

## Choreographer offers 'love letter' to New York

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**Dance Review**

BECKET — A woman sleeps. A crescent moon glows in a star-studded sky. And a man, vulnerable in only his underwear, dances in utter solitude. It reminds us that no matter how connected we may be, we are also quite alone.

The solo, exquisitely danced by Gerald Casel, is one of the vivid choreographic portraits that make up Stephen Petronio's "City

of Twist," which the creator calls "a kind of love letter" to New York City. Set to an elegant score (strings, keyboard, guitar, and electronics) by performance artist Laurie Anderson and beautifully lit by Ken Tabachnick, the work was created partly in response to Sept. 11 and gives the innovative Petronio's virtuosic movement a rare emotional context.

Solos become duets, trios. Fractured phrases coalesce into ensemble unity. Gradually a community forms, as eclectic

and fascinating as the city it represents. Yet with each connection, each embrace, a rebound propels the dancers into their own isolated spheres, driven by individual needs and urges. The last solo, the dancer clothed in tatters, is sheer despair. But in its perpetual motion are the seeds of survival.

Petronio, who is celebrating his company's 20th anniversary at Jacob's Pillow this week, knows about survival. The first male member of the legendary Trisha Brown

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The Stephen Petronio Company draws on a variety of influences while forging its own audacious, athletic style.



PHOTO/SARAH SILVER

### Troupe continues to move forward

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Company, he has had his own troupe since 1984 and has developed a distinctive movement language that blends elements from two of his major influences — Russian ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev and contact improvisation cocreator Steve Paxton — with Brown's earthy, weighted quirkiness.

Petronio, however, amps it up with a tensile, muscular athleticism. A balletic arabesque falls into a spiral, the body skewed preposterously off balance. Jumps shoot sideways, angled arms and legs trailing. Flamboyant scissor kicks twist in midair. Heads bob-

ble as if on ball bearings. Torsos bend into audacious curves that lead into blistering spins. It's a breathtaking stream of propulsive, virtuosic motion, yet it all feels thought out, carefully structured.

On Wednesday night, Petronio gave a tightly coiled performance of his reflective character study "Broken Man." His superb company threw itself into the blitzkrieg of "Strange Attractors Part II," a dazzling work that looks a little like "Flashdance" on steroids, melding kickboxing with elements of club dance.

The evening also included a provocative 8-minute preview of his unfinished "The Island of Misfit Toys," set to a score by Lou Reed. For now it's a puzzle. A tangle of limbs perfunctorily fondle bodies, without pleasure or an ounce of tenderness. The rapid-fire couplings that follow begin to acquire a real sensuousness, but they only get started before the lights go down. One can only imagine where Petronio will take this one.