

DANCE REVIEW

Collaboration needs more simmering

Are You Okay

★★½ (out of 4)

Written and choreographed by, and starring, Peggy Baker and Michael Healey. At Factory Studio Theatre, 125 Bathurst St, to March 13; 416-504-9971

MICHAEL CRABB

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

As in the kitchen, so in the theatre, one trusts the finished dish will stir the taste buds by amounting to more than a simple combination of ingredients.

Alas, in the case of *Are You Okay*, a collaboration between a group of award-magnet stage artists, the result does not quite fulfil its delectable promise.

Are You Okay brings together dancer/choreographer Peggy Baker, actor/playwright Michael Healey, and Necessary Angel Theatre's artistic director, Daniel Brooks.

The idea is to explore the revelatory sparks that fly when Baker and Healey each does her/his own thing at the same time on the same stage.

It differs notably from Denise Clark's *Radio Play* in 2008, which paired Baker and Healey in a more conventional, scripted format.

Baker, 58, and Healey, 47, are established and acclaimed; but where

does that leave them?

Healey, of course, could potentially continue to write and perform until his dotage. As a dancer, Baker must confront the inevitable deterioration of her physical instrument, although that will not stop her from choreographing.

These midlife concerns fuel Healey's witty, often thought-provoking monologue.

Imagine a deconstructed mix of

Garrison Keillor and Spalding Gray that is speeded up, turned in on itself repeatedly and more evocatively acted out. The gist of it is that midlife can resemble being caught in a continual holding pattern.

Baker, meanwhile, within the linearly defined black box of Factory Theatre's studio space, delivers her own kind of monologue in the inherently more poetic but less specific language of movement.

Middle-aged or not, she's still quite the mover; eloquent in gesture and viscerally expressive.

Baker does not appear to be attempting a direct choreographic response to Healey's words.

Then there's the problem of deciding on whom to focus. If you respond to physical language, Baker draws your attention and Healey's words tend to become background noise — supplemented by composer/musician Debashis Sinha's delicate, occasional interventions from his place in a small pit.

With such artists, it makes for an intriguing experience, but the recipe itself remains problematic.