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Absence makes art grow fonder

By CLIVE BARNES

THAT customary good luck salutation for the theater, "Break a leg," is not regarded as very appropriate in dance! Yet luck can arrive in strange packages.

When dancer/choreographer Stephen Petronio broke his foot last December — no, he wasn't

DANCE REVIEW

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY

Joyce Theater, 19th Street and Eighth Avenue; (212) 242-0800.

dancing, he was on vacation — it must have first seemed disastrous, particularly as even now, almost a year later, he cannot dance full out.

Yet when his Stephen Petronio Company opened at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night with the world premiere of his full-evening work "Strange Attractors," it was evident his on-stage absence made his art grow fonder.

In fact he does briefly appear with his troupe in an amorously-shaped Prelude, sardon-

ically set to Placebo's "Without You I'm Nothing," but for the rest he has been forced to concentrate on making dances. And what wondrous dances he has made.

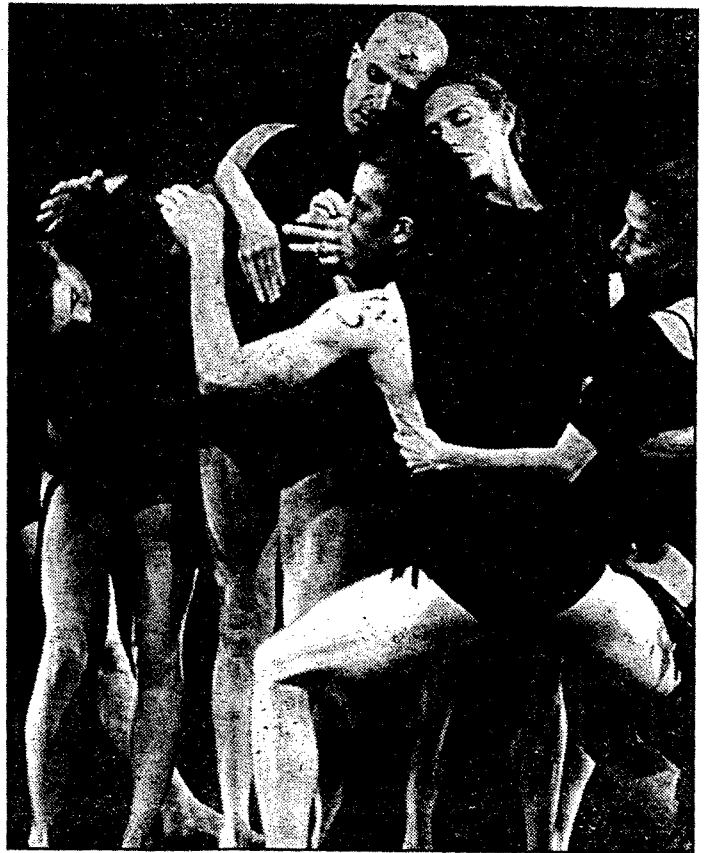
Ever since a decade ago he spent a couple of years working with the classically oriented British modern dancer Michael Clark, there has been a certain classic form and fluidity emerging in Petronio's work, evident in his breakthrough piece a couple of years back, "Not Garden."

The title "Strange Attractors" is taken from a scientific term defined as "a moving and magnetic focal point in a seemingly chaotic field."

This in its sense of order being perceived within chaos proves a pretty apt description of Petronio's fiercely energized yet swooping lyrical choreography.

The new ballet is in two acts — the first with a sonorous melodic score commissioned from 36-year-old Michael Nyman, one of Britain's leading young composers, the second, using a more strident electronic score from James Lavelle and Richard File.

The mood of the vibrantly danced choreography follows the music, but in both sections the



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concept of attraction and repulsion is interwoven with the general theme of order in chaos.

It is a major creation, full of unexpected invention and crystalline beauty. This is one of those works that can define what

dance is all about.

So that broken foot — forcing Petronio to create rather than dance — could be a mixed blessing where the mixture, as in "Strange Attractors," was just right.