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Stunned by the beauty of Petronio

*Stephen Petronio Dance Company
Stranmillis College Theatre*

Last week Stephen Petronio's New York-based dance company was performing at the Festival Hall in London. This week it was Belfast for two nights, the only other UK dates on its current tour. A capacity audience was stunned into awed silence by the sheer beauty of its work, in which many other diverse art forms collide - contemporary music, poetry, visual art, fashion and drama.

First on the menu came *Lareigne*, created in 1995 and providing an intriguing glance into the days when, in life and in art, Petronio was known to take a walk on the wild side. Tattered white chiffon hung off the dancers like spiky angel wings, perfectly complementing the angular rock/ballet choreography and pounding rhythms of the electronic score and punk vocals of The Clash.

But the real joy of the evening lay in Petronio's latest collaboration with musical enfant terrible Rufus Wainwright. Songs from Wainwright's gorgeous *Want Two* album provided the perfect framework for *Bud Suite*, a set of sensuously danced, wittily costumed pieces, celebrating love and friendship, private and public lives, among and across the sexes.

The final piece, *Bloom*, with original music by Wainwright, is an epic hymn to the universe. The dancers, in fluid designer costumes, offer an intense counterpart to the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. And through the lush, multi-tracked score soar the sweet voices of the Ulster Youth Choir, appearing first on stage then moving through the auditorium to complete an enchanted circle of sound, light and dazzling movement.

By Jane Coyle