

Peggy Baker, Michael Healey & Daniel Brooks talk about creativity's roots



Are You Okay, director Daniel Brooks, choreographer and performer Peggy Baker, and playwright and performer Michael Healey all had formative but unique experiences in their youth that solidified their dedication to the creative arts.

Aaron Lynett/National Post

Melissa Leong Feb 28, 2011 – 2:45 PM ET | Last Updated: Feb 28, 2011 1:26 PM ET

Three acclaimed Canadian artists are coming together for a unique theatre/dance piece called *Are You Okay*. It's described as a "kinetic conversation about creation, physical mastery, body betrayal, the brutal humour of time and the fleeting nature of professional competence."

Melissa Leong asked celebrated choreographer Peggy Baker, award-winning playwright and actor Michael Healey and Siminovitch Prize-winning director Daniel Brooks what that means and about their creative process:

Peggy Baker

Q: *How did you get involved with this project?*

Michael Healey and I met onstage, in front of an audience, at Theatre Passe Muraille in 2003, where we immediately planned and instantly performed an improvised duet for a fundraiser called *Blind Dates*. We've wanted to collaborate on a project with more rehearsal time and a longer run ever since.

Q: *What does "a kinetic conversation about creation, physical mastery, body betrayal, the brutal humour of time and the ephemeral nature of professional competence" look like?*

It looks like two performers doing solos shows at the same time on a stage too small for either of them performing alone.

Q: Describe your creative process in one word.

Actual.

Q: What is the greatest enemy to your process?

Interruption.

Q: What was the earliest harbinger of your artistry/career?

As a child in Edmonton, I took tap lessons in a basement rumpus room studio, practising rudiments and learning routines. One week our teacher surprised the class by asking each of us to prepare a dance to show at the next lesson. I had never been enthusiastic about practicing, but I was on fire with this choreographic assignment. I spent every moment I could all week long on my dance, and I couldn't wait to perform it. It was a dance about a rabbit, and I didn't wear my tap shoes.

Q: Name one past work which you are particularly proud of.

Doug Varone's epic duet, *In Thine Eyes*, stands out as one of the greatest experiences of my dance life. The speed, detail and complexity of the movement actually made it frightening to learn, but performing it was magnificent, because the dancing itself took so much, made so much sense, delivered such a forceful conclusion. A truly great work, I felt so proud to be able to bring that dance to the Canadian public.

Daniel Brooks

Q: How did you get involved with this project?

Michael and Peggy asked me. I said I was too busy. They said, "That's OK, whatever you can give us." I said, "Okay." Weeks later I thought, no, I don't have enough time. I had lunch with Michael and told him. He said, "Too late, you're doing it." So I'm doing it.

Q: What does "a kinetic conversation about creation, physical mastery, body betrayal, the brutal humour of time and the ephemeral nature of professional competence" look like?

Here is a horribly literal-minded response: "a kinetic conversation about creation, physical mastery, body betrayal, the brutal humour of time and the ephemeral nature of professional competence" is precisely what it looks like.

Q: Describe your creative process in one word.

Inspired.

Q: What is the greatest enemy to your process?

Illness.

Q: What was the earliest harbinger of your artistry/career?

As a child, I was told I was an artist by aliens, between the second and third period of a Leafs-Bruins game.

Q: Name one past work which you are particularly proud of and why.

I did a nice water-colour once, but never showed anyone.

Michael Healey

Q: How did you get involved with this project?

Peggy and I started talking a couple of years ago about where we are in our lives and careers, and what a show might consist of.

Q: What does "a kinetic conversation about creation, physical mastery, body betrayal, the brutal humour of time and the ephemeral nature of professional competence" look like?

Like three marbles in a shoebox, taped to the back of a lemur.

Q: Describe your creative process in one word.

No. It, along with Yes, forms the basis for judgment, which is central to the creative process.

Q: What is the greatest enemy to your process?

Doubt. I think.

Q: What was the earliest harbinger of your artistry/career?

I played the title character in *The Boy Upstairs* in Catholic middle school. More compelling than being onstage as an altar boy.

Q: Name one past work which you are particularly proud of and why.

My first play, called *Kicked*. It was so much easier to learn my own dialogue back then.

–*Are You Okay* runs from March 1 to 13. Visit *Factory Studio Theatre's website* for ticket information.

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