

Beautiful World

*Stephen Petronio Company
Gets It*

By QUINN BATSON
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Stephen Petronio Company gave its most luscious, rich evening of dance in many years in its Spring 2008 Joyce Theater program. The frantic quality of dancers trying to keep up with breakneck choreography and only just succeeding is gone this year, whether because the newest members of the company have fully matured into the movement or because the choreography is more varied and dynamic. Though still firmly rooted in the ground, and sometimes physically entwined in groups through entire phrases, dancers do seem to break free of gravity more often as well.



STEPHEN PETRONIO 2008

Choreography by: **Stephen Petronio**.
Dancers: **Michael Badger, Julian De Leon, Elena Demyanenko, Davalois Fearon, Jonathan Jaffe, Mandy Kirschner, Shila Tirabassi, Amanda Wells**.
Music by: **Antony, Fischerspooner, Nico Muhly, Lou Reed, Rufus Wainwright**.
Costumes by: **Michael Angel, Benjamin Cho, Tony Cohen, Rachel Roy, Tara Subkoff**.
Lighting design by: **Ken Tabachnick**.
Photos by Chris Woltmann (above) and Steven Schreiber (below)

"Beauty and the Brut" is a new full-company production of tension and sensuality that takes us down a meandering storyline that begins dispassionately but ends ambiguously and fully aroused, with a very gradual shift midway from English to French, cool light to warm, to mark the transition. The Beauty and Brut of this possibly involuntary seduction on a beach are danced simultaneously and variously by every member of the company in swinging, minimal/primitive costumes by Benjamin Cho, with Shila Tirabassi possibly dancing the core role. The largely spoken soundtrack, full of echoes and premonitions, is credited to Fischerspooner and Steve Stein, and it is perfectly matched to shimmering, imperceptibly evolving lighting by Ken Tabachnick. This is just an amazing piece, ripe and full.

"Bloom" also uses subtly shifting qualities of light and sound to propel the choreography, but in this piece the effect is like waves of warmth and coolness advancing, receding and mingling as they pass. Young People's Chorus of New York City adds the musical dynamic of live singing in and around the recorded singing of a different chorus and of Rufus Wainwright's solo voice over simple piano. The overall effect of the piece is peaceful and meditative, reflecting the Latin Mass "Lux aeterna" theme of the music.

"This Is the Story of a Girl in a World" is newly completed as a five-section work of dynamic beauty and strength. "Bird Gerhl" as danced by the duo of Tirabassi and Mandy Kirschner, and later by a superlative Amanda Wells, is delicious and impactful, in soft black costumes by Tony Cohen. Davalois Fearon now fully inhabits the solo of "For Today I am a Boy", a really strong but fluid piece of physical dancing. "Candy Says" begins intriguingly in semi-silhouette, with the most feminine of three figures eventually revealed to be the beautifully fluid Julian De Leon, really impressive considering the other two are Elena Demyanenko and Wells. The ensuing quartet with Michael Badger, all wearing striking extra-length posterized-photo t-shirts by Michael Angel, is really connected group partnering, physical and sometimes near-brutal. "Snap" as performed by Badger and Demyanenko is a seamlessly posing duo of beautiful physiques doing male and female versions of essentially the same movements, with elements of competitive bodybuilding mixed with dancefloor "shade", humorous and impressive. The final segment "Girl in a World", danced by the entire company, is full-on Petronio, beautiful people mixing it up smoothly and explosively.

By taking himself offstage, Stephen Petronio seems able to channel all his own physicality into creating even deeper choreography, really well conceived on every level.

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