



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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## Baker wins Premier's Award

BY JAMES ADAMS, TORONTO

**A**claimed Toronto dancer and choreographer Peggy Baker has been named the winner of the inaugural Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Cash value of the prize is \$35,000, one of the richest in Canada.

Baker's win was announced yesterday evening at a reception at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto by Ontario Deputy Premier George Smitherman and Culture Minister Caroline Di Cocco. Premier Dalton McGuinty, who last year announced the creation of the award to honour individual Ontario artists or groups, could not attend because he was in Washington, discussing cross-border issues with U.S. policy-makers and fellow provincial premiers.

Baker, chosen by a panel of jurors, was one of six finalists for the prize. Each of the runners-up — the De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group from Manitoulin Island, Almonte artist Jean Geur, the Ottawa Chamber Music Society, Toronto playwright Judith Thompson and Le Théâtre de Nouvel-Ontario in Sudbury — receives \$2,000.

Baker, now 54, came to Toronto from her home city of Edmonton in 1971 to study at the Toronto Dance Théâtre. In 1974 she became one of the founders of Dancemakers Toronto. Seven years later she moved to New York to join the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, with whom she toured internationally. In 1998 she was chosen to perform with Mikhail Baryshnikov's elite White Oaks Dance Project. Annie Leibovitz photographed her. The noted choreographer Mark Morris created works for her. The New York Times lauded her as one of the greats of modern dance: "no one else dances with the same striking mix of formal severity, muscular force and strangely feminine allure."

Baker returned to Toronto in 1991 to work as a soloist and, eventually, as a choreographer. In 1992 she was named the first-ever artist-in-residence at the National Ballet School, a position she still holds.

All finalists for the Premier's Award are asked to name an emerging artist in the fields in which they're nominated. Baker named Singapore-born, Toronto-based dancer-choreographer Yvonne Ng, who last evening received a \$15,000 "emerging artist" prize as part of the Premier's Award.

Nomination forms for the 2007-08 Premier's Award will be available May 1. Nominees must be engaged in a "professional arts practice" and this includes digital media, sound recording, TV and book and magazine publishing.