



JOHN LAUENER PHOTOS

Kate Holden, Sahara Morimoto and Sean Ling perform the world premiere of *coalesce*, choreographed by Peggy Baker and part of her show *confluence*.

# Baker takes us to a new world

## Peggy Baker Dance Projects: *confluence*

★★★ (out of 4)

Choreographed by Peggy Baker and Doug Varone. Until Feb. 28 at the Enwave Theatre, 231 Queens Quay W. [www.peggybakerdance.com](http://www.peggybakerdance.com) or 416-973-4000

**MICHAEL CRABB**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Peggy Baker distills the wisdom of a long performing career into her new show, *confluence*. At age 57 she is understandably pacing herself. Baker only appears for about a third of the 60-minute program, but she makes those moments count.

The program comprises two Baker choreographies — a new trio and a revived solo — and a reworked duet by American choreographer Doug Varone, which Baker performs with partner Larry Hahn.

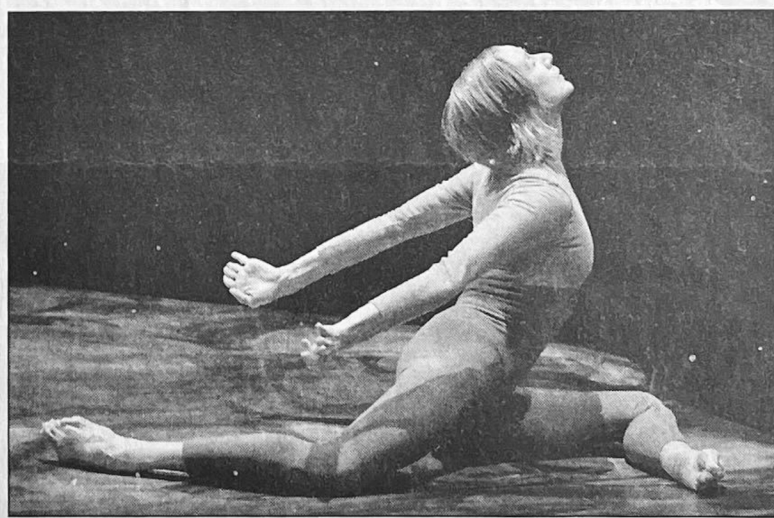
The show is thematically linked by a shared and seemingly unlikely inspiration. Baker and Varone were both excited by the rich mine of ideas found in physician Lewis Thomas's justly acclaimed 1974 collection of essays, *The Lives of a Cell*. Reading Thomas makes you view the world differently and Baker's new program indeed transports us to an otherworldly place beyond conventional human experience.

Baker's opening is called *earthling* but the image she presents is of some indeterminate yet exotic creature. Crouched on the edge of an inclined platform, Baker's arms reach toward the light. Debashis Sinha's commissioned score is dreamily elegiac as Baker turns and extends those famously long limbs of hers within the platform's tight confines. Baker's program-note quote from Thomas — "The most intensely social animals . . . have no option, when isolated, except to die" — underscores her choreographic theme of an organism steadily drained of animation.

A number of movement images from *earthling* reappear in the new work. Baker has choreographed *coalesce* for a trio of seasoned dancers, Kate Holden, Sean Ling and Sahara Morimoto. Sinha's background sound score, complemented by Marc Parent's atmospheric lighting, again suggests a realm of non-human organisms.

Although the dancers often echo each other's moves and gestures as they travel the stage they are essentially isolated, but as the work progresses they appear to meld into a more complex entity.

Palms touch almost furtively, without eye contact or apparent emotional significance.



Peggy Baker performs her new solo *earthling* at the Enwave Theatre.

A mood of potential tenderness intrudes as Ling, seated on the floor, rests his head on Holden's shoulder and their arms begin to fold over each other. Morimoto meanwhile dances around them in the peripheral gloom. Later this vignette repeats with Morimoto joined in a more complex entanglement of resting heads and enveloping limbs.

Only a short blackout separates *coalesce* from *armour*, the closing duet. Excerpted from a longer work and revised for this performance,

Varone's choreography is minimalistic and suspended in time, like a slice from a larger continuum. Baker and Hahn are here more like archetypes, elemental and distilled representations of the human need for connection beyond the stereotypical, emotionally overcharged and romantic dance duets we're used to seeing.

They insinuate themselves into each other's embrace, isolated yet together, driven by forces more mysterious than they can apprehend.