



SPLITSCREEN: PEGGY BAKER'S DANCE SHOWCASE

By Sveta Soloveva



*David Norsworthy and Sarah Fregeau in Split Screen
Stereophonic. Photo by Tim Nguyen*

During a phone conversation, choreographer **Peggy Baker** compared her latest work **SplitScreen** to a couple of google-windows opened side by side on the display. Even if they talk about the same thing, the information on each them are different. Hence, one has to focus on one or the other window to get the information.



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The audience had to make decisions of a similar nature while watching *SplitScreen* at **The Theatre Centre** this Tuesday evening, because each the four dances in the program has two synchronous, but distinct, lines of action.

Working with four of the best dancers in the Toronto dance scene — **Ric Brown**, **Sarah Fregeau**, **Kate Holden**, and **David Norsworthy** —, as well as Montreal-based lighting designer **Marc Parent** and Philadelphia-based guitarist **Tim Motzer**, the 64-year-old choreographer's latest features some utterly fascinating moments of contemporary dance.

Holden, in a pale dress, illuminates the stage in the opening solo from *Locus Plot* (2015). With sharp moves and convulsive breaths she contradicts three shadows (Fregeau, Brown, and Norsworthy) who, staying in a far corner, stroke the air with their arms and legs as if they were singing a lullaby with their bodies.

The mood changes completely when two men, Norsworthy and Brown, simultaneously perform their energetic solos. The oldest choreography *Yang* (1998) is the most gymnastic and fast-paced. The audience's glances shift from one dancer to the other as they jump, somersault and run in turns, impressing with their virtuous dance techniques.

Split Screen Stereophonic (2013) is an imperturbable observation of the intimate lives of two couples. Again, the attention shifts between two duets — Fregeau and Norsworthy, and Holden and Brown — who change their body languages in relation to their partners and echo each other throughout the whole dance. Fregeau and Norsworthy's performance is especially passionate and intense.

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Peggy Baker in Epilogue. Photo by Tim Nguyen

"People who come to see my work, see very highly-structured choreography that creates room for extremely spontaneous and physical interpretation by the dancers," says Baker.

The dancers are not the only characters in the contemporary fairytales. The presence of light and music is irrefutable. It's felt particularly in ***Epilogue*** when Baker appears on the stage along with Motzer. Her solo is a silent monologue accompanied by two chairs, the symbols of dismantled relationship. Baker replaces the chairs, saturating each move with drama. Because the dance has many pauses and focus on the story-line rather than extraordinary movements, sometimes Motzer's melody *We Were* stands out in place of the performance.

Light helps the dancers deliver their complex moves and emotions. It gives the performers dramatic looks by illuminating only one side of their faces, or, together with Larry Hahn's setting for the stereophonic, it divides the scene into two different apartments with large windows.

This harmonic textures of light, space, and sound intensifies the sense of three-dimensional space and gives plenty of room for imagination.

SplitScreen is at **The Theatre Centre**, 1115 Queen St. W., Feb. 21-26. **Tickets:** 416-538-

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