

Super-Modern Downtown Dance

Stephen Petronio Company dance concert. At UCSB's
Campbell Hall, Tuesday, February 24.

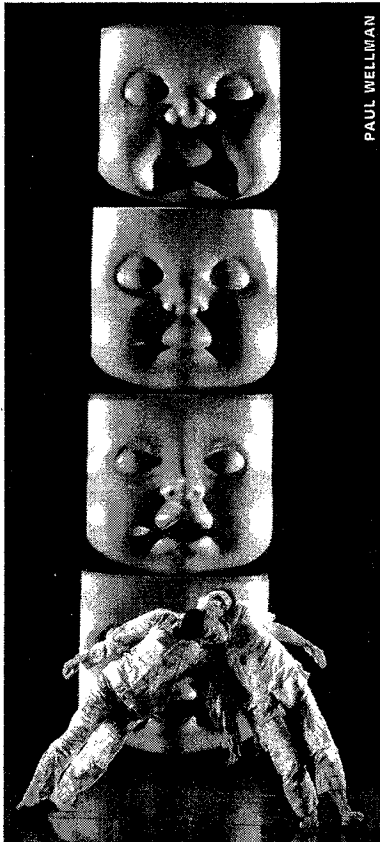
The Stephen Petronio Company recital at UCSB's Campbell Hall included some edgy moments—eight groping hands reaching for a single dancer, set to Lou Reed's song "Guilty"; a seemingly drug-addled rendition of Poe's "The Raven"; and men costumed in white jockey briefs and shirts worn backwards. But even if you didn't enjoy Petronio's style or use of images, it was impossible not to be impressed by the raw beauty, athleticism, and sensuality of the choreography. The nine dancers who make up the company performed three visually exciting and provocative pieces, all of them set to music either composed or compiled specifically for the troupe.

The evening began with a solo dance by Petronio. His costume was a cross between a straight-jacket and a suit, and his movements clearly stated the idea of the piece, "Broken Man." Petronio's arm gestures were pressured, with entire sequences repeating themselves, forwards and in reverse, as the dancer portrayed a man caught in a feedback loop.

"City of Twist," a piece inspired by the events of September 11 in New York City, alternated between lyricism and cacophony in both music and dance. The music, written and performed by Laurie Anderson, reflected the dancers' powerful body and facial expressions. Women in black danced like Gothic ballerinas in bare feet. Groups of dancers moved toward each other from multiple areas across the stage, weaving in and out of perfectly coordinated movement, only to disperse again.

Lou Reed's music provided the soundtrack for "The Island of Misfit Toys," in which dancers were supervised by a totem of doll faces with varying expressions. The piece began with an unconventional version of Poe's "The Raven"; Petronio sat in a chair to one side of his dancers, smoking furiously in time with the narrative. Throughout the piece, dancers created moving portraits of songs spanning Lou Reed's oeuvre.

Overall, the program was at once dark and beautiful. Petronio, who labels himself "super-modern," has choreographed and danced a visually compelling and powerfully emotional program. This is definitely a company worth seeing whenever you have the opportunity.



PAUL WELLMAN

**Hey babe, take a dance on
the wild side.**