

Gillis a powerhouse, of emotion like a flame on a cold night

Margie Gillis swept an audience up in her intense explosions of human emotion at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium on Wednesday night.

The sensual, sinewy, statuesque dancer received a standing ovation and a storm of applause after a nearly two-hour program. She performed her own solos, from her 1986 signature piece *The Little Animal* to her 1993 solo *Torn Roots, Broken Branches*, and two duets with Joao Mauricio, a former member of Brazil's Olympic team who danced 10 years with the Paul Taylor Dance Company. Gillis, remarkable for her long auburn mane and gestural and expressive power, has been compared to Isadora Duncan. Her solos are movement pictures of universal emotion that swiftly carry an impact purely in the language of the body.

For the last five years Gillis has been working on duets with other choreographers. Her duets created and performed with Mauricio don't deliver the same sucker-punch as her solos, which freeze the viewer with beautifully, intense, emotive pictures.

Last night's program was bracketed by two solos to Bach. Larger dance companies often dance to Bach as mathematical movement patterns akin to counterpoint. Gillis finds the emotion in the music, and lets the music trace patters on her body and spirit. In the 1991 *Variations*, to the beginning of Glenn Gould's hum-filled recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations, her body is, to her own humorous surprise, taken over by the hiccups and tumbling phrases on the music. For the 1985 *Slipstream*, to Bach's *Prelude, Suite No. 1 in G Major*, Gillis lets her long hair, previously braided, loose and performs a wild, joyous, passionate dance that includes a back-flip.

*The Little Animal* is a short piece about evolution in which a floor-based, splayed-foot, crouching animal rises to life. Some of the lower head movements suggests contrition.

*Bloom*, 1989, is completely opposite and demonstrates Gillis's range. Gillis dances to Siobhan McKenna's reading of Molly Bloom's soliloquies from *Ulysses*. The stunning dance brilliantly exclaims the words with quick gestures and flashing facial expression and also conveys a character of a repressed woman re-entering the passions of her romantic past.

*Torn Roots, Broken Branches*, 1993, the solo Gillis created after the death of her brother, Christopher Gillis, is a fierce, primal expression of rage and grief danced to a Sinead O'Connor song with its raw, Celtic passion.

Gillis' first duet with Mauricio, *Window of Loss*, 1996, choreographed by Gillis, Mauricio and her brother Christopher Gillis, is a straightforward romantic duet with initial playful, sunny, languorous, stretching movements of a dashing-about happy couple whose love breaks down into sadness and distance. A bit melodramatic, it is set to two songs by Jacques Brel.

The second duet, *Comme Une Pierre Sur Le Ciel*, 1996 by Gillis and Mauricio, is an odd piece with piercing music by Akikazu Nakamura, music like the high end of a recorder. The dance could also be called 50 ways to get out of a robe. Both Gillis and Mauricio, a powerful gestural dancer with great physique, are mostly nude under giant, grey, kimono-like robes.

Gillis has been dancing for 23 years; her movements are familiar but particularly in her solos, they have a depth-charge that is intoxicating.

The house was two thirds full, a surprise since Gillis, a hero of Canada's dance world, rarely visits Halifax and delivers essential human emotion like a flame on a cold night.