

One of the most formidable presences on the modern dance scene appears at Harbourfront

by Karen Brooks

Peggy Baker is one of the most formidable presences on the Canadian modern music scene. Joining the Lar Lubovitch Dance Co. (New York) at its height in the 1980s, Baker became one of Canada's international stars. One of the founding members of Dancemakers in the 1970s with early graduates of York, Baker returned to Canada two years ago to pursue a solo career.

Baker will be performing "Sanctum" at the Premiere Dance Theatre, January 24 to 26. The piece began with a verbal image used by the late Martha Graham: "reading the future by casting sticks on the ground." "It was unlike any image I had ever had before," Baker says, "plus it was given to me by (Graham)."

Baker, 39, grew up in Edmonton wanting to be an actress. She started in musical theatre at the University of Alberta, where she won a \$100 scholarship from the provincial government "to put towards whatever kind of training I wanted."

Baker studied movement for actors with Trish Beatty, co-founder of the

PREVIEW

Peggy Baker
Premiere Dance Theatre, Harbourfront
January 24 to 26

Toronto Dance Theatre, in Drumheller, Alberta in the late 1960s. The early acting training gave her "many skills intellectually." "When I hit low ebb," she says, "I went into acting class for a year in New York, at the Herbert Berkoff studio. This brought me back to why I wanted to dance: it has a lot to do with expressing human ideas in the theatre."

Moving to New York in 1976, Baker made the transition out of the Graham-based method she had studied at Toronto Dance Theatre. "Even though initially (the Graham method) was a great thing for me, later it became difficult." At one point, she felt "too upset by dancing" and couldn't progress: "I didn't know how else to train in modern dance in Toronto. So I went to New York for a year."

In New York, Baker studied at the Graham school with Jennifer Muller and Matt Turney.

Back in Toronto, Baker helped

found Dancemakers. "When I was going through this difficulty, not knowing where to go to class, I audited at York. Everybody else who was in Dancemakers from the beginning was out of York."

Of the founding of Dancemakers, she says: "We were all raw. A good group of people, but we were really young. It was happening at a time when Toronto dance was Toronto Dance Theatre and the National (Ballet). The initial thing behind Dancemakers was Andrea Smith wanting to do a concert. We decided to become an umbrella organization that would take projects; the people who ran the company did all the administration and legwork."

In the early years, Dancemakers nurtured the talent of Robert Desrosiers, Pat Frazer, Pat Miner and Carol Anderson. "It changed a lot in the first few years. Things came and went."

After eight years with Dancemakers, Baker joined Lar Lubovitch's company. "Lar was a strong, forceful creator with a really strong aesthetic. One very sophisticated creator. We were really in sync for quite a while."



Dancer Peggy Baker, who will appear at Harbourfront's Premiere Dance Theatre from January 24 to 26. Baker, with some York graduates, was one of the founding members of Dancemakers, and has danced with Lar Lubovitch's company.

At 37, Baker faced a choice. She thought, "Am I going to spend the rest of my career with this company? Lar and I were veering off in other directions. What I really wanted to do wasn't happening in this company any more. I had this feeling that I wasn't of this dance community (in Toronto), and I wanted to be part of it again."

"My personal life brought me back to Toronto, and my professional life brought me back to Canada, and I'm quite happy to be here."

Baker says anglophone dance in Canada is relatively "underrated"

compared to the Montreal "scene" and the highly respected Montreal International Dance Festival.

In 1990, Baker worked with choreographer Mark Morris in the "White Oak Project," the brainchild of Mikhail Baryshnikov, his "dream company." "Misha really wanted to start working in modern dance," Baker explained. "He fell in love with it at a certain point. Mark is a formidably talented creator. The combination is quite a knockout."

"After the first ('White Oak Project'), I felt that I could just go onto Misha's coattails and then I'd be 40 and I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted." Baker chose to become an independent: "I want to be in control of it. I want to choose who's working around me."

Asked if she considers Toronto a post-modern dance scene she answers: "Bill T. Jones, Charlie Molton — (it's) more of a New York phenomenon. Something else happened here... York spewed out all of these creators in the 70s. A big raft of people came out one after the other. They wanted to dance in serious movement pieces. It's just about generations washing up. So I don't know if we've ever had post-modern dance in Toronto — I'm not sure what kind of name I'd give to it."

"One of the amazing things about Toronto is the way music and dance has come together — that's been a strong characteristic of the dance impetus. It's the respect that the dance world here has for music in general."

Peggy Baker will be performing with Peter Ottmann and Ahmed Hassan at the Premiere Dance Theatre January 24 and 25 at 8 pm and January 26 at 2 pm. For more information, call Harbourfront, 973-4000.

Children's theatre more valuable experience than Terminator

by Moira MacDonald

I envy Robert Priest's kids. Not only does their poet/playwright/musician dad tell them neat-o stories at bedtime, but he has just turned one into a musical!

The story-cum-musical, *Knights of the Endless Day* runs until February 9 at Young People's Theatre. Priest got the idea for the work while telling tuck-in stories to his step-son Ananda, at the time in the throes of Dungeons and Dragons-mania.

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It's great fun, has catchy songs, cool dancing and expounds the beauties of non-violence and environmental awareness. But the best feature of *Knights* is that it takes an

THEATRE

Knights of the Endless Day
written by Robert Priest
directed by Jennifer Stein
Young People's Theatre
until February 9

otherwise predictable medieval fantasy and turns the whole idea of romantic chivalry on its ear.

The King of Orriador (Jim Warren) has just called a tourney for all men, regardless of social class. Ogo (Cliff Saunders), a strong but gentle commoner, enters the competition, his head filled with dreams of slaying fire-breathing dragons and riding a fine steed. The King is certainly impressed with Ogo's knightly aptitude but, to Ogo's dismay, charges him with the task of carrying the baby Princess Illia to her mother, Queen Blue (Kyra Harper), on the other side of the Kingdom.

The task takes some creativity on Ogo's part: hammering his knight's shield into a baby carrier, escaping

dangerous situations with dragons, giants and djinns *without* using violence (how many mothers have you seen fighting wars while wearing a snugly?) and learning to change diapers on the medieval trail (no disposables back then!). The words of an oath he once made to his own mother still ring in his ears: "I shall never raise this sword against the earth."

Gee, it all sounds so nice, so...idealistic. How come nobody made a pledge like Ogo's before the Gulf War? But that is what's great about *Knights*: it melds the best of 1990s social philosophy with all the possibilities of medieval fantasy, transforming them both.

In Orriador a man *can* be sensitive without being an emotional weakling, the power of pacifism is greater than the rule of the sword and moral integrity — not birth or wealth — determines a person's worth.

Where, but in Priest's world, could garlic be considered so sacred that a knight would be sent on a quest for it?



Lindsay Collins, Jani Lauzon and Oliver Dennis star in Robert Priest's *Knights of the Endless Day*. This children's play melds the best of 1990s social philosophy with all the possibilities of medieval fantasy, transforming them both. More than that, it is guaranteed to hold any kid's attention — and it's better for them than anything with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Call for submissions

Submissions are now being accepted for the League of Canadian Poets' fifth annual National Poetry Contest. There will be three cash prizes (\$1,000, \$750 and \$500), and the best 50 poems will be published in an anthology.

Entries must be unpublished and not exceed 75 written lines. There is an entry fee of \$6 per poem, and you can submit as many poems as you like.

The deadline for submissions is January 31, 1992. This year's jurors are poets Arnold Itwaru, Lola Tostevin and Daniel David Moses. The awards will be presented at the League's Annual General Meeting in May.

The League of Canadian Poets is a national association of over 300 professional, published poets. The money raised from the contest, after paying for prizes and other expenses, assists the League in promoting its members and Canadian poetry; in addition, five per cent of the contest proceeds are donated to the Give the Gift of Literacy Foundation.

For more information on the League of Canadian Poets, the contest or the collection of last year's winners, tentatively titled *More Garden Varieties, Three*, write The League of Canadian Poets, 24 Ryerson Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2P3. The League's phone number is (416) 363-5047; its fax number is 860-0862.