out like deadwood (one thinks moreover of the couple in *American Gothic*, Grant Wood's famous painting!) The dance aesthetic is deliberately outmoded, with a sometimes almost cartoonish aspect (live music by Shostakovich lending support) and a mordant humour that shows itself mainly in the small touches. Baker, whose merest sidelong glance speaks volumes, and Michael Sean Marye, are to be savoured.

The programme opens on a more lyrical note, Baker having handed on her solo, *Unfold*, created in 2000, to Andrea Nann. Slender and slight, Nann has an energy and physique quite different from Baker's, the contrast adding a further interest to the evening. Accompanied on stage by pianist Andrew Burashko, Nann moves sometimes in dialogue with, sometimes against the flow of, the music (so full of silences and soaring flights) of Scriabin, giving rise to striking discontinuities of rhythm and pose that Baker, as choreographer, has balanced perfectly.