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Stephen Petronio Company Shila Tirabassi and Jonathan Jaffe in Stephen Petronio's "Beauty and the Brut" at the Joyce Theater in Chelsea.

## Girl Meets Boy, Then Kinetic Melodrama Ensues

Dance fans remember Stephen Petronio for the bare bottoms and men in tightly laced corsets, for the pounding rock scores and Baudelairean bad-boy theatricality, and for the cream-of-the-crop cutting-edge composers and fashion designers that he likes to involve in his work.

But Mr. Petronio, whose company opened a week-long season at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night, is a more important choreographer than that sometimes facile reputation implies. He is one of the few contemporary dance makers who have created an instantly recognizable style, and — more perti-

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

nent — he shows in the two new works in this program that he can use it in fresh and unpredictable ways.

The thrill of watching Mr. Petronio's dances come from the kinetic drama of that style: limbs whiplashing in long straight lines through space; jumps engendered from static positions by pure energy, rather than momentum; abrupt changes of direction and dynamic that make each step look like a new thought. That could be numbing. But in these pieces he seems to parse his own relentless physicality and infuse it with emotional texture and wit.

In "Beauty and the Brut," a commissioned score by Fischer-spooner (the art-world-darlings music duo) offers a woman's voice recounting, in English and French, a pickup on a beach. With its Laurie Anderson-like echoes and deadpan unfinished sentences ("My name is — what-ever") set over minimal electron-

ic melodies, the score alone is a delight. So is Ken Tabachnick's wonderful lighting, which magically evokes the haze of sea and sky on an empty beach. And as that light hits the gorgeously statuesque Shila Tirabassi, curving her body sculpturally through space, the work takes you immediately and confidently into its own sexy, glamorous world.

At first Mr. Petronio uses just one couple: Ms. Tirabassi, fluid and commanding, and Jonathan Jaffe, deliberately lumpen and brutish. But then other dancers, in fabulous beach gear (half cave man, half Erté) by Benjamin Cho, appear in multiple, never literal, incarnations of this never-ending human comedy.

One of the pleasures of this program is watching the way Mr. Petronio moves dancers seamlessly on and off stage, and how skillfully he paces the sections of his pieces. This is true of the 2006 "Bloom," with its swirling move-

ment and haunting score by Rufus Wainwright, beautifully sung on Tuesday by the Young People's Chorus of New York City. It is also true of "This Is the Story of a Girl in a World," a new piece that offers discreet meditations on gender in the way it sets identical choreography — sometimes aggressive and propulsive, sometimes silky and lyrical — on both the men and women, and leaves us to think about the effects.

Each of the work's five sections (set to music by Antony, Lou Reed and Nico Muhly) is rewarding. But Davalois Fearon's fiercely beautiful solo, Julian De Leon's disconcerting femininity in "Candy Says," and Michael Badger and Elena Demyanenko's melodramatically gestural duo evoking iconic female performers (Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Karen Finley and others) are particularly notable for their effect: jarring and just right.