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Dance makes mathematical equations 'beautiful and dynamic': review

Geometry is no stranger to dance and it plays an important role in Peggy Baker's *locus plot*.



MAKOTO HIRATA

From left, Kate Holden, Sahara Morimoto and Sarah Fregeau in Peggy Baker Dance Projects' *locus plot*.

By: **Michael Crabb** Dance, Published on Sun Apr 26 2015

locus plot

Choreography by Peggy Baker. Until May 3, Betty Oliphant Theatre, 404 Jarvis St., Toronto; 1-888-838-3006 or peggybakerdance.com

A dance inspired by mathematical formulae might sound daunting. As filtered through the imagination of choreographer Peggy Baker it's anything but.

You could have flunked math and still relish Baker's *locus plot*. If you're a math whiz you'll likely be intrigued by how far an artist can take an abstract concept to animate human bone, muscle and mind in space and time.

Baker's new 55-minute *locus plot*, which opened on Friday and has five more showings this week, is her first stand-alone, evening-length group work. As the veteran dancer/choreographer explained in a pre-performance talk, her curiosity was sparked by a TVOntario program about mathematics. In particular, Baker was fascinated by pictorial renderings of mathematical equations that express various physical laws.

She found them, "beautiful and dynamic." They suggested a parallel with the graphic rendering on paper of movement, what's known as dance notation.

Baker then chose a number of schematics, using their graphical plots, as shaped by a formula's loci, as

a map for the invention of a dance. Along the way, Baker introduced another component, the “vocalography” of Fides Krucker.

Together they consulted mathematician and playwright John Mighton. He also provided freehand images of what one assumes were Baker’s favoured formulae, projected onto a screen during the dance. Finally, pianist/composer John Kameel Farah was brought into the artistic mix.

The Betty Oliphant Theatre stage was undecorated. The simple black draping at the back and sides provided an open performance area that, according to Marc Parent’s lighting plot, could be made to appear infinite or tightly defined. A large geometric pattern, taped down in the middle of the stage, was a reminder of what drove the dance.

Geometry, of course, is no stranger to dance, particularly to classical ballet where the individual lines of a dancer’s body and the patterns navigated across a stage are essential to the overall choreographic effect.

Baker’s geometry is not classical. The schematics that inspired her curve, coil, spiral and intersect. Their information is not just linear. They signify such factors as direction and speed.

Baker’s excellent cast — Ric Brown, Sarah Fregeau, Kate Holden, Sean Ling and Sahara Morimoto — are costumed by Robyn Macdonald for all but the final section in casual pants and tops.

The dance progresses in defined sequences with the cast deployed as an ensemble, intricately negotiating prescribed floor patterns then later appearing in short solos, duets and trios. At first the choreography in its patterning seems deliberately ordered and measured; circling, converging, limbs thrusting outward like errant radiuses. Later the mood becomes playful, almost skittish, the dancers briefly freed from all constraint.

As the work unfolds, one finds hints of an internal drama, both abstractly kinetic and human. Yet while there are suggestions of character, *locus plot* does not appear particularly concerned with projecting identifiable emotions or playing, as dance so often does, on gender differences and stereotypes.

Where emotion arises it has much to do with the extraordinary vocalizations Krucker has given the dancers. These range from the almost inaudible to growls, raucous whoops, yells, quasi-coloratura bird calls and visceral rumblings. While odd at times they never seem superfluous; more an audible expression of the dance itself.

Farah’s score is much more than an accompaniment. It has an extraordinary and complementary life of its own. Farah performs live onstage, seated at a grand piano and surrounded by electronic devices that add layers of colour and rhythmic effects.

At times, the piano’s acoustic sounds are digitally processed, as are the dancers’ vocals. Stylistically Farah ranges wide, offering melody, strong dance beats, lush atmospheric passages and an almost show-stopping, fast-fingered quasi-cadenza.

Baker’s *locus plot* journeys far from its specific inspiration but if the mathematical connection at times seems tenuous, an artistic licence that is completely justifiable, the dance itself is always enthralling to watch.