

STEPHEN PETRONIO

For 30 years, Stephen Petronio has honed a unique language of movement that speaks to the intuitive and complex possibilities of the body informed by its shifting cultural context. He has collaborated with a wide range of artists in many disciplines over his career and holds the integration of multiple forms as fundamental to his creative drive and vision. He continues to create a haven for dancers with a keen interest in the history of contemporary movement and an appetite for the unknown. Petronio was born in Newark, NJ, and received a BA from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, where he began his early training in improvisation and dance technique. He was greatly influenced by working with Steve Paxton as well as the dancing of Rudolf Nureyev and was the first male dancer of the Trisha Brown Company (1979 to 1986). He has gone on to build a unique career, receiving numerous accolades, including a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, awards from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, an American Choreographer Award, and a New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Award.

Petronio has created over 35 works for his company and has been commissioned by some of the world's most prestigious modern and ballet companies, including William Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt (1987), Deutsche Oper Berlin (1992), Lyon Opera Ballet (1994), Maggio Danza Florence (1996), Sydney Dance Company (2003, full evening), Norrdans (2006), the Washington Ballet (2007), The Scottish Ballet (2007), and two works for National Dance Company Wales (2010 and 2013).

His company repertory works have been set on The Scottish Ballet, Norrdans in Sweden, Dance Works Rotterdam, National Dance Company Wales, X Factor Dance Company in Edinburgh, Ballet National de Marseille, Ballet de Lorraine, and London Contemporary Dance Theater, as well as universities and colleges throughout the U.S. In 2009, Petronio completed an evening-length work for 30 dancers, *Tragic Love*, in collaboration with composer Son Lux for Ballet de Lorraine. He completed several additional new works with Son Lux: *By Singing Light*, for National Dance Company Wales (2010), *The Social Band*, a commission for OtherShore Dance Company in New York (2011), and numerous unique editions of *Like Lazarus Did* (2013) for Stephen Petronio Company. Other recent projects include *Prometheus Bound* (2011), a musical for the American Repertory Theater, in collaboration with director Diane Paulus (*HAIR*), writer and lyricist Steven Sater (*Spring Awakening*), and composer Serj Tankian (Grammy award, lead vocalist "System of a Down"). In 2013, Petronio created a new work, *Water Stories* for National Dance Company Wales in collaboration with composer Atticus Ross (Nine Inch Nails) and photographer Matthew Brandt with visual designer Ken Tabachnick.

Petronio, whose training originated with leading figures of the Judson era, performed *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* in 2010 for Trisha Brown Company at the Whitney Museum, and performed his 2012 rendition of Steve Paxton's *Intravenous Lecture* (1970) in New York, Portland, and at the TEDMED-2012 conference at the Kennedy Center Opera House in Washington, DC. In October 2012, Petronio received the distinction of being named the first Artist-in-Residence at The Joyce Theater, for a residency continuing through 2014. Currently, he is entangled with visual artist Janine Antoni in a number of discipline-blurring projects, one of which is the video installation *Honey Baby* (2013) in collaboration with composer Tom Laurie and filmmaker Kirsten Johnson. Petronio has recently published a memoir, *Confessions of a Motion Addict*.

S T E P H E N P E T R O N I O C O M P A N Y

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ABOUT THE COMPANY

Acclaimed by audiences and critics alike, Petronio is widely regarded as one of the leading dance-makers of his generation. New music, visual art and fashion collide in his dances producing powerfully modern landscapes for the senses. He has built a body of work with some of the most talented and provocative artists in the world, including composers Atticus Ross, Valgeir Sigurðsson, Nico Muhly, Fischerspooner, Rufus Wainwright, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Son Lux, James Lavelle, Michael Nyman, Clams Casino, Diamanda Galás, Andy Teirstein, Wire, Peter Gordon, Lenny Pickett and David Linton; visual artists Janine Antoni, Cindy Sherman, Anish Kapoor, Donald Baechler, Stephen Hannock, Tal Yarden, Arnaldo Ferrara, and Justin Terzi III; fashion designers Narciso Rodriguez, John Bartlett , Jillian Lewis, Adam Kimmel, Benjamin Cho, Michael Angel, Tony Cohen, Rachel Roy, Tara Subkoff/Imitation of Christ, Tanya Sarne/Ghost, Leigh Bowery, Paul Compitus, Manolo, Yonson Pak, and H. Petal; and Resident Lighting Designer Ken Tabachnick.

Founded in 1984, Stephen Petronio Company has performed in 26 countries throughout the world, including over 35 New York City engagements with 18 seasons at The Joyce Theater. The Company has been commissioned by Dance Umbrella Festival/London, Hebbel Theater/Berlin, Theater Scene National de Sceaux/France, Festival d'Automne a Paris, CNDC Angers/France, The Holland Festival, Festival International Montpellier-Danse, Danceworks UK Ltd, International Cannes Danse Festival, and in the US by San Francisco Performances, The Joyce Theater, UCSB Arts & Lectures, Wexner Center for the Arts, Walker Art Center, and White Bird, among others. Over the past year the Company performed in Houston, TX; Chicago, IL; Vancouver, BC; Catskill, Mamaroneck, and Sagaponack, NY; Boston, MA; Davis and San Francisco, CA; Portland, OR; New York, NY; and Scottsdale, AZ.

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THE CRITICS COMMENT

Petronio's work "surprises you at every ricocheting leap and pitched body flying off on a tangent...the effect is startling, as if time had been suspended."
— **Dance Magazine**

"He is one of the few contemporary dance makers who have created an instantly recognizable style...fresh and unpredictable...infused with emotional texture and wit...jarring and just right"
— **Roslyn Sulcas, The New York Times**

"...Stephen Petronio and his elegant troupe create indelibly beautiful imagery by matching steps with just the right music and visuals...a feast for the senses..."
— **Rebecca Milzoff, New York Magazine**

"...He has had a singular knack for pairing his sexually charged, elegantly virtuosic movement language with some of the hottest musicians and fashion designers of the moment..."
— **Claudia La Rocco, The New York Times**

Petronio's work "crackles with emphases. His taste for highlights from the ballet vocabulary, such as actively crossed, taut footwork and freely shot-out arabesques, gives the flow of his hyperactive choreography a cheeky athleticism [and] flashing force."
— **Robert Greskovic, The Wall Street Journal**

LOCOMOTOR (2014)

Petronio's "superb dancers often seem to be aloft in high winds, buffeted off balance, swinging their arms and legs around...making the dancing course richly through them as they cut through space." They "barrel in and out...burst and ooze and slash their way into motion, now stopping dead and waiting a while, now pairing up in intimate encounters."
— **Deborah Jowitt, DanceBeat at Arts Journal**

"LOCOMOTOR is a stunning dance and a worthy milestone to mark the company's 30th year... Petronio's choreography is reliably exciting to watch, but his singular invention and sui generis technique are polished to a diamond brilliance here."
— **Susan Yung, Ephemeralist**

LOCOMOTOR is "vibrant and fulfilling, capturing the punk attitude of the choreographer at his most adrenaline-giddy...sexy, fresh and provocative, from the clingy, flesh and black costumes by Narciso Rodriguez to the cut-up electronic score by Petronio's cousin, the consistently Pitchfork-feted Clams Casino."
— **Jack Hanley, Civilian magazine**

"A beautiful machine, flying backward." Locomotor "feels fresh and vital...with characteristic elastic spinning and sharp limb angles, and plenty of zap."
— **Quinn Batson, OffOffOff Dance**

Like Lazarus Did (LLD 4/30) (2013)

"Stephen Petronio's *Like Lazarus Did* is a divine piece about resurrection...the best kind of theater. It feels like a dream you might have if you found yourself in a dark, empty cathedral in the middle of the night."
— **Leigh Witchel, New York Post**

"...a suggestion of spiritual striving in the turned out and tightly crossed legs, in the twisting and bucking torsos, even in the sexual energy of louche hips. Newer elements—stumbling, a hobbled quality—combine with his familiar whip-around explosions to express being in a body and trying to break free. Mr. Petronio arranges his composition complexly and expertly."
— **Brian Seibert, The New York Times**

"...this glorious new work of Petronio's...conceive[s] of the body as a kind of holy machine...A powerful motor drives the whirling arms; slashing legs; mobile hips; and rippling, canting torsos...exalted, white-hot..."
— **Deborah Jowitt, DanceBeat at Arts Journal**

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"...the ten dancers in Petronio's company have the fearless attack and whip-quick control that has come to mark his choreography, and *Like Lazarus Did* had plenty of it. But there were exquisite passages that revealed a quieter, more nuanced and emotional side of his work. ...Petronio had created a constantly shifting landscape, in which groupings came and went in pristine but short-lived episodes, phrases building in complexity, winding and unwinding, and his collaborators kept up with this varied exploration."

— **Andrew Boynton, *The New Yorker***

"...sixty minutes of bold and beautiful movement...*Like Lazarus Did* is a dazzling funeral procession that is well worth being a part of."

— **Mark Rifkin, *This Week in New York***

The Architecture of Loss (2012)

"Deeply felt, soul-sharing artwork of physical and spiritual grace"

— **Quinn Batson, *Offoffoff.com***

"*The Architecture of Loss*...presents the perfect integration of movement, scenic design and costuming"

— **Eva Yaa Asantewaa, *InfiniteBody***

"Stephen Petronio's melancholy, disturbingly beautiful new *Architecture of Loss*...is not trying to show us mourning as a response to loss; he's showing us loss as absence and the evanescence of supporting structures. ...it feels the way a room feels when someone dear to you has gone away for a long time."

— **Deborah Jowitt, *DanceBeat at Arts Journal***

"You get caught up in the eyecatching movement and also drawn in by the emotional urgency...[*The Architecture of Loss*] resonated with wariness and unease, each encounter seeming to skirt tragedy."

— **Susan Reiter, *City Arts***

UNDERLAND (2011)

"The movements of his magnificent dancers are both three-dimensional and incisive...In my mind's eye these wily athletes are always turning, vaulting, charting new directions. In *Underland*, I see them as survivors, insisting on life while buildings collapse and bombs explode behind them...The beautiful, dangerous *Underland* progresses toward a more hopeful conclusion... Although black hearts still flourish underground, art, perhaps, offers redemption."

— **Deborah Jowitt, *The Village Voice***

"There's a visceral thrill to Stephen Petronio's choreography that is unlike anything offered by other contemporary choreographers... a superb craftsman who knows how to build and layer a dance, pace the whiplash speed andcreate intriguing configurations through spatial patterns...the movement, with its improbable juxtapositions, seems to pour across the stage..."

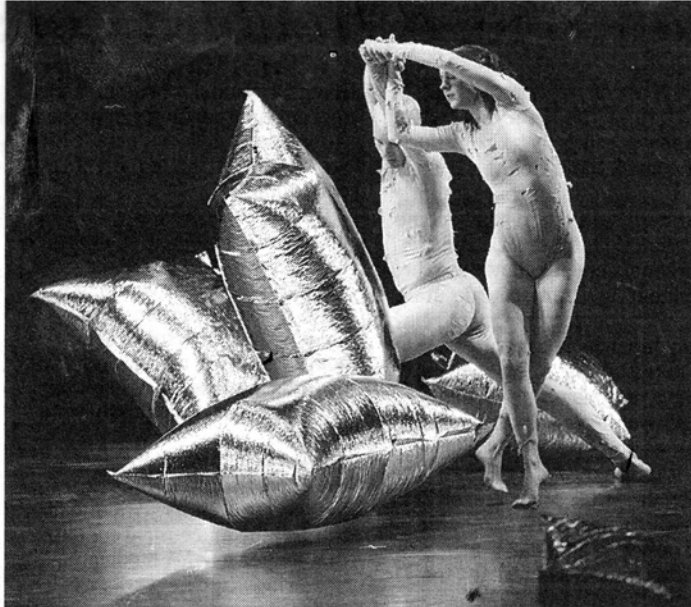
— **Roslyn Sulcas, *The New York Times***

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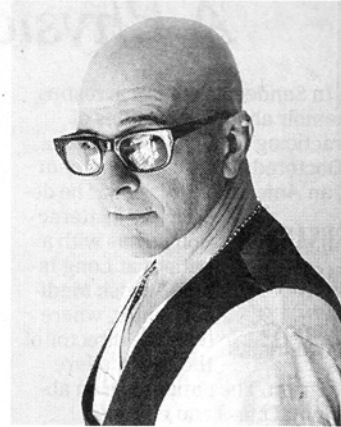
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THE Arts



ROB STRONG



CHESTER HIGGINS JR./THE NEW YORK TIMES

The troupe of Stephen Petronio, above, will perform Merce Cunningham's "RainForest," at left in 2011, with Brandon Collwes and Jennifer Goggans.

New Members for a Dance 'Family'

Stephen Petronio's One-Choreographer Company Will Add Others

By BRIAN SEIBERT

There are people in the dance world who believe that single-choreographer companies are on their way out. The choreographer Stephen Petronio has not been one of those people. His troupe recently celebrated its 30th anniversary, and in an interview this year in *The New York Times*, he adamantly defended the idea of a dance company as an instrument of unparalleled value for a choreographer, speaking of "the depth of research possible with a family of dancers."

But Mr. Petronio is also among the many choreographers whose minds turned to questions of legacy after the death of Merce Cunningham in 2009, and especially after the Cunningham company disbanded two years later. The announcement in 2012 that Trisha Brown, because of illness, would no longer make new works increased his sense of urgency — and made the issue more personal for Mr. Petronio, who danced in Ms. Brown's troupe from 1979 to 1986. The fate of her company is still unclear.

So on Wednesday, Mr. Petronio is announcing a change of his own: a five-year pilot project to incorporate works by other choreographers into his company's repertory. Not just any choreographers. He is starting with Cunningham ("RainForest," from 1968). Ms. Brown will be next ("Glacial Decoy," from 1979). He has plans to bring in more pieces by both of those masters, alongside works by Anna Halprin, Lucinda Childs and Steve Paxton.

Mr. Petronio's announcement follows a similar one in February: that Paul Taylor would be in-

troducing work by other choreographers into the repertory of his company, which has been a single-choreographer shop for all of its 60 years.

"RainForest" won't be the first work by an outside choreographer that Mr. Petronio has introduced into his company's repertory. In 2012, he performed his own version of Mr. Paxton's "Intravenous Lecture," talking and dancing while hooked up to an IV, as a homage to Mr. Paxton, an early mentor.

The new project isn't sanguinary in such a physical sense, but it is about defining artistic gene-

A singular stylist's troupe will perform a Cunningham work.

alogy and perpetuating a lineage. He is calling it "Bloodlines."

In an interview on Monday, Mr. Petronio spoke of the project as a kind of collaboration. Over the years, he has made a habit of working with high-profile visual artists and composers, a practice he adopted from Cunningham and Ms. Brown. ("RainForest" features silver pillows by Andy Warhol. "Glacial Decoy" has a set by Robert Rauschenberg.) At different points, he approached both Cunningham and Ms. Brown with the idea of collaborating on a dance. (Both were reluctant.)

"If I were David Bowie," Mr. Petronio said, "I would be singing next to someone like Lou Reed. But we don't do that in dance. Why not? I'm over the idea that

my company has to be only about Stephen Petronio."

"Who can carry this work?" he recalled asking himself, concerned about the future of the Cunningham and Brown oeuvres. He said he hoped that his company could serve as a model for how others might learn and perpetuate work by those choreographers. Whenever possible, his troupe will incorporate members (or former members) of the other choreographers' companies.

Melissa Toogood, who was a Cunningham dancer and who appeared with the Petronio troupe at the Joyce Theater in April, will return for the Petronio premiere of "RainForest" next year. Some current Petronio dancers studied at the Cunningham school; others are taking Cunningham technique classes now.

The idea, Mr. Petronio stressed, was not for the different styles to blend. He wants them to stay distinct, to "talk with each other."

He said he also hoped that including the outside pieces in his repertory would allow him more time for his own choreographic investigations.

For the moment, both Mr. Taylor and Mr. Petronio are still in the planning stages. It remains to be seen what impact their decisions will have on the single-choreographer model, and whether Mr. Petronio's move might provide an answer to the question of how the works of Cunningham and Ms. Brown could live on.

In the short term, the only thing that's certain is that New York lovers of Cunningham will get to see "RainForest" next year.

STEPHEN PETRONIO with Nancy Dalva

Stephen Petronio
Confessions of a Motion Addict
(Createspace, 2014)



Stephen Petronio—iconoclastic and iconic, subversive, game changing, elegant, with just a gleam of something slightly depraved glinting off his spiky ear studs—is celebrating 30 years as a choreographer with a debut as an author. Here, he discusses it all with his new reader but longtime watcher, the *Rail*'s Nancy Dalva.

Nancy Dalva (Rail): What do we learn about you in this book that we don't learn from your dances?

Stephen Petronio: I wrote *Confessions of a Motion Addict* as text about my life and the forces that move me into action, both in the world and on the stage. While there is succinct discussion of my creative motor, dance works, and the collaborators I've worked with over the years, I wanted very much to verbally construct the back-story of my life.

It was important for me to create and perform with words: to paint my childhood and ascent into the New York dance/art worlds and the touring life that has been so key to who I am. So much of my dance is about the sound and force of motion, and *Confessions* is about the sound force rhythm of language.

I write quite a bit about the pleasures of the body (i.e. sex), that magic that is so outside of the dance realm. I suppose I thought it was important to track the stories in my body, repurposed for sensual, aesthetic, and spiritual interest. I also write frankly about substance (booze and drugs) use and abuse in *Confessions*. I thought it was important to parallel my interest in the extremity of these experiences and how they may or may not relate to my art making.

And you get a healthy taste of the crazy Italian family that I came from and how it impacted my social and professional needs.

Rail: I feel as if you have taken the same material and channeled it into two forms of performance art: one is choreography, the other is autobiography. Which one is more veiled? I am thinking here about the “truth.” Autobiography, in general, is seemingly so *truthy*, yet is a form rife with displacement, projection, selection, delusion, revision, and every other complexity arising from self-reportage.

Petronio: If you have the eyes to do so, you can see straight into my soul when you watch a dance of mine. They are always constructions wrought from mind, body, and taste—my taste, fueled by my desire. Most audiences read movement in other ways or don’t have the power to see that deeply into dance, but there are a few writers and viewers who can. I know this because they “read” me after a performance and I can’t believe they can see so clearly after one viewing. That’s rare though. How I ravel and unravel motion, my need for complexity or brashness, simplicity or cool, structural symmetry or disintegrating fields, speaks volumes about my nature.

I am aware that, in writing, I can give you a more traceable narrative and that I can record that text as history in service of my will—the picture I want to paint. I have tried to come as close to what I believe is an honest text as I can, without doing collateral damage to the players in my life. I also invest a great deal of energy in composing with words, as I might do in movement.

While I stretched my writing muscles in dialogue, poetic form, freestyle prose, and more “proper” narrative the same way I might express my interest in virtuoso, postmodern, or pedestrian forms in motion, it is always in service of some underlying, intuitive, and, dare I say, emotive reveal.

I approached the early childhood writing in *Confessions* as painting with words: images that I could see so clearly in my head. I really didn’t think of it as writing at all. I just had to step out of the way and capture what was already there. Of course, upon reading these writings, my brother had a very different idea of certain details of shared experiences. Needless to say, every story is the unique amalgam of fact, projection, and misunderstanding, and for that variety we are gleefully thankful.

Rail: When I look at your work I don’t so much see influences as characteristics. Your own style is clear via Trisha—you were that anomalous element of testosterone that charged everything in its path, back in that day—and also one can see certain elements that might indicate an affection for a clean, clear technique, a Mercean 360 degree front, a stage perhaps multi-focal but never crowded, and with the viewer given, at times, a choice of where to look. Or not. Yes, no?

Petronio: I’ll roll with the above. How speed and assault have been shifting architecture has been on my mind for years. Assault has receded and shifted to formal exposition of state, emotional or otherwise.

Rail: Is there such a thing as bred-in-the-bones glamour? Something not superficial, but intrinsic? And if so, where does that come from? Mom? Dad?

Petronio: Glamour had a starring role in my early ’60s childhood. From my little perch in family life the view was thrillingly cinematic. This is from the book:

There’s a whiff of glamour. Camera pans right onto phantomlike relatives adrift in a stylish celluloid limbo. Here is my perfect Italian family and its sprawling extended web. We are caught at birthdays, communions, and weddings...where every woman’s makeup is perfect and hair coiffed to the nth. They float on monochrome *peau de soie* stilettos that match their narrow-waist dresses while the men wear muted awkward grins and stand in proper trousers and dress shirts.

Rail: You performed part of this work as the text for your incarnation of Steve Paxton’s *Intravenous Lecture*. Are you otherwise still dedicated to writing and choreography being separate activities?

Petronio: Since *Intravenous Lecture*, I'm enjoying the problematic joining of movement and text. I've always experienced the proposition as troubling: words engaging the narrative mind while also dominating the part of the mind that reads non-narrative, kinetic experience. If I speak a sentence about nature, does all action immediately following have to illustrate that thought? Can we shortcut to that result if we so desire? Conversely, if I perform an action and then speak, can we stop the speaking from being a comment on the action? Can words and action float together free of rational narrative meaning if we desire to surpass the basic assigning of accepted meaning of words on movement and vice versa?

My general feeling is that it's impossible to use the delivery systems of language and motion without the storytelling part of language superseding the movement. I'm currently working on a solo for the American Dance Festival in July, in Durham, North Carolina, that employs writings about my father from *Confessions*. I will speak them live in this dance, but am still grappling with the formal delivery of the two kinds of information.

Rail: You once said to me, "I love the *mise*." As in *mise-en-scène*. I love the work in practice clothes in the studio, without the decor, the costumes, the glamour extrinsic to the choreography and its embodiment. What is the *mise* adding that I am not getting?

Petronio: The dialogue between the inside and the outside, the deeply felt and the outward expression, the immaterial, dare I say spiritual, and the surface, material, quantifiable world, is completely intriguing to me. The internal and external at first glance seem to be at odds. The fan clubs surrounding process and product, inside and out, are deeply suspicious of each other. I love the schism and maintain that these polar worlds can enjoy incredible synergy and heightened union. And if you understand anything about me, you sense the desire for union—communion through union.

Rail: Well no wonder you chose a designer called Imitation of Christ.

Petronio: Of course, this conversation about costuming is predicated on an assumption that the proponents of these polar worlds are sophisticated and savvy players. When the lights go up on a performance, that first glimpse of a magical world—still or in motion—reveals a surface that is a vehicle for an idea, feeling, sense. What that world is dressed in can work wonders in this transmission. Or it can get wrongly, superficially, and sadly in the way. Let the surface deliver and heighten the immaterial world in perfect flight! How can I not reach for this possibility? Cloth has revealed the consciousness of culture since clothing was invented.

Rail: Has writing your book revealed anything about you to yourself that you didn't fully know or acknowledge before? Or suggest a different way to work?

Petronio: Writing has rules of engagement but can be exciting and open-ended as all hell. Writing is a very different proposition than composing with motion, but can lead to comparable mental and physical states. Editing is so easy to remember in writing as it is on the page in front of me. In the studio, revisions slip and slide in the process. So, writing makes me look for more editorial rigor in choreographing.

Rail: Has writing played into your choreography in any other way?

Petronio: You'll have to keep looking and tell me.

The New York Times

Arts&Leisure

Come Here, Look Back, Move Forward

Stephen Petronio Company Marks Its 30th Anniversary

By BRIAN SEIBERT | APRIL 4, 2014 | P. AR7



Stephen Petronio, left, and the hip-hop producer Clams Casino, who has contributed a score for “Locomotor,” a new work choreographed by Mr. Petronio. Credit Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

The choreographer Stephen Petronio does not like to go backward. He says that moving in reverse — say, on a train — makes him feel mentally disturbed and physically ill. Nevertheless, there is a lot of backward in his life these days.

At 58, he has written a memoir. A lovingly rendered account of an Italian-American childhood in suburban New Jersey, it is the story of a bookish boy not quite at home in that world. In college, he discovers improvisational dance. He becomes the first man to join the dance company of Trisha Brown. He founds his own troupe and develops a movement language, an unmistakable style: breakneck, baroque and erotic. “I think of myself,” he writes, “as a formalist with a dirty mind.”

The memoir is packed with sex and drugs and celebrities; the pages are peppered with literally boldface names. Mr. Petronio becomes a father. He gets married to two women and twice to one man. He makes

many dances. By the end, he's gone clean and sober, but one habit remains unkicked. The title of the book is "Confessions of a Motion Addict."



Dancers in the troupe rehearsing. Credit Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

On Tuesday at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan, his company begins its 30th anniversary season. Since 2012, Mr. Petronio has been the Joyce's first artist in residence. Interviewed in the studio and office that come with that position (along with a salary), he spoke with both mortification and pride of having lasted this long.

There's only one older work on the program: "Strange Attractors (Part I)," a piece from 1999 that's typical Petronio in its tension between chaos and order but unusual in its romantic stretch. The two other selections are new and forward looking — except that both draw on memory, and one is all about traveling in reverse.

Since the 1980s his company has specialized in the headlong motion he calls "dipping into the future." But in his new "Locomotor," the dancers hurl themselves backward — fast. The effect is like high-speed rewind, and the thrill of watching it includes fear. It was frightening for the dancers to learn, Mr. Petronio said, demanding novel skills of orientation on the fly. In a recent rehearsal, the guest artist Melissa Toogood, a former Merce Cunningham dancer trained to do anything, asked, "How is that possible?"

The direction of travel isn't the only backward element. Inspired by the theory that backward motion stimulates reminiscence, Mr. Petronio has studied "Locomotor" with bits of past dances and evocations of former company members, the ghosts he always sees in the movements he developed with those dancers.

"It's like a dream I had when I was a child," he said of his concept. "I'm in my neighborhood, looking for my house, but everything's slightly rearranged."

Childhood memories also figure into the other premiere, a solo for Mr. Petronio called "Stripped." Like choreographing, performing is an addiction he hasn't yet given up. Two years ago, to honor his early mentor Steve Paxton, he performed Mr. Paxton's "Intravenous Lecture," which requires dancing and talking about censorship while hooked up to an IV.

"I don't know if it was the saline dripping into me," Mr. Petronio remembered, "but for the first time in my career I danced with zero pain." He added, "So that's my new secret."

"Stripped" doesn't involve open veins, at least not physically. Set to Philip Glass's Étude No. 5, the solo is itself a kind of practice piece. Mr. Petronio loads himself with 30 gestures, as well as a series of emotional states, some recalled from his youth, and with these materials, he enacts his choreographic process onstage.

For "Stripped," the artist Janine Antoni has sewn a collection of men's ties end to end. This "costumed intervention," wrapped around Mr. Petronio's head, links with the Petronian theme of identity and surface, but Ms. Antoni's interventions go beyond costume design.

Mr. Petronio is an inveterate collaborator. “Locomotor” features a score by the rising hip-hop producer Clams Casino, who happens to be his cousin. Many of the boldface names in his memoir belong to the musicians, fashion designers and artists he’s commissioned: Lou Reed, Cindy Sherman. But none of those collaborators has done what Ms. Antoni has: invited him into her world.

In their first collaboration — for Mr. Petronio’s 2013 piece “Like Lazarus Did” — Ms. Antoni performed as a living sculpture. Her suggestion that the stage be covered in honey for the work’s final solo, an evocation of birth, was theatrically impractical. But she and Mr. Petronio have since pursued the idea in a video, exhibited with her installations, called “Honey Baby.” In the process, they blurred the roles of choreographer and visual artist, and for subsequent performances and objects, those roles have stayed blurred.

As a choreographer, Mr. Petronio said, he has always envied visual artists for the permanence of the things they make. His creative involvement with Ms. Antoni gives him a taste of that permanence, but also, and even more important, something else. Five or so years ago, he looked at the movement language he had created — a rare achievement in dance — and thought, “Now what?” He and Ms. Antoni shake each other up.

One thing that hasn’t changed is his belief in having a dance company. “It is seen as passé,” he said, “because the financial structures that supported companies are disappearing. But there were companies before there was a structure to support them. The structure got built around the artistic need, the depth of research possible with a family of dancers.”

Although in the early years Mr. Petronio’s troupe earned 90 percent of its income performing, it has had to adjust to new circumstances, and just before the Joyce selected him as artist in residence, he was considering closing up shop.

For now, his company survives. The death of Cunningham and the retirement of Ms. Brown have prompted thoughts of the future. What if his legacy were a physical place, where others might have time to create movement? There is no place yet, and he is not yet done, but getting ahead of himself is Mr. Petronio’s style.

Family Ties

April 15, 2014

The Trisha Brown Dance Company and the Stephen Petronio Company give their New York seasons the same week.



(L to R): Nicholas Sciscione, Natalie Mackessy, Jaqlin Medlock, and Davalois Fearon in Stephen Petronio's *Strange Attractors I*. Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

Sitting in the Joyce Theater during the Stephen Petronio Company's 30th Anniversary Season, the word "highflyer" suddenly pushes its way into my mind. This is not just because Petronio is ambitious and successful, but because he takes risks and succeeds when you might expect him to founder. When I dig into his invigorating, just-published memoir, *Confessions of a Motion Addict*, I marvel that he survived and continued to perform and choreograph through the years when he was indulging in amounts of booze, drugs, and sex that would have downed almost anyone else in the dance world.

More to the point, I watch his 1999 *Strange Attractors I* and his new *Locomotor* and am amazed all over again by the movement he creates and how he patterns his dances. High flying doesn't figure as giant, poised leaps (although these do appear), but his superb dancers often seem to be aloft in high winds, buffeted off balance, swinging their arms and legs around to maintain a semblance of equilibrium and taking off again. Yet however much they wrench their bodies around, tilt, or topple, they reveal no sense of struggle. They seem to take pleasure in what they're doing with their bodies—not in any self-indulgent way, just making the dancing course richly through them as they cut through space.



Barrington Hinds in Petronio's *Strange Attractors I*.
Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

The opening solo of *Strange Attractors I* shows just how perversely beautiful Petronio's movement palette can be. To luscious music for string quartet by Michael Nyman, Barrington Hinds subverts balletic maneuvers such as pirouettes and beats and all manner of jumps—canting them, blocking them, diverting the movement impulse elsewhere, and plunging them into a stew of wholly unconventional ingredients. When one of the performers—man or woman—tosses a leg into the air, the action seems effortless, as if oiling the hip joint were something everyone in the company did before going onstage. The nine dancers' gray silk pajamas or black and gray slips (by Ghost) ripple as they pass onto the stage and off, fall into synchrony or embraces, attract and repel (sometimes at the same time). Josh D. Green and Julian De Leon, Davalois Fearon and Natalie Mackessy, Jaqlin Medlock and Nicholas Sciscione find their own ways of developing bodily conversations. The other three tirelessly wonderful dancers in *Strange Attractor's I* are Joshua Tuason and Gino Grenek (now Petronio's assistant). Medlock, marginally the smallest of the women, eats up as much space as Hinds, the marginally tallest man.

Petronio's *Locomotor*, receiving its world premiere at the Joyce, explores images of past and future, forward and back, and their meeting places in the present. Narciso Rodriguez has costumed the nine dancers (minus Grenek and plus Emily Stone and guest artist Melissa Toogood) in white leotards with sleeves and side patches gray or black (not, to my mind, very attractive, but they emphasize the point about duality).



Joshua Tuason and Melissa Toogood match leaps in Stephen Petronio's *Locomotor*.
Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

Toogood opens *Locomotor* alone onstage. This past year, the onetime member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company has been seen all over town in choreography by divers others (talk about an addiction to motion!). Petronio has profited from her alertness, from the way she inhabits pauses, and the subtle nuances with which she grooms the movement, never relinquishing its essential wildness. Establishing one element of *Locomotor's* structure, she begins her long phrase on the front right half of the stage, which Tabachnik has lit

for her. Minutes later, she begins the same phrase at the left rear of the area, facing back.

Once the others join in, the title is further explained. In expert changeable lighting by Ken Tabachnik and to a variegated electronic score by Michael Volpe (aka Clams Casino), the dancers run along invisible tracks as steadily as trains. However, a number of these tracks are shaped like horseshoes. For instance, three dancers, lined up out of sight in the wings, may run backward onto the stage, loop around—still close to the side of the area—make a move or two, and rush away facing the way they're going. Or they may leap backward (not an easy maneuver) in a larger circle, even exiting backward. Unlike in *Strange Attractors*, the performers don't line up at the edges of the stage, watching until deciding to join the dance; they barrel in and out, which suggests that those tracks continue out of our sight before making a U turn.

Amid the score's flutters, flaps, crashes, roars rhythmic thudding, and sweet bits of melody, the dancers burst and ooze and slash their way into motion, now stopping dead and waiting a while, now pairing up in intimate encounters. Sometime, you see them at work through a few motionless others. Twice a dancer reappears in a red outfit, for no obvious reason. In the end, Stone is anchored while the others line up at the rear of the stage, dance forward, turn to face the other way, return to the rear, and face us again, before surging into the final moments of dancing.

There was a time when I found Petronio's works relentless—sensual fits of movement, the goal of which was to keep on going. They still have that ongoing quality but it has gentled. He turned 58 a couple of weeks before his company's 30th anniversary season, and, like his memoir, these performances at the Joyce look back—not so much to his large, big-hearted Italian family, but to the family of dancers he has worked with over three decades. Some have departed, some are more recent recruits, but their bodies and their sensibilities inhabit his work.



Stephen Petronio in his solo *Stripped*. Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

The passing of time and the reminiscences bared in his book seem to me to inform his new solo *Stripped*. He begins it wearing trousers with a shirt, tie, and jacket and standing in spectral light. But. . . what is wrong with him? His head looks like a gray pumpkin. To Philip Glass's Etude No. 5, he takes off the jacket and begins to move, carefully placing a foot, changing his facing, bowing down. I later read in the program that Janine Antoni, a visual artist he has collaborated before, has designed what's termed a "costume intervention."

I'll say. Petronio must be able to see a bit, and breathe, but the loose, swinging movements he develops have a certain edginess and awkwardness. He strokes his body, puts his hands over his invisible face and feels it. Is he stripping down or being born? Perhaps both. After a while, he breaches the Joyce's "fourth wall" by unwinding a strip of cloth from his head mask and passing one end to a woman in the front row. Now he begins to spin his way out that and the two additional strands that make up the bulbous covering. He gives the beginning of the second to an invisible person offstage and the third to another on the opposite side of the stage.

Oh, lovely! The last strip of cloth is abloom with bits of color. (I read that it's made of neckties.) And finally, amid the slim fabric fences, Petronio is free, fully revealed—bald as a newborn and almost as bemused.

How's this for a coincidence? The same April week that the Stephen Petronio Company opened at the Joyce, the Trisha Brown Dance Company performed one block east on 19th Street at New York Live Arts. On the program was *Opal Loop/Cloud Installation #72503*; made in 1980, it marked Petronio's debut as a dancer in Brown's company, the first man to join it. He appeared a year later in her *Son of Gone Fishin'*, which was also revived for the NYLA programs. You can understand where Petronio learned to make his body a terrain for detours and interruptions, along which movement nevertheless traveled like water. He took that fluidity into his own less gentle, less playful work...

Ephemeralist

Petronio at 30—C'mon baby, see the Locomotor

by Susan Yung | Thursday, April 10, 2014



Joshua Tuason and Melissa Toogood in *Locomotor*. Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

Stephen Petronio's group premiere, *Locomotor*, is a stunning dance and a worthy milestone to mark the company's 30th year. It isn't easy to continually produce new work for three decades, especially if, like Petronio, you generally shy from narrative and gesture. That said, there are moments in *Locomotor* that profit from this dearth of emotion, so touching are they when finally shared. In keeping with the collaborative tradition, the beige and black geometric unitards are by haute designer Narciso Rodriguez; the soundscape, shifting from crisp clicks and church bells to shimmering drums, is by Michael Volpe (appetizingly nicknamed "Clams Casino.")

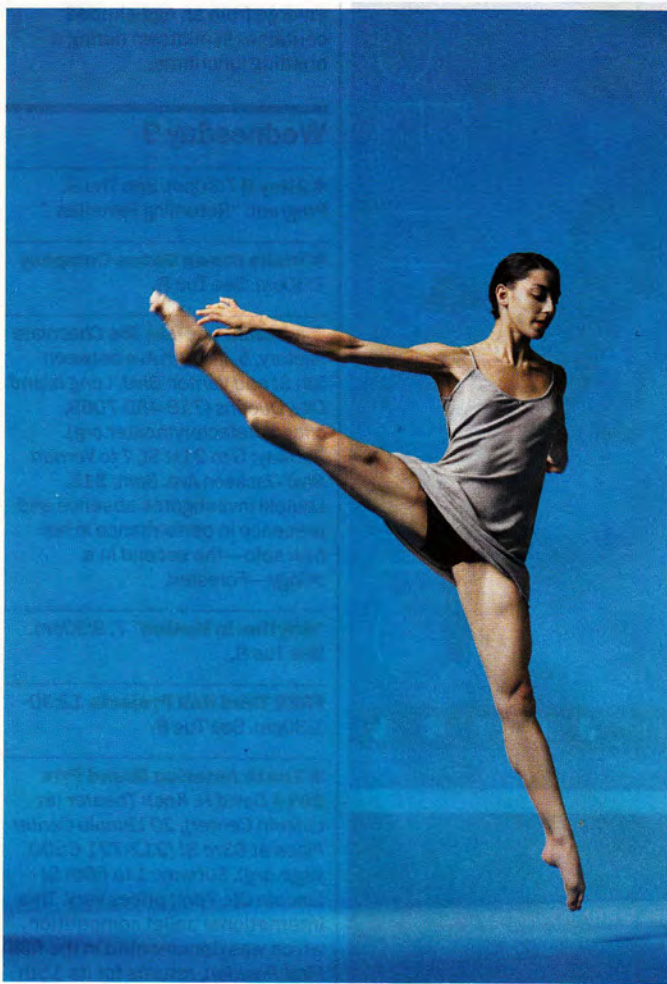
The work's premise is simple: movement, both forward and backward. In a leadoff solo, guest artist Melissa Toogood slips perfectly into Petronio's precise, demanding style that somehow requires both dangerous kineticism and stillness at the same time. The company's remaining eight dancers enter in pairs, carving arcs from and into the wings. Two men, one in front of the other, hold hands as they dart about the stage—a simple, ingenious device, and one of those "why haven't we seen this before?" moments—and pivot and loop their arms like ballroom dancers; at a point, one kneels and receives a kiss

on the head from his partner. It's like they're locked into the idea of forward progression, and yet their mutual bond is as much a necessity.

Raised legs are at right angles, feet crisply pointed, torsos bent and twisted to preset degrees off-center. The technique is modern, but with a highly classical skeleton; it can pound into the floor, but the overall effect is to instigate flight, if for a split second. Petronio's choreography is reliably exciting to watch, but his singular invention and sui generis technique are polished to a diamond brilliance here.

Surprisingly, the most captivating move, and one that is clearly not easy to pull off with grace, is the reverse leap, which occupies the final thrilling movement. Prior to that, Nicholas Sciscione and Josh D Green—both muscular and dazzlingly fleet—partner Toogood, flinging her high, or feet overhead, flipping her around a leg rotisserie-style, pulling her from a prone position as she flutters her arrowed feet in unexpected, delicate battements.

Petronio danced the other premiere on the Joyce program (through April 13th), *Stripped*. This brief solo is to Philip Glass' Etude No. 5; the visual punchline is designed by artist Janine Antoni—a headwrap of neckties, which meets a linear fate in the finale. No further spoilers. The third piece, *Strange Attractors*, was created in 1999; its silken pajamas (by Ghost) and Michael Nyman score are the only indications of its pre-millennial age. It showcases well the standout, eclectic company, in particular the ageless Gino Grenek and an eloquent Jaqlin Medlock. The program rightly travels forward—and backward—with gusto.



Stephen Petronio Company

For his 30th-anniversary season, Petronio focuses on his pull toward new music. Along with the return of *Strange Attractors (Part I)* from 1999, the choreographer unveils two premieres: *Locomotor*, set to Michael Volpe (or Clams Casino), and a new solo to Philip Glass. His stellar company, including Jaqlin Medlock (pictured), demonstrates just how silken the body can be. *Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave at 19th St (212-242-0800, joyce.org). Tue 8, Wed 9, Apr 13 at 7:30pm; Apr 10-12 at 8pm; Apr 12, 13 at 2pm. \$10-\$59.*

tdfSTAGES

Stephen Petronio Dances on the Cutting Edge

by Susan Reiter



For its 30th season, Stephen Petronio Company looks forward and backward at the same time.

Stephen Petronio's choreography intermingles discipline and wildness, with an underlying structure that gives his dances heft. In landscapes where danger lurks amid beauty, there's always something significant at stake.

What's more, these stakes always feel immediate. Petronio's dances resonate with the moment in which they are created—reacting, responding, and commenting in fascinating ways. A cutting-edge group of collaborators, including visual artists like Cindy Sherman and composers like Laurie Anderson and Rufus Wainright, also helps his work speak to our time.

To that end, Stephen Petronio Company's 30th anniversary season at the Joyce Theater (April 8 – 13) will career forward even as it engages with the past. The major premiere on the program, *Locomotor*, explores the idea of "traveling forward and backward through space and through time." He's also made a new solo for himself, *Stripped*, that investigates the specific possibilities of a mature male body.

In Petronio's recently published memoir *Confessions of a Motion Addict*, he vividly conjures his early years in suburban New Jersey amid an expansive Italian-American family. The book chronicles his evolution as a dancer and a gay man, describing how he came to dance late, how the now-legendary postmodernist Steve Paxton opened up new possibilities, and how his career and life sometimes careened out of control.

Petronio didn't set out to write a book. When he was struggling with the creation of 2010's *Ghost Town*, he distracted himself by posting stories to Facebook. "I'm an insomniac by nature, but I wasn't sleeping at all during this process. So I began writing," he says. "My childhood memories are very vivid, so I thought, 'Maybe I should record some of these memory ghosts as an exercise, painting in words. Maybe it will somehow inform what I was doing in the studio.' People began really responding. At one point somebody said, 'When are you going to publish these?'"

He continues, "Learning how to write so consistently was a really interesting exercise. Before, whenever I was inspired I would write. But to actually have a goal—and know that every night at 3 or 4 when I woke up, I would be writing—that was an interesting kind of discipline for me. I actually felt that my writing was informed by my dance-making more than my dance-making was

informed by my writing. There are certain rhythmic inclinations that I have in movement that I could feel in my writing pattern.”



For *Locomotor*, Petronio is working with a new musical collaborator, albeit one he has known for years. The original score is by Michael Volpe (a.k.a. Clams Casino), who has emerged as an innovative producer in both hip-hop and experimental music. The 26-year-old musician is also the son of Petronio’s first cousin. (In his memoir he portrays her as a fellow free spirit, stretching the boundaries of suburban propriety, leading him on forays to Greenwich Village, and taking him to see his first dance performance.) So Volpe has been seeing Petronio’s dance performances since his childhood.

“He’s just exploded in the last couple of years,” Petronio says of his young cousin’s career. “I loved what he was doing. Then he released an album of tracks of electronic music without text that was so beautiful and innovative. When I heard that, I had to work with him. When I called, he said, ‘I was hoping you’d ask me.’ ”

The *Locomotor* collaboration has been a real back and forth. “He’s been coming to the studio a lot for rehearsals,” Petronio says. “He understands the work on a very intuitive level. We don’t discuss it that much. I’m super-verbal, but he’s not. He works on instinct, and that’s how I work. We’re both not formally trained in what we do. That’s exciting.”

Petronio also speaks admiringly of his dancers. “As the difference in agility between my body and theirs widens, what I find very emotional is that I can give them the small piece of inspiration and they spring to life with it in the most amazing way. That, to me, is such a beautiful and touching and hopeful thing; they keep me 20 years old by interpreting my energy in their bodies.”

Meanwhile, Petronio keeps finding the impetus for new dances. “There’s a spring that’s always there,” he says. “What I’ve gotten more used to is figuring out how you weld that energy and that excitement into highly detailed movement with innuendo and specificity. When I was younger, that was much harder to do. Now I understand that’s what I do. It comes slightly more automatically, but the well of inspiration feels like it’s the same place.”

Susan Reiter is a freelance arts journalist who contributes to the Los Angeles Times, Playbill, Dance Magazine and other publications

Photos by Sarah Silver

LEISURE & ARTS

DANCE

Going Through the Motions

By ROBERT GRESKOVIC

Born 20 years apart, U.S. dancer-choreographers Trisha Brown and Stephen Petronio are related artistically yet about as different as their genders. In 1979, Mr. Petronio became the first male dancer in Ms. Brown's dance company; by that time her group was already well on its way to presenting works that Ms. Brown has characterized as the creations of a "bricklayer with a sense of humor." Her plain, mostly matter-of-fact dances, sometimes set in offbeat locations and paced as gently as a leisurely stroll, eventually inspired Mr. Petronio's dancemaking.

Ms. Brown, who last year relinquished direction over and creative input to the Trisha Brown Dance Co. due to ill health, remains a key figure in the postmodern dance movement she helped shape beginning in the early 1960s. Her company, which she founded in 1970, last week gave a program of her dances at New York Live Arts while Stephen Petronio Co., now celebrating its 30th anniversary, gave a weeklong season at the Joyce Theater.

The four-work bill performed by TBDC is part of its "Proscenium Works" tour, presenting dances meant for traditional theater spaces. NYLA's black-box, chamber-scale space barely fits a proscenium theme, but it helped make viewing the often casual-seeming creations an intimate experience.

"Opal Loop/Cloud Installation #72503" began life in 1980 in a nichelike, brick-walled industrial space. Back then the short work, barely 15 minutes long, presented Ms. Brown and three of her dancers, including Mr. Petronio, in unemphatic, loose-limbed, back-and-forth lateral moves as a bank of fog, pro-



vided by Fujiko Nakaya's vapor-making sculpture, advanced and nearly engulfed the dancers. At NYLA, the theater's wider space was ill-suited for filling with fog; mostly the mistiness just hung back, making the atmosphere seem more decorative than overwhelming.

Struggling to bridge the gap between movement and meaning.

"Solo Olos" (1976) recaptured much of the playful concept suggested by its palindromic title, as four current Brown dancers performed a set phrase of moves while a fifth dancer randomly called out specific cues asking them to alter their pattern. The resulting variations—"reverse," "spill" and "branch"—prompted viewers to scrutinize the dancers' movements and to follow the changing details in their gamelike presentation of choreographed moves.

Both "Rogues" (2011), a male duet, and "Son of Gone Fishin'" (1981), a full-company work, showed more of the same light, witty and gently busy Brownian

moves. Neither dance as given here, however, made much individual impact: What we saw by the end of the bill was more of what we'd already seen.

* * *

Mr. Petronio has credited Steve Paxton, postmodern dance's purveyor of improvisational methods, and Rudolf Nureyev, ballet's charismatic virtuoso, as early influences inspiring him to pursue a dance career. Mr. Petronio's own choreographic career took off with a brazen and brainy emphasis of his own after leaving TBDC. He soon adopted a punk-rock edge, including the shaved head he still maintains.

The female dominance that characterized Ms. Brown's work became in Mr. Petronio's creations largely male. His current troupe, in which he now appears only selectively as a solo dancer, is stocked with some of the most impressive men now performing in modern dance.

While Mr. Petronio's choreography employs a similarity of invention for both his women and men, it's the latter who remain the standouts. For his anniversary bill, Mr. Petronio chose "Strange Attractors Part I" (1999), to Michael Nyman's original score, and a world pre-

miere, "Locomotor," to another original piece of music: Michael Volpe's samplings of variously "found" sounds. These two similarly cast group works framed Mr. Petronio's solo, "Stripped," made especially for this anniversary and set to Philip Glass's "Etude No. 5."

Both of the company works, each stylishly costumed, show their casts of nine dancers mostly riding the impetus of their accompaniment, though more on its surface than into its depths. In place of Ms. Brown's more delicate touch, Mr. Petronio's crackles with emphases. His taste for highlights from the ballet vocabulary, such as actively crossed, taut footwork and freely shot-out arabesques, gives the flow of his hyperactive choreography a cheeky athleticism. Where Ms. Brown's legwork might smoothly swing into position, Mr. Petronio's arrives with flashing force.

By the end, however, for all its skillful dancing (with sleek Joshua Tuason particularly impressive) this bill was most theatrically memorable for Mr. Petronio's five-minute solo. With his head wrapped in a seemingly endless length of linked neckties (costuming by Janine Antoni), the dancing choreographer spent his time on stage as if emerging, almost reluctantly, from a suffocating chrysalis.

Like Ms. Brown, Mr. Petronio shows an abiding fascination for moving his expertly active dancers through lengths or loops of paces. How much of this yields distinct dance theater and how much remains the "yards and yards" of movement material mentioned in NYLA's program notes about Ms. Brown's working process becomes your call.

Mr. Greskovic writes about dance for the Journal.

Stephen Petronio's 'Like Lazarus Did' is a divine piece about resurrection



Leigh Witchel

DANCE REVIEW

LIKE LAZARUS DID: STEPHEN PETRONIO
COMPANY

The Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave.; 212-242-0800. Through
Sunday. Running time: 65 minutes, no intermission.

It takes a lot of living to make great art about dying. Stephen Petronio is no longer the hot, young post-modern dancer he was in the late '70s. Now 57, he's something more — a mature artist.

His new work, "Like Lazarus Did," is about resurrection. There's no plot, just dance, but the imagery is so clear that you don't need a story.

The piece begins outside the theater, where children from the Young People's Chorus of New York City are lined up on the sidewalk, all in black. Accompanied by a vocalist and trumpeter, they sing as they enter the Joyce: It's the kiddie version of a New Orleans funeral procession.



Julieta Cervantes

Inside, a sculpture glows softly, hovering over the audience. It's made of plastic body parts and bleached bones suspended above an evacuation cradle — the kind used for rescue missions. The curtain is raised just enough to see Petronio lying on the stage barefoot and wearing a black suit as if laid out for a funeral.

Nine dancers in loose white shifts begin the piece in trinities, moving three by three as they exchange places in neat, precise patterns. The movement gets bigger, spiraling through the stage.

In between you see apparitions lifted from medieval imagery. One man has his arm outstretched as if he were begging, leading another man by the hand.

Twin silver cords descend; a dancer turns from us and grabs them to begin a solo, even his smallest back muscles rippling. Yet he doesn't ascend. Instead, the curtain falls and rises to reveal the entire cast, moving with tight arms and whipping turns. The final solo is for another man, nearly naked. He inches along the floor before finally standing erect.

Though the subject is somber, the choreography isn't. The dancers are astonishing, their movement so deceptively simple and flowing that you want to try it yourself. Yet it's precisely controlled and requires the pure, long lines of a ballet dancer.

Composer Son Lux has delivered the right music — atmospheric and haunting. He sings the opening himself, in a strangled voice: lyrics from a slave spiritual, "I want to die like Lazarus did." The children's chorus is also well-used, as their voices slowly swell in impact.

Petronio has delivered far more than dance. "Like Lazarus Did" is the best kind of theater. It feels like a dream you might have if you found yourself in a dark, empty cathedral in the middle of the night.

The New York Times

Wednesday, May 1, 2013

Dance Review

He's Back From the Dead, With So Much More to Do 'Like Lazarus Did' at the Joyce Theater



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Like Lazarus Did The hourlong work, by the Stephen Petronio Company, had its premiere on Tuesday at the Joyce Theater, featuring music by Son Lux and an appearance by the Young People's Chorus of New York City.

By BRIAN SEIBERT

In Stephen Petronio's "Like Lazarus Did," dance is preceded by the stillness of death. As you enter the Joyce Theater, where the hourlong work had its debut on Tuesday, the choreographer is already on stage, lying on his back in a dark suit, corpselike, his eyes closed, the soles of his bare feet gilded with gold paint.

Suspended high above the audience in a helicopter stretcher is another body: that of the performance artist Janine Antoni. Soon, Mr. Petronio's body will rise and leave (to return only briefly). But Ms. Antoni's body will remain still, as a robust cast of 10 dances.

And before all of this, there is music. The aisles and half of the balcony fill with 130 children from the Young People's Chorus of New York City. The musician Son Lux, who composed the score, sings "I wanna die" and the children answer, "like Lazarus did."

Those are powerful words, drawn from a slave spiritual, and from them the dance derives its theme of resurrection. There is much in Mr. Petronio's signature vocabulary suited to such a theme: a suggestion of spiritual striving in the turned out and tightly crossed legs, in the twisting and bucking torsos, even in the sexual energy of louche hips. Newer elements — stumbling, a

hobbled quality — combine with his familiar whip-around explosions to express being in a body and trying to break free

Mr. Petronio arranges his composition complexly and expertly. Patterns run backward and in canon. People come and go, pull and lift one another, wait patiently for their turn, collapse and rise. They hook an arm under one of their own knees, as if to hoist themselves.

But those words. Mr. Lux warbles more of them, his voice often electronically processed. His score, which ranges widely from minimalist to modernist to hymnal to thumping bass, with Rob Moose on violin and C. J. Camerieri on trumpet, falls short of phrases like “the moon will turn to blood.” And when he sings words by Sojourner Truth (“Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman”) nothing that Mr. Petronio gives his women to do matches the fierce challenge of that language.

Both the score and the choreography seem to suffer from an excess of sources: pagan, Christian, Eastern, ancient, modern. The profusion might be true to the confusions of contemporary life, but the effect is a kind of canceling out. Mr. Petronio has also borrowed from his earlier works — resurrecting them — but when, near the work’s three-quarter mark, the curtain climactically falls only to rise upon what looks like an old Petronio dance, the feeling is less than transcendent.

The ending finds some redemption. In flesh-colored briefs, Nicholas Sciscione puts up his dukes like a drunk. He rolls on the floor like a fetus in the womb, with his feet occasionally giving a little kick. He hooks an arm under a recumbent knee.

The children’s choir sings him a lullaby — “Hush now, baby, go to sleep” — but he rises to stand, wobbling. He’s not done yet.

“Like Lazarus Did” continues through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.

'Lazarus' provides a way to resurrect your love of dance

Review. Petronio's latest boasts some exquisitely trained movers.

The figure of Lazarus is abroad in the city, in Colm Toibin's "The Testament of Mary" on Broadway and now in Stephen Petronio's new choreography, "Like Lazarus Did." With an electro-acoustic musical mix by Son Lux that includes dozens of singers from the Young People's Chorus of New York City, and a large installation featuring artist Janine Antoni hanging over our heads swaddled in a sort of sledge, the hour-long piece takes us places we may not recognize. Is

this the Fertile Crescent at the dawn of Christianity? Are we watching a prelude to the agony of Jesus, or just fabulous bodies in constant motion on a Chelsea stage?

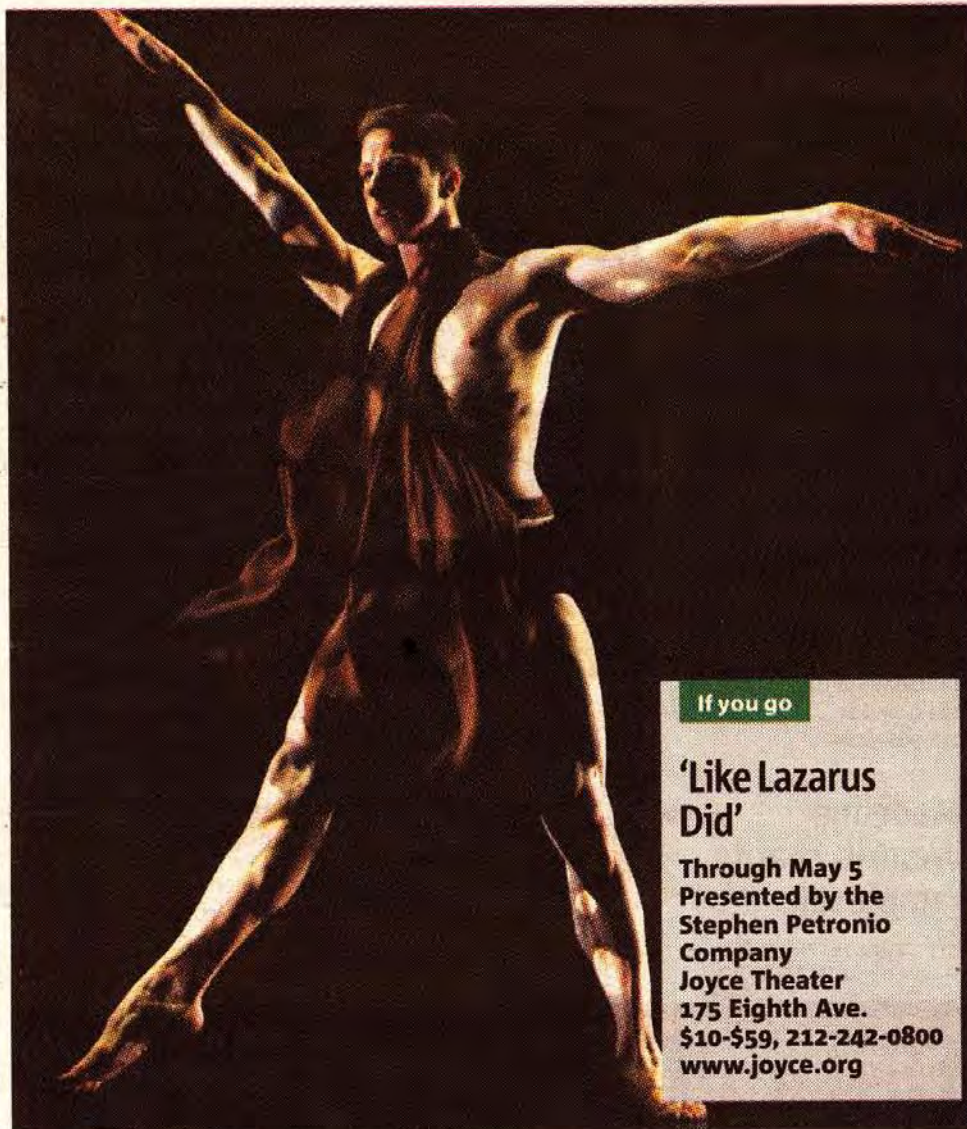
As fragments of vocal music, taken from American slave songs that resemble the more familiar spirituals, drift from the orchestra pit and the balcony, the dancers — mostly male — flail their bare limbs, forming small groups and, rarely, couples. A trumpet, a violin and 30 unearthly voices cascade in the theater, backed by percussion and industrial noise.

Petronio, a pioneer in the experimental-dance world, heads a troupe of strong, exquisitely trained movers who channel

themes of death and resurrection, sometimes as powerfully as foremother Martha Graham. H. Petal's constantly morphing costumes resemble grave wrappings or religious vestments, with the 10 wonderful performers occasionally stripping down to brief trunks — the piece is an odd fusion of religious imagery and beefcake. While referencing the miracle of Lazarus, it's also a litany of apocalypse.

The performers jump and wriggle and semaphore their arms, finally emerging into light after a long stretch of Ken Tabachnick's moody atmosphere.

**ELIZABETH
ZIMMER**
letters@metro.us



Joshua Green performs in "Like Lazarus Did." / JULIETA CERVANTES

If you go

'Like Lazarus Did'

Through May 5
Presented by the
Stephen Petronio
Company
Joyce Theater
175 Eighth Ave.
\$10-\$59, 212-242-0800
www.joyce.org

April 30, 2013

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

'Like Hanging On To The Tail Of A Dragon'



'Like Lazarus Did': Stephen Petronio And Janine Antoni Talk Dance, Rebirth And The 'Living Set' (INTERVIEW, VIDEO)

By Priscilla Frank | 04/30/2013

Dance has long possessed the ability to elevate our thoughts, dreams and desires, investigating complex societal issues through interpretative bodies. In his latest piece, choreographer Stephen Petronio channels art and spirituality in "Like Lazarus Did (LLD 4/30)," addressing the legacy of slavery through multiple angles.

A rich meditation on the various forms of transcendence, Petronio's work features 10 dancers, an electroacoustic score and a "living set" by artist Janine Antoni. While the dance is occurring on the stage, Antoni will be meditating inside a hanging sculpture of her own creation, high above the audience. We reached out to Petronio and Antoni to learn more about this thought-provoking project.

HP: Tell us about the music and art behind "Like Lazarus Did."

Stephen Petronio: Basically my composer [Son Lux] brought me a songbook of American Slave songs from the 1800s, and I was so inspired by the the sense of faith as well as the elevation above the conditions under which they were living. It made me think about various forms of leaving the body for a heightened state, and it seemed like a beautiful meditation. I also loved that it had been passed down from oral tradition for so long without having been written down. I love the idea of things from mouth to mouth; in dance we similarly pass information from body to body.

Janine Antoni: I proposed to Stephen that I perform as well. I will be performing inside of the sculpture I made but instead of being on the stage I am going to be in the audience. The sculpture and myself are hanging above the audience for the entire duration of the performance. I am hanging inside of a helicopter stretcher and above me are all my body parts... all suspended above me. My hand is reaching out of the stretcher and I am holding a light. These body parts are based on the gestures that appear in Stephen's choreography.

HP: How long are you suspended?

JA: The performance is just under an hour, but I will be up there for half an hour before the performance starts.

HP: What can we expect from the score?

SP: The songs are really about the text... The work starts with a death and ends with a birth; the last song is a lullaby and the first song is a hallelujah.



HP: This is obviously a very spiritual piece. How did your personal views and values impact the work?

SP: I was completely moved by the power of the slave songs and the concept of the afterlife. I am interested in that state of being free from pain; every culture has a reincarnation or a regeneration story. From pagan cultures to eastern cultures, there is a regeneration and rebirth story, from the phoenix rising to Sleeping Beauty awakening and being transformed. It's all over the place. So there is a strong belief and a strong urge to have a place that is free. But do i feel spiritually evolved? (Laughs) I don't know.

JA: I would say I am a syncretist by nature or maybe by heritage. Like Stephen, I am interested in how different cultures approach these questions. I am certainly interested in asking these questions in my work.

HP: What was your collaboration experience like?

SP: I begin working with people when I am drawn to their work. Sometimes you become friends with them and sometimes not. Janine is up there with the best.

JA: Collaborating with Stephen is like hanging on to the tail of a dragon.

"[Like Lazarus Did](#)" will run from April 30 – May 5, 2013 at [The Joyce Theater](#) in New York.

Stephen Petronio Company Photos: Sarah Silver

DANCE
INCONVERSATION

STEPHEN PETRONIO with Nancy Dalva

LIKE LAZARUS DID | JOYCE THEATER | APRIL 30 – MAY 5, 2013

Nancy Dalva (Rail): Your newest work, *Like Lazarus Did*, premieres this month at the Joyce Theater. Why not *As Lazarus Did*? Are you “liking” resurrection?

Petronio: You’re such an editor! The title is from one of the songs—from a publication of American slave spirituals that sparked the original idea for *Like Lazarus Did*. The language is lost to that era, but the songs giving off a faith and sense of elevation so far from the wretched plight of those singing these songs. Son Lux, a composer I’ve worked with on British and European projects till now, brought me this book of songs previously only passed down through oral tradition. Totally inspiring! Of course he’s using them as a springboard for new creation.

Rail: You are premiering a dance about resurrection during Easter season. Is there a credo in it? Some personal statement of faith, or rejection thereof? Did you go to church as a child? Did the pageantry appeal to you?

Petronio: I’m a fallen Catholic: attended parochial schools, wanted to be a missionary as a child. Wanted to be chosen. I suppose that resonates and the *theatrical* aspect is supreme. I mean, it’s hard to beat mystical transformation and redemption in gold trimmed vestments.

Last year my father passed, and I was sitting in the church that I attended in my hometown youth, and there was a priest speaking so eloquently about my father’s final resurrection. It really hit me hard—the power and comfort of that promise. And it’s power as a commodity. Who would want the ultimate prize—immortality—yet it’s a product that’s never seen or proven. Very impressive feat.



Stephen Petronio; Photo: Sarah Silver

Resurrection and immortality: the final triumph over death is deeply bedded across many cultures. The need to continue is irrepressible. One of the only certainties in life is its end, and we can’t quite resolve that. The Judeo-Christian lore of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, an act necessary to prove his divinity: the penultimate miracle that tripped his conviction of heresy, angering the high rabbis of Jerusalem and setting into motion the ultimate sacrifice of his life.

From the the sacrificial virgin whose death is necessary to promulgate the growth of crops in the pagan-themed *Sacre du Printemps*, to the phoenix rising from her dust to reemerge immortal and omnipotent, to eastern religion’s cycle of reincarnation: the continual need to renew, to look back at forms again, to bring them forward to see what remains of the original, or to see how something transforms.

Rail: Tell me how you made the dance. What was the participation of the dancers?

Petronio: My first instinct was to resurrect previous Petronio dancers, bringing forward signature roles in the bodies of new dancers and allowing them to transform in the process. I'm always fascinated to feel the essence of my early stars in the roles we created together after so many years still unmistakably there, but transformed by the current body and mind reinterpreting. But unlike a reconstruction—I sought out transformation in the new body and allowed myself free reign as the current artist I am to spring off from these sources.

Then I began to call back other iconic figures I love—small flashes of Michael Jackson, Merce [Cunningham] and Trisha [Brown], mythological figures, the snake and the phoenix—to see what emerged. And of course, so much of the early me, the initial sequencing and spinal whip that I was born with, to go back to see what it is now. I also looked to some formal devices like retrograde and accumulation, to revisit and retrace movement over and over to see how it changes and how it's the same.

Rail: I saw a piece of yours in that strange Ukrainian dance hall on Second Avenue. You started out “dead” but then you seemed to raise others from the dead.

Petronio: Or from sleeping. If you take being awakened from sleep as a kind of resurrection—well then, you have *Sleeping Beauty*, just to begin. Not to mention the phoenix.

Like Lazarus Did is ongoing and evolving. Each new resurrection has a different set of concerns. At the ballroom, I was very interested in who was empowering whom: I as the author bringing the dancers to life or the dancers as my resurrected instruments breathing life back into me and my ideas.

Rail: How do you feel when you get up in the morning, Stephen? A whole new world? Or same old same old?

Petronio: I am extremely hopeful in the morning and have a very short memory. So my perceptions don't feel same-y. Mornings are a renewal for me. I wake up fast and running.

Rail: Are you in this dance? And if so, who are you? Is there a role or are you playing your own role?

Petronio: I am the author; the snake; the fire starter.

Rail: Who's doing the costumes? Décor?

Petronio: The costumes are by H. Petal, a British designer I've been working with on and off since 1990. The décor, including the element of the dramatic: the incredible artist Janine Antoni, who works in many mediums but will be making a “living set” where she'll be suspended in a sculpture above the audience for the duration.

Rail: Your work has for a long time participated in the fashion world, and the company is always attired in something you don't see anywhere else, as much runway and designer playground as theater. Why *why*? (You detect a note of despair here, but that's only me, because I love the work as is in the studio. Just the dancers and the movement.)

Petronio: What we wear is a key into who we are alone and in the world. Yes, stripped naked is delicious, but the discovery of the perfect thing to wear in motion is as exhilarating to me. The dance world's chronic suspicion of the surface of things can be a denial of an important element of the whole.

Rail: When I look back at certain works—not only yours—I find the choreography is as fresh as today if not tomorrow, but the *mise-en-scène* dates it. Yes, no?

Petronio: I love it when the *mise* locates a thing in time and space. That's part of the journal of the time we are capturing in my works.

Rail: You seem to be working again with a chorus. What's with this? Where's the appeal? It's as if you are working on a Wagnerian scale. Every possible element. And yet, stripped down, your movement itself is formalist, unencumbered.

Petronio: I'm social and want as many different artists reaching for something together as I can manage. The Young People's Chorus transforms the experience of the work for an audience, and we are now a part of each others lives. This is our third work together at the Joyce, and I will work with them as many times as I can in the future. We are building a language and history together.

I come from a history of multidisciplinary stages and must take that as far as I'm able. It's a much lonelier world without my partners. I spend so much time alone with my dancers and I love that, but I am a social animal, and dance is a connection both with internal power, history and tradition, the social sphere, and then forward into the unknown.

Rail: Do the *Like Lazarus Did* collaborators all know what the others are doing? Is the dance finished first? Are you working to the music?

Petronio: The music—working with it and in the theater, including the singers, all of that. All the collaborators and I are working from a directive I've built, an arc from dirge to invocation to exploration of literal and abstract rumination of states of elevation. The work finalizes in a kind of birth. We are all building along this arc simultaneously and together.

I say *invocation* and Ryan [Lott] builds an alleluia. I say *rebirth*, Ryan delivers a lullaby. Janine studies this and internalizes this into a mental focus and sculptural form. Every day someone sends off some new discovery that in turn sparks off something else. It's heaven.

Rail: Any advice for your audiences? Your reviewers? Things your dancers wish you would tell them?

Petronio: 1. Every second/moment is an opportunity for a kind of letting go and renewal. 2. Let's not get too literal.

Rail: What question that people ask you annoys you the most?

Petronio: "Oh, do you mean like on *So You Think You Can Dance*?"

Dance Beat

Contending with Loss

March 9, 2012

By Deborah Jowitt



Davalois Fearon, Emily Stone (center back), Natalie McKessy, and men in Stephen Petronio's *The Architecture of Loss*. Photo: Julie Lemberger.

Stephen Petronio's melancholy, disturbingly beautiful new *Architecture of Loss* is, I'm pretty sure, fraught with more stillness and more silence than any of the works he's made over the last couple of decades. The word "architecture" in the title tells us that he's not trying to show us mourning as a *response* to loss; he's showing us loss as absence and the evanescence of supporting structures.

Except for visual designer Ken Tabachnick and Ravi Rajan, who created the slides, Petronio's collaborators are all Icelanders: composer Valgeir Sigurdsson, costume designer Gudrun & Gudrun, and artist Rannvá Kunoy, whose cloudy paintings are projected onto three large screens that hang at the back of the Joyce Theater's stage. The very first—and loveliest—images are in soft gray strokes and smudges that could have been made by pastels. In them you can imagine you see water, wind, bridges, bluffs—all swathed in fog.

The music—played live by Nadia Sirota (viola), Shazhad Ismaily (percussion, bass guitar, et al), and the composer (piano, electronics, and more), with Nico Muhly on recorded piano—can sound chill and eerie: there's singing, echoing, rasping, crackling. At times, the piano emits single, spaced-out notes that sound like water dripping resoundingly on ice in a momentary thaw. The dancers wear woven attire, some of it loosely cut, that hints at fishnet.

A cold atmosphere, then. It feels the way a room feels when someone dear to you has gone away for a long time. The landscape of the stage keeps reconfiguring itself, as if, after the disappearance of one or more of the dancers, it has to re-calibrate itself. People replace one another in unfinished business. Three plus two equals five, minus one equals four. Sometimes one or two of the screens at the back go blank; the single deep pink or yellow smudges that take over from the more complex grayness come and go.

The movement, as in most of Petronio's choreography, amplifies and disorders the dancers' bodies in space. They rarely place their gestures. They swing one straight leg in a semi-circle, say, and let that impetus pull the rest of their

body into new directions. They wheel their arms and lash the air. They make you aware of jutting elbows. Impulses arise in their spines and ripple out; a big assertive gesture may leave its aftermath—perhaps a head, slow to follow, suddenly seems only loosely anchored to the neck that supports it. If the performers didn't attack so incisively, they might make you think of rag dolls flung by unseen hands. Instead, think whirlwinds.

In *The Architecture of Loss*, however, these superlative performers spend intermittent time standing like a frozen forest, while others dance around and among them. Here are their names: Julian De Leon, Davalois Fearon, Joshua Green, Gino Grenek, Barrington Hinds, Natalie MacKessy, Jaqlin Medlock, Nicolas Sciscione, Emily Stone, Joshua Tuason, Amanda Wells.

Encounters are brief. People form tableaux, collapse, lie still. In some of the meetings, one person leans against another. This act acquires the most emotional resonance in a duet for Green and Wells. You feel the effort and the daring when Wells leans out at a precarious slant, bracing herself on whatever part of his body Green offers her. You see the muscles in her back engage, feel the stress in her arm, while she holds the position until she slowly crumples. Green lifts her, presses her around himself, but in the end he deposits her in a sitting position on the floor and places her hand beside her so she can lean on it. She stays there, frozen, while he dances alone. When Wells leaves, Tuason replaces her in a more equally balanced pairing with Green.

In the end, the light darkens and the screens return to misty shapes. People are still leaving; others wait, accustoming themselves to absence.

Petronio chose to revive his fine 2002 *City of Twist* for his Joyce programs (April 6 through 11). An interesting choice, since he had begun work on it before 9/11. With its Laurie Anderson score and fashionably distorted costumes by Tara Subkoff /Imitation of Christ, it suggests a paean to the city's toughness, its speed, its transformations, layered over a different sense of loss from that expressed in the new piece.

Petronio has never programmed a work by another choreographer, and guest stars aren't really his thing. All the more provocative (and mysterious) is the fact that at the Joyce, he performs a four-decades-old solo by Steve Paxton, and Wendy Whelan of the New York City Ballet dances a brief solo, extracted from Petronio's 2003 *Underland* and given the title of *Ethersketch I* (late-breaking change: Whelan will dance at every performance).



Wendy Whelan in Petronio's *Ethersketch I*. Photo: Julie Lemberger.

Why Whelan? Well, upon winning a Bessie last year, this superb ballerina announced slyly that—her NYCB schedule notwithstanding—she was available. Petronio took her up on it. I doff my virtual hat to her. Wearing soft slippers, a tiny skirt, a sparkling sleeveless blouse, and a be-jewelled golden collar (costume by Karen Erickson), she aces the sweeping leg gestures and yanked-off-center stances and sinuous flow that unfold alongside Muhly's recorded score. Compared with the Petronio dancers, she's slightly unyielding in the neck and shoulders during transitions. Never mind. Opening-night spectators let her know we loved her.

And why Paxton? I'm not sure. Except that, as Petronio explains while performing the solo, Paxton visited Hampshire College when Petronio was an undergraduate there and taught a class that stunned the latter into what turned out to be a career.

I'm getting ahead of myself. In 1970, Paxton was invited to stage his *Satisfyin Lover* at New York University. I'd seen it in March of 1968 at St. Peter's Church. Thirty-two people wearing anything they felt like wearing gradually walked across the gymnasium. There was a chair or two someone could sit on a while if she/he had a mind to. It felt like a celebration of our ordinariness as well as a statement about what could be considered art.

For the 1970 version, Paxton got the idea of casting 32 red-headed people and having them walk naked. NYU cancelled the performance. Instead, in a big, open space in NYU's former Eisner-Lubin Student Center (the Skirball Center occupies its footprint now), he performed *Intravenous Lecture*. I was out of town, but from what people told me, he had a doctor attach him to an intravenous drip and then walked around, talking to the audience. I got the impression that he held the bag of fluid himself (maybe not). I don't know whether he improvised much dancing, but one of his points, I believe, came in the form of question. Which was more disturbing to look at—a bunch of naked people walking across a space or a man with a needle in his arm? What was the goal of censorship anyway?



Petronio in Steve Paxton's *Intravenous Lecture* (Sciscione attending). Photo: Julie Lemberger

It is this improvised solo that Petronio, with Paxton's blessing elected to perform. His version doesn't, of course, have the immediacy of the original, although censorship keeps coming up in far-right-wing rants, and we currently battle the issue of state-mandated vaginal probes. On opening night, Dr. Glen Marin hooks Petronio up to the drip (at each performance, a different doctor does the job and takes a bow). The bag of saline solution is then hooked onto a stand, and while Petronio wanders, gestures, slides into little flashes of dancing, and lies down for a moment, dancer Sciscione follows him with the wheeled stand, making sure he doesn't stretch the line too far. The sight is strange and disturbing—the clear-plastic tubing comes to look like a fragile lifeline, an umbilical chord, a leash, the baggage we tote wherever we go.

Petronio speaks of the body as something to love, honor, and obey in all its disastrous and transformative and beautiful moments, but he focuses most specifically on an experience in his past. In brief, he was arrested in London, where he was living in the late 1980s, for going to a neighborhood store wearing (accidentally) a Vivienne Westwood T-shirt that displayed two men in a sexual act that the arresting officer could only, with difficulty, bring himself to name. Homosexuality was a criminal offense in England at the time. Petronio's offense was "inciting public unrest."

That's sort of what he arouses in the theater by performing *Intravenous Lecture*. Not a bad idea. And an interesting counter to the thrill of watching the valiant, transfigured bodies of his dancers.

The New York Times

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

Dance Review

It's Nick Cave's World; They Just Dance in It

By ROSLYN SULCAS



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

There's a visceral thrill to Stephen Petronio's choreography that is unlike anything offered by other contemporary choreographers. Legs whip round bodies with razor-edged ferocity; high, flying jumps erupt into the air; pelvises and torsos ripple through abrupt, unpredictable changes of direction, shifting from vertical to horizontal and back in the blink of an eye. The movement, with its improbable juxtapositions, seems to pour across the stage in an unquenchable flow, and yet it's rarely too much for the eye to absorb.

That's because Mr. Petronio is also a superb craftsman who knows how to build and layer a dance, pace the whiplash speed and alter the hectic mood, and create intriguing formal configurations through spatial patterns as well as individual bodies. In "Underland," which opened at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday, he does all that with his usual skill and panache.

The result is high-level entertainment; there were probably few people in the startlingly stylish audience (Patricia Field! Hamish Bowles!) who didn't enjoy the physical exhilaration that Mr. Petronio's brilliant dancers conveyed in the hourlong work. ("Is it over already?" my companion asked in dismay at the end.)

But the most seductive component of "Underland," created for the Sydney Dance Company in 2003, is also its greatest handicap. The piece is set to songs by Nick Cave, the Australian artist who is the musical love child of Leonard Cohen and Neil Diamond, with Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht as godfathers. Mr. Cave, with his hallucinatory lyrics, growling ferocity and gothic morbidity, is a hard act to live up to, and Mr. Petronio doesn't quite manage it.

That's perhaps because his style isn't suited to telling specific stories. The propulsive, jarring movement is its own larger narrative: one that tells of the human body in a contemporary world of fractured images, ambiguous sexuality, tenderness and violence. And Mr. Cave's songs are, most of all stories about people — from the rambling poetry of the recluse in "Mah Sanctum," to the folklore murderer of "Stagger Lee" or the killer going to the executioner's chair in "The Mercy Seat." (The songs are woven with unobtrusive brilliance into a score by Mr. Cave's former producer Tony Cohen.)

Frequently the effect is to reduce Mr. Petronio's choreography to an illustrative role. There are backflips and traveling circus costumes in a dance to the marvelously thumpy Weillian rhythms of "The Carny"; and crying gestures threaded into the military marching formations and implicit

suggestions of war and loss in “The Weeping Song.” A catch-and-throw, slash-and-burn, give-as-good-as-you-get duet for Barrington Hinds and Natalie Mackessy is thrilling to watch, but a predictable response to the violence of lyrics and sound in “Stagger Lee.”

This lack of resistance to the verbal and musical associations of the songs blurs our response to the dance, as inventive and sophisticated as it is. The triptych video screen at the back of the stage makes matters worse, with a slow succession of images (by Mike Daly) of war, explosions and fire that feel didactic rather than integral. (Ken Tabachnick’s lighting, is, as usual, subtly perfect.)

Despite these problems, “Underland” is well worth seeing, partly for the sheer pleasure of watching superb dancers do very difficult things with searing skill. And also because it shows an important artist grappling with his own ambitions. Mr. Petronio clearly believes in dance: that it can take on Mr. Cave or anyone else, that it can be glamorous and unabashedly theatrical (there are multiple costume changes, in sexy disheveled mode from Tara Subakoff) as well as audacious.

He doesn’t pull it off in “Underland,” which never coheres into the dark world he clearly wants to evoke. The endeavor, as Samuel Beckett might have said, fails better than most.

The Stephen Petronio Company performs through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea ; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.

IN PERFORMANCE—The Stephen Petronio Company —★★★★

A thrilling 'Underland' from Stephen Petronio



By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune
March 9, 2013

The glories of the specific choreographic piece that is "Underland"—and they are considerable—almost don't matter in that it's also a chance to watch the Stephen Petronio Company, about as thrilling as dance troupes get.

Petronio's one-hour piece is fascinating, but it's his consummate mastery of the craft that blows you away. It's as if he whispered into the ears of this terrific ensemble, "Just keep moving, and do so spectacularly," and then sent them on stage to prove the power, beauty and excitement of the art.

Back in the day, Petronio was an electrifying dancer himself, and he begins "Underland," created in 2003 and playing in revival during the troupe's visit through Saturday to the Dance Center of Columbia College, in telltale cameo. Shrouded in dim light, he lurks on an inclined plank, crawling slowly downward, an object clutched in his teeth.

It's a play on the Down Under nickname of the homeland of the work's composer, Australian songster Nick Cave, and a kind of inverted Sisyphean image foreshadowing the dark underworld of Cave's lyrics. We are journeying to dismal places.

There's an intoxicating paradox between this world view and the virtuosity of the dancers, who spin, leap and shape-shift on a dime, in moves expertly crammed with magnificent, natural detail. How can life be so bad when artists dance this sensationally?

That tension energizes "Underland," a work finally as moving and hopeful as it is grim in subject. Petronio's style is more classic than I remember, whirling whiffs of ballet everywhere, my favorite a brief sequence in which two men enact duplicate entrechats, then jut their legs and spasmodically twitch their feet as follow-up.

The foursome in "The Ship Song," the inflamed classicism of Joshua Green and a wondrous duet by Natalie Mackessy and Barrington Hinds to Cave's Stagger Lee ode, ingeniously melded with a richly complex male quartet, deserve mention.

But it's Petronio's silky direction that rules, a smartly balanced control of medium and message, even as the dancers technically tear off the roof.

People say the old model of single-choreographer company is no longer practical. Maybe Baby Boomer Petronio is a sublime breath of its last gasp. Or maybe he's reason to make sure they're wrong.

When: 8 p.m. through Saturday

Where: Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan Ave.

Price: \$26-\$30; 312-369-8330 or colum.edu/dancecenter

The New York Times



Stephen Petronio Company Reed Luplau, a guest artist, with Amanda Wells, left, and Shila Tirabassi in "Foreign Import," at the Joyce on Tuesday.
Photo: Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

A Choreographer's Stamp, Still Unmistakable

DANCE REVIEW
ROSLYN SULCAS
Thursday, April 29, 2010

Although we don't think about it much in daily life, the way someone moves is as distinctive as a voice or facial features. Of course some movements, voices or features are more striking than others. So it is, in dance terms, with Stephen Petronio, one of the few contemporary choreographers to have created an instantly recognizable style and also a substantial oeuvre, built over 25 years upon hard-driving, limb-lashing, fascinatingly dense coordinations.

You see the source of this style as soon as the curtain goes up on "#3," a 1986 solo performed by Mr. Petronio at the start of his company's current program, which opened at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night. In black pants, white shirt and loosened necktie, Mr. Petronio twists his torso and gestures enigmatically, his movements as tight, mannered and constrained as the music (by Lenny Pickett) is loose and jazzy. But his twitchy, ripply segues from one position to another, the

non sequitur sequences, the lightning fast changes of dynamic, all speak of his own kinetic personality.

In "MiddleSexGorge" (1990), perhaps Mr. Petronio's best-known piece, that personality is all Baudelairean bad-boy beauty and menace. Part of its renown stems from the H. Petal costumes for the male dancers; flower-ringed tights and buttocks-baring pink corsets. Twenty years later those costumes — and the brutal postpunk rhythms of Wire — provide an aesthetic rather than a political statement. The force of the work comes from the way Mr. Petronio keeps lines of energy pulsing across the stage, as the nine dancers jump and turn in tightly packed sequences, while their legs and arms whip with elongated clarity around their bodies.

Mr. Petronio's movement has an effortfulness that is often apparent through the deliberate awkwardness of his juxtapositions: jumps from flat-footed swivels; torsos tilted one way, arms reaching back the other; abrupt changes of momentum. Though it's a very different dynamic from

ballet, it's interesting to see how balletic Mr. Petronio's work looks now. (Or rather, we've become used to seeing ballet companies do work that looks something like this.)

Bad-boy beauty and menace, and a little bit of mourning.

"Foreign Import," a 2007 trio that is an extract from a larger piece, "Ride the Beast," was created for the Scottish Ballet. Set to Radiohead's "Creep," it provides elegant contrasts between the elongated lines of two women (Shila Tirabassi and Amanda Wells), wearing drapery chiffon cloaks (by Benjamin Cho) and a pelvis-tilting, surging solo from Reed Luplau, who weaves between them as they continue on their implacable course.

Somewhat confusingly, the new "Ghostown" follows with no break; presumably Mr. Petronio wanted to show the connections between the pieces. Both do have an elegiac quality that seems new

for Mr. Petronio, although "Ghostown" develops the idea in a more overt way, with Mandy Kirschner as a central spirit in flowing white, inhabiting a space in which ever-shifting groups of dancers appear and vanish with unpredictable fluency.

The way Mr. Petronio uses these groups and the edges of the stage is structurally fascinating, recalling Trisha Brown's exploitation of the wings in works like "Set and Reset," and this piece conveys a sense of both loss and mystery. (What has happened here? Who is mourning who, or what?)

"Ghostown" can feel meandering and slightly heavy-handed in its hints of narrative. But Mr. Petronio is trying something new here, and the new can take time to settle before our eyes. Like most of his work, you want to see it again.

The Stephen Petronio Company performs through Sunday at Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.

Los Angeles Times

Stephen Petronio and Trisha Brown: Moving in the same dance circles

The choreographers are known for rich and complex dances. Southern Californians can see their troupes soon: Petronio's performing his hit 'Underland'; Brown's showcasing her works spanning decades.

By Valerie Gladstone, Special to the Los Angeles Times
November 13, 2011

Reporting from New York — Stephen Petronio and Trisha Brown see each other's New York-based companies perform whenever they can. Friends and like-minded choreographers for more than 25 years, they both make sensual dances, packed with ideas. But when they come to the Los Angeles area soon, they'll be too busy preparing for their performances to take in each other's concerts.

Says Petronio in a recent conversation, "I'll never stop being swept up in Trisha's work."

The 11-member Stephen Petronio Company is bringing the choreographer's hit "Underland," performed to songs by Australian rocker Nick Cave, to Riverside and Santa Barbara this week. Days later, Brown and her troupe visit the Northridge Valley Performing Arts Center. Within a week, lucky audiences can check out two major artists linked in modern dance history.

"On the surface," says Petronio, bald, tattooed and 55, "I'm more aggressive and provocative than Trisha. But both of us pour information into every movement. That's what we thrive on."

Brown says, "My choreography is about change. It is sometimes metaphoric, using memory as a resource. For me, this brings reality to the movement and modulates its quality and texture."

Brown's and Petronio's genius for rich and complex dances, accompanied by the courage to keep experimenting, has propelled their careers and earned Brown, 74, a place in dance's pantheon. (She recently received a New York Dance and Performance Award, or "Bessie," for lifetime achievement.) Passionate about their work, they don't want audiences to leave unmoved or without resonant images.

Petronio originally choreographed "Underland" in 2003 for the Sydney Dance Company, using Cave's plaintive songs of lust, murder and death. "I never tire of this piece," he says. "I adore the music and love how my movement language lives with it. That doesn't always happen in a work for me."

A frequent collaborator with hip, contemporary composers, fashion designers and visual artists, Petronio calls himself a "formalist." But for all its wildness, his choreography is well organized and well constructed, qualities he first admired in Brown. "Trisha and I have a real appetite for formal organization of the chaotic body," he says. "You have to look at her works many times before really seeing what's going on."



"UNDERLAND": Stephen Petronio troupe members perform his choreographed work to songs by rocker Nick Cave. (Sarah Silver / Stephen Petronio Company)

Their meeting was a match made in dance heaven. When New Jersey-born Petronio first heard about Brown, he was a student at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass., taking classes with Steve Paxton, the originator of the dance technique known as contact improvisation. Diane Madden, now rehearsal director of Brown's nine-person company, was a student at Hampshire at the same time. Petronio and Madden became fast friends and traveled to Boston together to take a workshop with Brown.

Within three years, Brown had hired them both, making Petronio her first male dancer. For seven years, he soaked up her artistry, leaving in 1986 to establish his own company. Madden observed their period together. "It's easy to see why Stephen and Trisha got along," she says. "They both have mercurial minds and work super fast. Wit and humor are also a big part of them both. Because they are also very different people, they could play off one another's creativity."

Even after 30 years of performing and working with Brown, Madden remains in awe of her talents, which include choreographing for her company, for opera and theater, as well as creating masterful drawings, which have been exhibited at such international festivals as Documenta in Kassel, Germany, and the Venice Biennale. "Trisha has this extraordinary ability to craft exquisite phrases of movement," she says. "You put that together with her movement vocabulary and you have dances that you never get enough of."

Her company's program at the Valley Performing Arts Center should give the audience a good idea of what Madden means. The troupe will perform "Watermotor," "Opal Loop," "Foray Forêt" and "Les Yeux et l'âme" (The Eyes and the Soul), an exemplary range of works that Brown choreographed between 1978 and 2011. Among other scores, they are accompanied by marching band music and an excerpt from Rameau's opera "Pygmalion," while "Watermotor" is danced in silence.

Brown fell in love with movement early on, recalling that as a child in Aberdeen, Wash., she spent as much time as possible playing outside. "Playing is integrated into my dances," she says. "There is a spirit of playing in the improvisation and rhythmic structure." As a member of the Judson Dance Theater in New York in the 1960s, she earned a reputation as a groundbreaker with works consisting of only pedestrian movement. Much of what she did was in reaction to what she calls "convention, pretension, romanticism and sentimentality."

"Today, my methods of organizing movement and the movement itself are more complex," she says. "My choreography is about change. The language is abstract, but layered with meaning, even in pure movement. Within the movement phrases, there are total, instantaneous shifts from one physical state to the next. It's tumultuous to perform, but if the momentum is just right, there is an ease."

For a long time, Brown didn't use music for any of her pieces; later, ironically, she began choreographing for opera. She also started collaborating with visual artists, particularly Robert Rauschenberg, using his sets for many of her works. Composer John Cage and choreographer Anna Halprin were also early influences, but her longest and richest collaboration was with Rauschenberg. "There aren't enough words for me to describe the power of our meeting," she says.

Though Brown and Petronio have traveled very different paths over the last 25 years, they remain linked by their belief in the power of dance. "What I love about making dance is the unknown," she says. Acknowledging that there's a lot of grumbling and fear about the future of dance, Petronio still expresses unreserved optimism. "It's so essentially human," he says, "that it can never die out."

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2009

A Turbulent Voyage Marks a Magical Ship Captain's 25 Years of Dance

Stephen Petronio's "I Drink the Air Before Me," performed at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night, begins where none of his other dances have: aboard a

DANCE REVIEW

GIA
KOURLAS

ship. Scrim in the shape of a sail is pinned to one side of the stage; the choreographer, with the costuming help of the artist Cindy Sherman, is its craggy, bearded captain, dressed in a nautical jacket, chaps and rubber hip boots over jeans.

During the preshow, Mr. Petronio remains in character, docking his ship by hooking ropes throughout the theater. Grunting at audience members to get out of his way, he eventually climbs onto scaffolding — his crow's nest — where he recites a paraphrase of a folk lyric: "I won't be your man at all if I can't be your salty dog." Soon after, he disappears.

Named after a line from Shakespeare's "Tempest," the dance is inspired by a raging storm. Like Mr. Petronio's choreography, the score, by Nico Muhly, evokes turbulent undercurrents in which the frantic sounds of flute and strings are woven with the more tumultuous notes of a trombone and piano. Without being literal, the music and choreography cre-

Stephen Petronio Company
Joyce Theater

ate a sonic, ephemeral wave.

For the work, created in celebration of his 25 years in dance, Mr. Petronio opted for something new instead of a retrospective. His bizarre impersonation of a captain marks a departure, but the bulk of "I Drink the Air Before Me" assembles his usual tools: ferocious speed, rigorous structure and dancers who ravel and unravel like ribbons.

Groups of bodies swell and dissipate like squalls, though while the scene is frequently forceful, the relentless choreography is only part of the picture. Mr. Petronio's movement also reverberates as an energetic echo, moving past the physical form to etch invisible lines and patterns onto his canvas, the stage. Amanda Wells, arching her back, swirls her legs and arms as if swept by wind. Gino Grenek whips his body across the stage like a funnel cloud. And Shila Tirabassi, a force of nature herself, elongates her reach with every movement to impart sensual fluidity.

When the violent rush of bodies threatens to overwhelm, Mr. Petronio calms things down. The Young People's Chorus of New York City joins the dancers onstage to sing the work's choral finale, "One Day Tells Its Tale to Another." Their innocence softens the fury; the sea is finally still, and Mr. Petronio has weathered a perfect storm.



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left, Davalois Fearon, Mandy Kirschner and Shila Tirabassi performing in "I Drink the Air Before Me" at the Joyce Theater.

Stephen Petronio Company continues through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.

Stephen Petronio Company - review

Barbican, London



Calm and squalls ... the Stephen Petronio Company. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

Stephen Petronio's latest work, *I Drink the Air Before Me*, may take its title from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, but its imagery comes from the sea. During its informal, 30-minute prelude, the dancers warm up on stage wearing navy macs, like a ship's crew. Petronio, an absurd if slightly menacing captain in grey beard and wellies, stomps around unfurling ropes and muttering vicious curses at everyone in his way.

It's a deliciously odd blurring of the nautical and theatrical, and it promises an even odder narrative to follow. The salty references continue, in a flash of hornpipe and the dancers' blue and white striped costumes – but once Petronio has climbed up to a crow's nest to watch his work set sail, it becomes obvious that the voyage will be musical, choreographic and emotional rather than literal.

Nico Muhly's score, layering electronic beats, live ensemble and choir, is a tempest in itself, with textures and colours battering against each other in a dissonant blast. The 11 dancers, after a prelude of quietly patterned calm, plunge into choreography of similar ferocity. With the asymmetric, twisting, flailing impetus of Petronio's signature style dialled right up, they often appear to be battling the elements: they're hurled across the stage in whirling, lop-sided turns or jagged leaps.

I Drink the Air could nearly be Petronio's finest piece. Its choreography is dense with invention, its dancers project a fine fierce physicality and an alert, emotional presence. But it is also self-defeatingly hard to watch. Too often the intensity of the choreography is cancelled out by the intransigent clamour of Muhly's music; too often it's not allowed to breathe in the calm between the squalls. Even though the work finally gets to dock with music and dance of quiet resonance, we feel too buffeted to get the full measure of its beauty.



MAGAZINE

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THE WORLD AT YOUR FEET

APRIL 2009

The CHOREOGRAPHY ISSUE

PETRONIO POWER

CHOREOGRAPHER'S
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Amanda Wells,
Michael Badger,
Stephen Petronio,
Shila Tirabassi, and
Barrington Hinds

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BY VALERIE GLADSTONE

Petronio in Bloom

A daring intellect, he's been taking risks for 25 years.

Stephen Petronio set Shila Tirabassi spinning in a circle, releasing her only when she stopped abruptly and shot her back leg out in arabesque. "Perfect," he said, moving away as she turned on the diagonal, allowing space for Amanda Wells to leap forward in a series of explosive jetés. "Good, good," he cheered.

His other dancers practiced moves on the sidelines at the Joyce SoHo studio in Manhattan. They had been performing steadily for months, and, back in December, had returned from a six-week tour of England. "That's it," he called out as the women finished the vigorous sequence in a sweat. "It's beautiful."

He had just begun choreographing *I Drink the Air Before Me*, the evening-length dance that will mark his April season at the Joyce Theater. This year his company's 25th anniversary provides an opportunity to look back over his career as well as look forward.

Linda Shelton, executive director of the Joyce, watched Petronio develop, starting in the 1980s. She saw him at various downtown venues in one-night performances. Now he has an annual weeklong engagement at her theater. "Stephen is one of the few choreographers with a distinctive style," she says. "I love the furious pace, his seemingly inexhaustible store of idiosyncratic steps, and wildly inventive juxtapositions of movement. There's no one like him. People ask who is the next Merce Cunningham or the next Paul Taylor. It's Stephen."

Petronio had no idea he would come this far. "In the early years," he says, "I tricked myself into staying by having a company temporarily. It was so much fun in the studio," he said, but he couldn't make ends meet financially. "I constantly told myself that I would stop after the next dance—until I finally just relaxed into the rhythm of that dichotomy."



Petronio in 1986

To celebrate his anniversary, Petronio, who is 53, decided to expand his troupe to 12 and to choreograph something new rather than offer a retrospective of his works. He was inspired by extreme and unpredictable weather to create *I Drink the Air Before Me*, which has plenty of swirling and spiraling movement to evoke tornadoes and hurricanes—not surprising from an artist known for his fierce, vigorous, quicksilver choreography. He commissioned hip young composer Nico Muhly to write an original score for acoustic instruments, electronics, and voice to be performed live by his chamber ensemble and the Young People's Chorus of New York City. He asked visual artist Cindy Sherman to design an elaborate costume for him and longtime collaborator Ken Tabachnick (who also happens to be general manager of New York City Ballet) to create the lighting.

"My job is to make things that are just beyond my grasp from last year," says Petronio, who looks almost as young as his dancers in his loose pants and sleeveless T-shirt. "It's nice to dream big."

He takes risks whenever possible, demonstrating a talent for successfully collaborating with big names like Laurie Anderson, Lou Reed, Rufus Wainwright, and Antony Hegarty and visual artists like Sherman and Anish Kapoor. "I've always been interested in pop culture, photography, film, and the visual arts," he says. "Those things formed me. I didn't have access to dance history. My tools have been more filmic and photographic." Perhaps for this reason, he attracts a decidedly glamorous audience; in the 1980s Rudolf Nureyev, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, and Andy Warhol attended his performances at The Joyce.

A few days after the rehearsal, at the cozy farmhouse in upstate New York that

Badger, Tirabassi, Hinds
and Wells in Benjamin Cho
costumes created for
Beauty and the Brut



Elena Demyanenko
and Amanda Wells
in *Lareigne* (2006)

he shares with his husband, Jean-Marc Flack, Petronio described how he fell into dance accidentally at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, a liberal arts school he chose as an arts-starved teenager growing up in Nutley, New Jersey. In his sophomore year, a friend suggested he try a contact improvisation class, an experience he compares to being hit with a thunderbolt. From that point on, dance took over his life. He spent the next two years learning as much as possible from the revolutionary co-founder of contact improvisation, Steve Paxton.

After graduating, Petronio headed to New York, where he discovered Trisha Brown, who was already a major figure in the downtown dance scene. Until then, she had not included male dancers as permanent members in her company. But in 1979, attracted to his silky, muscular style, she invited him to join her group, where he happily stayed for seven years. Not surprisingly, his two major influences, Paxton and Brown, also shared an affinity for one another and often performed together. From the beginning, he wanted to choreograph as much as to dance, and Brown encouraged him in that direction.

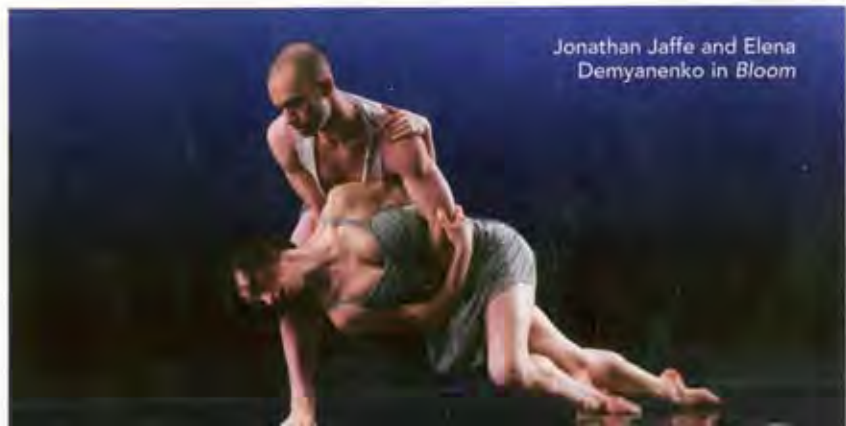
Looking back on his dances from the early to mid '80s, he first mentions the hilarious and surreal *Adrift* (With Clifford Arnell), with a nerdy title character who wore a suit and glasses and moved in a jerky, Chaplinesque way. In #3 he portrayed a cabaret performer, basing the movements on photographs of well-known singers like Judy Garland. It was a precursor of all the riveting solos that were to come. *Broken Man* from 2002 stands out as one of the most affecting in the way he embodies a completely devastated and confused human being, trying to no avail to become whole.

"Things were tough at the begin-

ning," Petronio says. "It was a question of begging, borrowing, and holding things together with tape until I became comfortable asking for financial support. When I moved from wanting to satisfy myself to engaging others as a way of life, it became much easier to seek support." As he presented these works at the Danspace Project and Dance Theater Workshop, he began to get a name for himself in downtown dance.

At the same time, the AIDS crisis was looming. Though he participated in the activist group ACT UP, he believed he should do more in the studio for the cause. Out of this conviction came some of his most highly sexual and provocative works.

"I started making movement that came from the pelvis, embracing the reproductive parts of the body," Petronio says. "It was flung forward, aggressive and slashing." No work exemplifies this period so clearly as the thrilling and shocking *Middlesex Gorge* from 1990, which he refers to as "my sexual anthem." With the dancers dressed in corsets, their buttocks bare, and a menac-



Jonathan Jaffe and Elena
Demyanenko in *Bloom*



ing score by the punk band Wire, the piece caused an uproar in the media.

During these years, he was dating another angry young man, the English dancer/choreographer Michael Clark. They performed in each other's works, sometimes nude, and choreographed a violent and brutal dance to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* together. But as the '90s wore on, Petronio returned to more formal composition and pattern making. The most memorable example, the beautiful *Lareigne*, is based partly on a triplet. Instead of concentrating on the movement of the torso he made it more about locomotion and moving through space.

Like most Americans, Petronio was horrified by September 11 and wanted to choreograph a piece that would capture the impact of that terrible experience on New Yorkers. He began developing various character studies and assigning them to his dancers. When the highly dramatic *City of Twist*, with music by Laurie Anderson, had its premiere at the Joyce in October 2002, audiences saw a whole new side to him: He was still a genius at structure but could also convey the emotions of a dreadful time.

Since then he has followed an almost double path, one year choreographing primarily with architectural space in mind, and the next concerning himself with emotion. An example of the latter is the moving *Bloom*, which is accompanied by a children's choir singing poems by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Last year, he made a funny and erotic dance called *Beauty and the Brut*, where a female dancer enacts the lyrics of a song about the mixed emotions of a Frenchwoman being seduced by an awkward American on a beach.

No one shows more enthusiasm for Petronio's work than his dancers. "Stephen's committed to pure, exhilarating movement," says Gino Grenek, "and he allows your individualism to emerge."

Wells says, "We explore the connective tissue, the transitions from one movement to the next. The question becomes, Where does this movement initiate from? It is a highly intellectual process of remembering where all the movement is derived from. And it's an immense physical challenge to keep things light, clear, and efficient." The objective, says Tirabassi, is "to get our energy to touch the audience in some way."

All of Petronio's dancers have ballet training, and a few have performed with major ballet companies. Petronio has also choreographed for companies such as the Ballett Frankfurt, Lyon Opera Ballet, and Scottish Ballet. "I love the facility and pyrotechnics of ballet dancers," he says. "To dance my work, they have to let go of the rigidity of the spine. Once they do, it's exciting to see the combination of their fluidity and my movement."

Petronio's devotion to the art is absolute, and he has great fun working at it. He does, of course, want other things for his company: a permanent dance home, more consistent work, and health benefits. He also wants to have a summer dance retreat and festival in the country.

Right now, things are good. But one senses that he could master bad times as well. "This coming period in my life is about continuing my daily practice, deepening my creative process, and teaching my language with a modicum of stability." Then he adds, referring to his approach to choreography, "To be engaged with a problem is divinely satisfying."

Valerie Gladstone writes about the arts for The New York Times, Boston Globe and other publications. She co-authored *A Young Dancer: The Life of an Ailey Student*.



Badger,
Petronio,
Wells