

Saving grace

BY GAIL PACKWOOD

MUSIC FOR PIANO AND SOLO DANCER

Featuring Peggy Baker, Rex Harrington, Sasha Ivanochko. Presented by Peggy Baker Dance Projects with Andrew Burashko. Feb 5-6. Sat 8pm; Sun mat 4pm. \$28; \$22 students/seniors. Betty Oliphant Theatre, 404 Jarvis. 416-504-7529.

After spending “the last 15 years by myself in a studio,” acclaimed solo dance artist Peggy Baker is expanding on her creations in some very illustrious company.

This weekend, the final installment of her Choreographer’s Trust project will be onstage at the Betty Oliphant Theatre, featuring her signature solo,

“Brute,” as performed alternately by former National Ballet of Canada principal Rex Harrington and contemporary dance artist Sasha Ivanochko.

Baker’s self-imposed seclusion was part of the inspiration behind the three years she has spent working on the Choreographer’s Trust, which has enabled her to pass on selections from her choreographic repertoire to other respected dancers. Dance companies often keep work in rep for years, teaching a piece to successive company members indefinitely. This has not been an option for an artist like Baker, who instead of retiring in her thirties like most professional dancers, chose to pursue what became a highly successful solo career. Though she often



joins forces with composers and musicians (such as longtime collaborator Andrew Burashko, whose playing is intricately woven into these works), she mostly choreographs by herself. This project was propelled by Baker’s desire to preserve her years of “long and deep exploration” in the studio, which would have been lost if not shared with a new generation of dancers.

Baker, whose 33-year professional dance career has made her one of Canada’s most influential dancers and choreographers, was a founding mem-

Sasha Ivanochko (left) and Rex Harrington will perform *Brute* on alternate nights, both helping to preserve Peggy Baker’s work for her Choreographer’s Trust.

ber and director of Toronto’s Dance-makers, a member of the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in New York and a member of Mikhail Baryshnikov’s White Oak Dance Project.

Originally choreographed by Ms Baker in 1994, “Brute” is a 30-minute, technically difficult solo that requires a great deal of stamina. Baker can still dance it herself — at 52 she has no immediate plans to retire — however, in dance, with the risk of injury always present, it is better to never take anything for granted. And so, she passes on the torch.

For the project’s final chapter, Baker wanted performers who would bring a “curiosity and honesty” to the dance. Harrington and Ivanochko’s widely diverse training backgrounds made their exploration that much more interesting. As Baker says, “You are part of where you came from. The

process uncovers what is necessary in the dance. I gave them the information, but they interpret it themselves.”

The tall, classically trained Harrington has a radically different approach to the piece than that of the tiny, modern dancer Ivanochko. Both interpretations are equally valid in Baker’s mind. “It is the difference between the musical score and the playing of it,” she says. Her hope is that this will lead to a fuller articulation of the dance and that her work will become part of the dancers’ own concerts in the future, as well as something they can use to study and train with.

“Both Rex and Sasha have been magnificent. To work every day with them has been so wonderful. Their integrity and talent [has been] really moving. A gift.” Baker is sure to return this gift in kind to her audience. ■

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