

# The George Cedric Metcalf Foundation:

Sustaining the vibrancy of the professional performing arts

Small and mid-sized organizations are an essential component of the performing arts ecology. They are being challenged to respond to a difficult and rapidly changing environment, but they have no resources with which to pursue innovative strategies for change and development. In 2001 the Metcalf Foundation launched its Strategic Initiatives Program to help these organizations achieve key organizational goals. They are given an opportunity, over a three-year period, to implement a strategic course of action that would not be possible under normal budgetary circumstances.

A Canadian dance icon, Peggy Baker is recognized around the world as one of the most outstanding contemporary dancers of her generation. Working primarily as a solo dancer, with equally respected composers, musicians, and other artists, she has created and performed a stunning body of work.

In the last few years Peggy has been doing some of her deepest and best work. But she is also facing a difficult and inevitable challenge for a dancer, the physical reality of age. This was the profound question facing Peggy: What is to happen to her remarkable life's work when she is no longer able to perform it?

Peggy's response was bold, creative, and generous. She approached the Metcalf Foundation with a strategy designed to ensure a living legacy of her work, as well as to create a comprehensive and permanent record of her



Peggy Baker, Canada's modern dance icon

creative process. In response, the Metcalf Foundation gave Peggy Baker and her company \$60,000 between 2001 and 2003. This Choreographer's Trust was used to fund a teaching and recording project with young dancers. Peggy chose 6 pairs of younger dancers, taught each pair one of her best solo works, and gave them the right to continue to

perform these pieces throughout their own careers.

To preserve this unique creative mentoring process, each rehearsal was documented, so that the choreography was captured with special written notation and video. A visual artist created a portfolio of sketches,

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and a writer kept a running diary of Peggy's teaching, the dancers' reactions, and her own musings on the project. This record will be preserved, with Peggy's original choreographic notes, as an outstanding resource. It illuminates, in an unprecedented way, the physical and aesthetic ideas and the creative process that drive the choreography of Peggy Baker. One of the great discoveries Peggy made during the Choreographer's Trust was how much her choreography was enriched by the contributions of each different dancer - men and

women - as the work progressed. For the chosen twelve, it was a profound and lasting gift, and the opportunity of a lifetime to be taught by someone of Peggy's brilliance and experience.

In her report Peggy remarked: "It is profoundly gratifying to know that the knowledge and ideas absorbed and developed through my own career have been shared in meaningful ways and that they will continue to expand...It has been tremendously heartening for me to gain a new appreciation of my choreography through the interpretation of dancers other than myself. It has given me the confidence both to

continue to include older works in my active repertoire, and also to continue to create on and for myself."

The Choreographer's Trust celebrates and preserves the past of one of Canada's outstanding artists, while providing her with a period of wonderful creative renewal. It will have a lasting impact on some of the leading artists in a new generation of Canadian contemporary dance. And it will ensure that Peggy Baker's artistry will continue to move and inspire audiences for many years to come.