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By Paula Citron

Gillis seduces another crowd with more meditative work
Dance Review

The standing ovation that followed Margie Gillis's performance at Premier Dance Theatre Tuesday night was heart felt. Once again the Montreal-based dancer had seduced an audience with her philosophy of movement as emotional expression.

Two decades ago, Gillis was the wild child of Canadian dance: Give her any piece of music, and she could turn it into a physical torrent of passionate storytelling. Now 45 years old, Gillis is a mature artist who opts for more craft and less impulse. As Tuesday night's program indicated, her works have become more reflective and meditative, perhaps even cerebral.

Although Gillis may have put distance between herself and the audience with more formality of structure, the raw emotionalism of her earlier pieces is never far from the surface. Indeed, in some ways the dancer is making herself more physically vulnerable, as three of the five pieces involved nudity.

Two duets, co-choreographed and performed with guest artists from New York, point to the new direction of the mature Gillis. *Comme une pierre sur le ciel* (1996) is set to an original composition by Akikazu Nakamura, and moves with the stately measures of an ancient Noh drama. Created with Joao Mauricio, the dance depicts the tortured relationship between a woman and a man who, at various times, is her child, lover and father. The power struggle becomes a physical contest as the dancers sit, stand and crouch on each other's bodies, and Gillis attempts to consume the man in the folds of her voluminous grey kimono. Only their faces betray the emotions beneath their rigid body control.

By contrast, *Nothing Clings to You* (1997) – created with Paola Styron to a quiet, atmospheric score by Eugene Friesen and John Oswald – is more about liberation. The two women are alter egos, both clothed in identical long dresses with provocatively open backs, one in white and the other in black. Perfectly matched, they move with exquisite feminine grace, swirling their trains, posing like artists' models. Yet the urge for freedom calls, and to answer it as individuals, they separate and become naked. The piece is a paean to womanhood in all its complexities.

Voyage (1998) is probably Gillis's most ambitious work. The 25-minute solo takes inspiration from Québécois songwriter Gilles Vigneault's *Si les bateaux*, which has been fashioned into an eerie sound collage of disjointed musical fragments and sea sounds by composer Gaétan Leboeuf. In her turn-of-the-century skirt, jacket and cap, Gillis is an immigrant in search of a home, emotionally and spiritually. But she is distracted by personal demons, evidenced by her unfastened clothes and the two suitcases of emotional baggage she must find a way to carry. The work is overlong, repetitive and rather self-indulgent, but a flawed Gillis is still a magnificent force on the stage. (And Pierre Lavoie's masterful lighting for the three recent pieces also deserves a special mention.)

The program is rounded out by two of the dancer's famous solos. The charming and droll *Bloom* (1989) is set to the late Irish actress Siobhan McKenna's readings from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, while the whimsical *Variations* (1991) perfectly captures Glenn Gould's eccentric and brilliant Bach piano style in movement.