

DANCE REVIEW

he:she: An exploration of dualities

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- Title he:she
- Company Peggy Baker Dance Projects
- Venue Betty Oliphant Theatre
- City Toronto
- Runs Until Sunday, April 6, 2014

Choreography by Peggy Baker and Paul-André Fortier

Dance for revered choreographer Peggy Baker means beautiful bodies moving beautifully through space.

As a result, there are certain elements one expects in a Peggy Baker show. Wall-to-wall movement executed by top-of-the-line dancers. Music of substance. Dance pieces whose themes run deep. The overall productions buffed to a high gloss. In other words, Baker is a class act.

In her program notes for her latest show *he:she*, Baker describes the evening as an exploration of dualities – yang/yin, youth/age, acoustic/electronic, light/dark, and so on. She is also on record as stating that she will never have a dance performed to taped music, if the music was meant to be performed live. Thus, the program features live music for three out of the four pieces.

The show contains two premieres that are very different.

The male trio *stone leaf shell skin*, inspired by the erotically charged black-and-white images of legendary American photographer Edward Weston (1886-1958), is a winner. The commissioned score by Heather Schmidt, performed live by celebrated cellist Shauna Rolston, is a cunning mix of attractive modernist melodies set over a track of electronic drones.

In the piece, Sean Ling, Ric Brown and Mateo Galindo Torres pass through many stages, from the obvious testosterone ragings, to the more surprising languid sensuality. They engage in follow the leader, one-upmanship, fun-loving athleticism, group hugs, and, more importantly, vulnerability. It is almost as if Rolston, the lone woman on stage, is driving the trio to become more interior and reflective as the piece goes on.

Aleatoric Duet No. 2 is part of an ongoing Baker exploration. Aleatoric means “by chance,” and as Ling and Andrea Nann perform their attractive duet, musician John Kameel Farah, surrounded by his samplers and mixers, improvises the music. The material in the dance is culled from Baker’s choreography that Ling and Nann have performed on previous occasions.

The rich program also includes the exquisite *Sylvan Quartet* (1998), set to angst-filled music by Cha Ka Nin, performed by dancer Sahara Morimoto, cellist Rolston, pianist Farah and clarinetist Max Christie. Baker also takes to the stage in Paul-André Fortier’s enigmatic solo, *Box, la femme au carton*. (2011).