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By Lisa Cochrane  
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## Local dance fans rejoice in Gillis's return

Margie Gillis, Canada's internationally acclaimed solo dancer artist, treated as enraptured audience Wednesday to her first Halifax show in nearly a decade. Gillis delivered on the promise of her exemplary reputation with a varied program of solo and duets.

In the nine years since we saw her Titian tresses flung across a Halifax stage, Gillis has been appointed to the Order of Canada and has toured extensively, playing at every major dance event and venue around the world. Gillis's rich life is magically funnelled into her an increasingly phenomenal performance. Sharing the stage with her was an exceptional Brazilian - born guest artist, Joao Mauricio, who has danced for New York's Paul Taylor Dance Company for 10 years.

The highlight was Gillis's solo, Bloom, created in 1989 and danced while actress Siobhan McKenna read excerpts from James Joyce's Ulysses . While the words revealed a woman's scorn over her husband's deceptions and the bliss of finding love amid the splendor of nature, Gillis's artistry brought a superb dimension to this juxta-position of the text and dance. Seamlessly weaving a series of gestures and short movements, some literal ( a dangling head and swishing hair becomes a tired horse ) and some purely evocative (undulating torso and gnarled wrist implying anger and betrayal ), Gillis revealed a strong sense of character and a mischievous wit. Her Molly Bloom is a raw feeling; Gillis's athleticism allowed her to release herself into the emotion.

In Window of Loss, Gillis examined a relationship in a more traditional duet, something like, "here we are blissfully together and now something horrible has happened, and so we suffer." The audacious choice to dance the second part to Jacques Brel's heartwrenching Ne me quitte pas worked. Gillis and Mauricio transformed frolic to anguish, ending apart, with him in a crouched position and her low and quizzical, looking up as if to suggest, "How could this happen?"

Gillis explored loss again In Torn Roots, Broken Branches, choreographed after the death of Gillis's brother, Christopher. Wearing a black flowing dress and jacket by designer Norma Kamali, Gillis shared her teeth-clenching pain in a classic work dances to a powerful Sinead O'Connor song. With arms waving wildly and her mouth agape, Gillis was enveloped by grief and the billowing black tissue of her dress.

The evening closed with one of Gillis's signature works, Slipstream, a joyful flirt danced to the music by Bach. She pulsed her way through the well-crafted, simple work. Her work is accessible, no holds barred. An openness and sense of self - disclosure crumbled the wall of uncertainty that often keeps the viewer from understanding dance. One could clearly feel the abandon surging beneath her carefully constructed choreography and the passion for life that fuels her private poetry.

Gillis makes us want to dance ourselves, And in all her imperfect humanity she conveys that we can. Upon her crisp climatic finale, audience members leapt from their seats into spontaneous applause, Our hearts were already dancing.