

DANCE PREVIEW

Baker breaks ground

Peggy Baker makes bold moves while passing on baton **By KATHLEEN SMITH**

STEREOPHONIC choreographed by Peggy Baker, presented by Peggy Baker Dance Projects at the Betty Oliphant Theatre (404 Jarvis). Runs to Sunday (March 3), Thursday to Saturday 8:30 pm, Sunday 4 pm. \$25-\$30; matinee \$75 (includes meet-the-artists reception); pwc today (Thursday, February 28). 1-800-838-3006, peggybakerdance.com

Peggy Baker is simultaneously passing the baton and continuing to break new choreographic ground. Only a dancer could pull off such a balancing act, and Baker, though dancing a little less frequently at 60, has always been one of the best.

Stereophonic, a new collection of Baker choreographies onstage this week at the Betty Oliphant, benefits from the creative energy of younger dancers such as Sahara Morimoto, who's worked closely with Baker for several years, creating new dances but also helping to reconstruct old solos for a new generation.

"I love it," Morimoto says simply of her work with Baker. "I am inspired being around her. And I am able to continuously develop."

Morimoto performs the new work *Aleatoric Solo No.1*, the inspiration for which is Baker's own dance catalogue. Morimoto chose movement passages from the dozen or so Baker works she's learned, then distilled and refined them in collaboration with Baker.

"Sahara knows my work better than anyone," says Baker. "She has extensive knowledge, but she's not just reiterating me – she knows my work

through her own body."

Baker's had an extremely rich career – from dancing with Lar Lubovitch and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project in the 80s and her celebrated deep explorations of solo performance in the 90s to the founding of her own company in 2010 – yet she can still teach artists half her age a thing or two about trying something new.

She tackles the topic of male/female relationships in the group work *Split Screen Stereophonic*, a subject she's shied away from for most of her 40-year career.

"It's something I feel can go badly

astray in dance," says Baker. "It can fall into clichés really easily."

She's finally confronting it now through the filter of women's perspectives on love. Morimoto performs with Sean Ling in the piece with a second couple – Sarah Fregeau and Benjamin Kamino – dancing at the same time on the other side of a wall separating the stage, the split screen of the title.

"I am so happy I am not in it," Baker laughs. "I am at such a different place in my life than those young women. I have so much retrospect on that."

Happily for her devoted fans, Baker also performs in the program, bringing some of that retrospect to bear in *Epilogue*, a personal dance that explores loss and absence.

While watching Morimoto and the others rehearse the group work, Baker describes her new solo as a kind of aftermath.

"It's about what happens much later." © stage@nowtoronto.com



Peggy Baker (left) says Sahara Morimoto knows her work better than anyone.