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Split Screen Stereophonic

 Aparna Halpé (<https://playstosee.com/author/aparnahalpe/>)  24/02/2017

The Theatre Centre, Toronto (<http://peggybakerdance.com/bookings/main-stage-touring/split-screen-stereophonic-epilogue>)

Peggy Baker Dance Projects' *Split Screen Stereophonic* reprises four masterworks from the company's recent repertoire. While each piece has its distinct nuance and phrase, it was the underlying narrative arc between them that made this evening so memorable. In cohesion, the pieces explore the deep and often troubling ebb and flow of desire between woman and man, culminating in a devastating elegy of loss performed by the doyenne of Canadian contemporary dance, Peggy Baker.

The evening begins with “solo from *locus plot*”, a meditative and intensely physical exploration of space and time that is also somehow existentially female. We recognize signature movement thematics from Baker’s pieces, and in this context, they powerfully inhabit a language of the feminine, invoked for example, in the alternating sequences between a bent, retching figure, and a supine languorous figure reminiscent of the many phases a woman must endure in the process of gestation. Kate Holden, in solo, is as luminous as a moonbeam, and yet completely and recognizably all woman.

If “solo from locus plot” is meditatively feminine, “Yang” would be its creative opposite. This piece is a veritable explosion of male energy set to the heart thumping piece, *Frisking*, prolationum for 11 percussionists, by Thierry De Mey. Ric Brown and David Norsworthy set fire to the stage with their performances, and while each brings his particular cadence and personality to the movement, together, they manage to create that exceptionally rare creature in dance — a perfect ensemble.


The centrepiece of the evening is “Split Screen Stereophonic,” which was first performed in 2013 and created in collaboration with original cast members including Benjamin Kamino, whose talent I have previously written about on Playstosee.com. On a stage split by two fabric screens with ghostly imprints of what could be leaves and branches, two women dance, seemingly alone in their spheres, and yet occasionally meeting in movement, like uncanny mirrored images. I say uncanny, because it is clear that they are each individual, and so these shared, symmetrical phrases of movement make us wonder about the many threads that unwittingly connect us in life.

Into this restless and almost consummate aloneness come two men, and the split screens provide us, the audience, with that tenderly voyeuristic experience of an outsider glancing through a window into the fragile, beautiful world of lovers unaware of any but themselves. Each couple inhabits their own personal vocabulary of desire, ultimately resolving in directions that cannot be foreseen. While the eye is drawn simultaneously to both couples, the raw, erotic symbiosis of Sarah Fregeau and David Norsworthy is truly heart-stopping, and ultimately, devastating.

In her pre-show talk, Peggy Baker shared the process by which “epilogue” was born. There she was, unable to create, until two chairs in a space became a dance. Set to the haunting *we were*, performed live on stage by Tim Motzer, this piece is a devastating exploration of loss as it hits later in life when our own mortality makes every shared embrace so much more precious. Watching Ms. Baker dance brought tears to my eyes because it was an exquisite reminder that even in the darkest hour of grief and longing, the body will dance with every fibre of being, and in the end, the spirit will be free to leave it all and walk away.

Split Screen Stereophonic is a must see for all Toronto audiences. These are performances that will inhabit you in the most magical ways for days to come.

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Dance Theatre

Choreography: Peggy Baker

Composers: John Kameel Farah, Thierry De Mey, Knuckleduster, and Tim Motzer

Dancers: Ric Brown, Sarah Fregeau, Kate Holden, David Norsworthy, and Peggy Baker

[The Theatre Centre, Toronto \(http://peggybakerdance.com/bookings/main-stage-touring/split-screen-stereophonic-epilogue\)](http://peggybakerdance.com/bookings/main-stage-touring/split-screen-stereophonic-epilogue)

21-26 February 2017

Reviewed by Aparna Halpé

23 February 2017

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Aparna Halpé is Professor of English at Centennial College, Toronto, Canada. Aparna holds a doctorate in English Literature from the University of Toronto, and has a life long love of the performing arts fostered by her early training in music, dance and theater. In addition to her scholarly work, Aparna is a published poet and founding member of the tango ensemble Ruta 7.

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