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By Clive Barnes

Gillis: In a realm of her own

Some dancers can hold a stage, all alone, with one imperious gesture. Some dancers have to - they are those now unusual creatures, the dance recitalists, such as Margie Gillis, who on Tuesday night opened a season at the Joyce Theater.

Once upon time, at the beginning of the century when modern dance was so modern that it didn't need to be hyphenated to indicate that it was a style not a vintage, dance recitalists were all the rage.

There was Isadora Duncan - the grandmother of them all - Ruth St. Denis, Loie Fuller, and Maud Allen, all women who before World War 1 had danced their own free-style way across the stages of the world.

Although today the solo dance recitalist may be a rarity, among those rare birds the reputation of Margie Gillis is unsurpassed.

A Canadian like her trail-blazing predecessor, Allen, Gillis is a wonderful dancer with a robust passion, a compelling sense of life and music, and most important, that heaven-sent ability to carve movement into the memory of its audience. This can make triviality significant and make significance almost shattering in its impact.

This was the effect of her new-old piece, the revival of Pauline Koner's ecstatic solo "The Farewell," created in 1962 to the memory of modern-pioneer Doris Humphrey.

Set to the final section of Mahler's mighty "Das Lied von Erde," Koner's beautifully staged and lyrically choreographed farewell to her great mentor, seamlessly evokes the multifarious spirit of Humphrey and the manner of her dance.

Now Gillis transforms it not only into an homage to Humphrey, with her specific technique of fall and recovery, but also an homage to Koner herself.

Gillis was briefly joined in a couple of dances, first by Paola Styron in the visually arresting : "The Heaven I Cannot See" and also by the always elegant Robert LaFosse in a heart-tugging emotional duet "Vers la Glace."

But it is as a woman alone that she burns most bright and shines most clearly - whether she is semi-doodling a baroque dance to the opening of Glenn Gould's recording of the Goldberg Variations, or, at the end of her program, again to Bach, dazzling with her technique and spirit in a dance called most appropriately, "Slipstream."

Yes, indeed, a woman alone, and one of a kind.