



JEREMY MIMNAGH

Sahara Morimoto and Ric Brown perform in Peggy Baker's *Phase Space*, which is rife with emotional substance.

Dance explores chaos of memories

Phase Space

★★★★ (out of 4)

Choreography by Peggy Baker, Peggy Baker Dance Projects. At the Betty Oliphant Theatre, 404 Jarvis St., until Jan. 31. peggybakerdance.com or 1-800-838-3006

MICHAEL CRABB

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

You don't need to know about the unusual genesis of Peggy Baker's latest choreographic offering, *Phase Space*, to feel enriched by watching the four dances it includes.

The performers are uniformly excellent. The production is spare yet meticulously designed and executed. Marc Parent's lighting can switch from surgical precision to radiantly diffused atmospheric effects. John Kameel Farah's soundscape is much more than conventional accompaniment.

It is an integral participant in the evolving action.

Baker's choreography, while essentially abstract, is rife with emotional substance.

It's akin to experiencing an inexplicably

cably compelling piece of music or a painting that grabs attention but defies accurate description.

Each of the dances can be savoured on its own terms, yet, together, their shared choreographic DNA makes them part of a whole.

Those familiar with Baker as both solo artist and choreographer will spot references to her favoured ways of articulating the body.

Phrases of movement, often angular and gestural, are punctuated with pauses.

As a dancer, Baker, now more or less retired from performance, exuded deliberation and purposefulness. Yet others are dancing here and their physicality and individuality, at times more overtly emotive than Baker's slightly austere and rigorous mode, together with the way fragments of familiar movement are recombined, make the old look completely new.

So it is fascinating to learn from Baker's exceptionally clear program note that the springboard for *Phase Space* is a concept drawn from physics and mathematics.

With *Phase Space*, Baker's central concern is the messy fluidity of human memory, the way it defies logic and chronology or, as she puts it, "unravels, floats, dissolves, reverses, contracts, expands and spirals."

It helps make sense of the dreamlike world of *Phase Space's* opening trio with its distortions of size and thus perspective. The high-pitched squeals and visceral growls emitted by Sahara Morimoto, Sarah Fregeau and Ric Brown in their rendering of Fides Krucker's "vocalography" augment a generalized sense of unpredictability, even chaos.

But memories can also appear to fall into order, create mirror images and idealized outcomes; except, uncontrollably, they're apt to morph into something else. There's a sense of this in a duet by Morimoto and Andrea Nann.

A closing solo for Kate Holden is almost a duet with its set-piece, a large hanging framed canvas. The object is motionless, but the shadows it casts and Holden's intense awareness of its presence are crucial to the solo's faintly eerie aura.