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Kink and violence gang up to hog the spotlight in much of Stephen Petronio's choreography. "I was feeling ghettoized by what was expected of me," says Petronio, who emerged as the subversive "bad boy" of New York's downtown art scene at the height of the ACT UP era. "I feel like it's such a limitation to only play to one side of my sexuality." So he decided to shine some light into the darkness by commissioning out crooner Rufus Wainwright to write an original score for his choreography. The collaboration, titled *Bloom*, premieres at the Joyce Theater in New York City on April 18.

Petronio asked Wainwright to compose something that swoons and swells with young love. "Adolescents, despite what a lot of people believe, are sexual," says the gay choreographer. "I wanted the smell of youth—the transition from youth to adult. That moment of transformation is the inspiration." Aptly, the piece will be sung by 44 members of the Young People's Chorus of New York City.

Wainwright and Petronio settled on three poems—two by Walt Whitman, one by Emily Dickinson—to lend a lyrical voice to the layered melodies of *Bloom*'s six sections. All involve planting, growing, becoming an individual. Whitman's "Unseen Buds" speaks of the ongoing potential of germination; "One's-Self I Sing" celebrates the act of claiming individuality. Dickinson's famous "Hope" praises the trustworthiness of that virtue. "These poems say what it means to be democratic and responsible in the world and to be conscious of other people," says Petronio. "The floral analogy is about growing as a person."

Petronio's dancers match the music's fugue-like architectural structure with sensual physicality. Sharing the program with the premiere are *Bud Suite*, a sexy duet for two men set to Wainwright's operatic "Oh What a World," and *The Rite Part*, a portion of an earlier Petronio work called *Full Half Wrong*, based on Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. As for the rite of collaboration with Wainwright (whose artistic capital seems to be growing hourly), Petronio is thrilled. "The right spirit jumps on the right thing at the right time," he says. ■

Carman also writes for The New York Times.



■ "I wanted the transition from youth to adult," says Petronio (inset) of *Bloom*.



Fresh moves

Choreographer Stephen Petronio tells how he and Rufus Wainwright created a new dance about the beauty of growing up and discovering sexuality

By Joseph Carman