

## susan walker's artsblog

dance, film, theatre, books, what-have-you



### Dancing explosively into the light

*From ghoulies and ghosties  
And long-leggedy beasties  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord, deliver us!*

Such sentiments – and a whole lot more – have inspired the spectacular and often profound multimedia production that is *who we are in the dark*. The Peggy Baker Dance project that premiered last night at Canadian Stage's Bluma Appel Theatre grew out of a

short 2015 work, *fractured black*, that marked the first collaboration between Baker and dynamic violinist Sarah Neufeld, a member of Arcade Fire and the Montreal ensemble Bell Orchestre.

Baker's best performances have centred on a live interaction between solo musician and dancer or dancers. For *who we are in the dark*, Baker pairs Neufeld with Arcade Fire master drummer Jeremy Gara, on a riser upstage. The show builds like the progress of a chemical reaction as eight dancers move through a space of electric possibility. Gara's drumming is synched to Jeremy Mimmagh's surging black and white projections on the stage-high back scrim, while Marc Parent's incisive strobes, like criss-crossed bars of neon light, animate a stage bathed in mood-altering ultraviolet, turquoise and nightshade colours.

Kate Holden, the premiere interpreter of Baker's choreographic vision, leads us into the fray, as Sarah Fregeau, Mairi Greig, Nicole Rose Bond, Benjamin Kamino, Sahara Morimoto, David Norsworthy and Jarrett Siddall form a well rehearsed and coordinated ensemble.

Who are we in the dark? We're scared, we're secretive, combative, sexual, intimate – we're in touch with our id. All is expressed in Baker's muscular, enclosing and repelling movements and Fides Krucker's vocalography: the dancers' growls of satisfaction or apprehension, howls of pain, murmurs of animal pleasure or mewls of a creature looking for its mother, as they move in ensemble like a mob driven by the collective unconscious.

The huge, furiously painted canvas hangings of the recently deceased Montreal artist John Heward add another layer to *who we are in the dark*. One hangs on the wall above the musicians and never moves. Others, displaying Gestalt images such a circle or a crude house or mountain, drop down into the performance space, where the dancers tear them and move through them as if they constituted another form of music.

A chilling, electric hum rises and falls through the piece as Gara's primal, syncopated drum rhythms and Neufeld's scissoring violin bow, alternately frantic and soothing, drive the dancers. Four same-sex and male-female couples express their love in dance. In one still moment, Neufeld does a vigorous violin solo in a spotlight cone, in conversation with a line of dancers, Holden in the forefront, leaning in to the music with beautiful Baker sweeping arms and elongated torso and legs. As the music, lightshow and projections rise to a crescendo, the scrim turns into a rainbow-coloured swirl of paint, a backdrop for Sarah Fregeau, who enters in a pearl grey costume, as if she's found enlightenment.

These are dark times and great art can lead us toward the light at the end of the tunnel. *who we are in the dark* was made possible with cash from the National Arts Centre's Creation Fund and the dare-to-dream determination of CanStage executive producer Sherrie Johnson. Baker and her collaborators have mounted a show that reveals just how big they can go given the right budget.

### **who we are in the dark**

Concept, choreography and direction by Peggy Baker

Composition and live music by Sarah Neufeld and Jeremy Gara

A Peggy Baker Dance Projects production presented by Canadian Stage with Fall for Dance North

At the Bluma Appel Theatre, Toronto, until Feb 24; Montreal's Théâtre Maisonneuve, Feb 27-March 2; Hamilton's McMaster University, March 6; Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity, March 9; Whitehorse's Yukon Arts Centre, March 13; and Kingston's Grand Theatre, April 9, 2019

Photo by Jeremy Mimmagh

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