

## Arcade Fire members score Peggy Baker dance show at Place des Arts

*Sarah Neufeld and Jeremy Gara share the stage in Who We Are In the Dark, a collaboration with the dance icon at Théâtre Maisonneuve.*

Author of the article:

[T'Cha Dunlevy](#) • Montreal Gazette

Published Feb 27, 2019 • Last updated Feb 27, 2019 • 4 minute read

[Join the conversation](#)



Arcade Fire violinist Sarah Neufeld performs in dance choreographer Peggy Baker's new show Who We Are In the Dark. PHOTO BY JEREMY MIMNAGH

## Article content

There's dance music and there's dance music.

Arcade Fire has flirted with funkier sounds on its last couple albums; but band members Sarah Neufeld and Jeremy Gara up the ante with *Who We Are In the Dark*, their new collaboration with Canadian contemporary dance icon Peggy Baker, opening Wednesday at Place des Arts' Théâtre Maisonneuve.

"I met Sarah in the fall of 2015," said Baker, reached Monday at her Toronto home. "I had been invited to make a solo for the inaugural performance of the Fall For Dance North, in Toronto. I had retired as a soloist five years earlier, but it was an incredible opportunity."

Baker, 66, had often collaborated with classical musicians and new music composers over the course of her career, but she wanted to try something different.

"I thought, what if I work with a woman who is much younger, from the indie-rock world? I was introduced to Sarah Neufeld and we totally hit it off.

"I loved her physicality, her authenticity and the virtuosity of her playing. I also just loved her conceptual approach; in that first duet we made, we were both in isolated spaces on stage, so we had to work at very high speeds to keep the area lit up, it felt like."

Baker also asked Neufeld to write a prologue for the piece, titled Fractured Black, the opening line of which became the title for *Who We Are In the Dark*.

"We only have two realities, light and dark," Baker explained. "Darkness is fundamental to our experience — it's part of us. It's something we have to face, at different times in our life, when we lose someone we love, or we're lost to grief or depression. Our universe arose out of darkness; it's our fundamental reality, and light is the kind of miracle."

Baker and Neufeld met sporadically over the next few years. Then in January 2018, Baker invited Neufeld to the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity to work with her and seven dancers on the new production, which was already well underway.

"I came in as a raw, blank slate," Neufeld said. "I was the lone musician in the corner, adjusting to everything around me. I don't think I slept much — I was so excited. I was working so hard. I would run off to another studio after we workshopped a scene, and I would just work on my own parts.

"How I play is quite challenging and instrumentally difficult. I often have an idea, but I can't play it for a while. So having 15 people in a room, with cameras, I felt like: 'Oh my God I have to get away from everything to make it playable.' It was good, and humbling."

Outside of her work with Arcade Fire, Neufeld has released two solo albums of intense, intricate violin music, plus a similarly boundary-pushing collaborative album with saxophonist Colin Stetson.

When it came time to find another musician to round out the sound for *Who We Are In the Dark*, Gara was an obvious choice. Neufeld's longtime bandmate played on her 2016 solo release, *The Ridge*, and the two share a natural complicity.

"I was excited to work with him again," she said. "He has a really powerful drum sound."

Gara joined the rehearsals in the spring, by which time the performance was taking on a life of its own.

"It was trial by fire," he said. "There was Sara and the dancers, all together in a room. ... Even in a rock band or jazz combo, there's something exciting about responding to what you're seeing, and being in the moment with it.

"It's one thing to improvise with fellow musicians, but to respond to a completely different vocabulary and art form was amazing, and hard to quantify."

Baker is dedicating the show to the late Montreal artist John Heward, who died in November. The two had discussed working together for years, and finally got around to it with this show. Heward's unframed paintings are draped about the stage, providing a striking backdrop that mirrors the overall theme.

"His paintings carry a lot of physical history," Baker said. "He uses repurposed canvas and house paint brushes, painting in calligraphy strokes. His paintings are raw ... and carry a sense that they've been defaced. Some of them even look like they've been exposed to some kind of violence. Hanging in the space, like sheets, they look like ghosts of paintings.

"I can't wait for his widow, Sylvia Safdie, his colleagues, family and friends to experience this work in Montreal."

***AT A GLANCE: Danse Danse presents Peggy Baker Dance Projects' Who We Are in the Dark, featuring the music of Arcade Fire's Sarah Neufeld and Jeremy Gara, Wednesday to Saturday at 8 p.m. at Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts. Tickets cost \$50.88 to \$77.10, available at [dansedanse.ca](http://dansedanse.ca) or by calling 514-842-2112.***

[tdunlevy@postmedia.com](mailto:tdunlevy@postmedia.com)

[twitter.com/TChaDunlevy](https://twitter.com/TChaDunlevy)