

# The Arts

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## DANCE REVIEW

### *Drawing on the Pain of the Recent Past*

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Stephen Petronio has increasingly turned his attention in recent years to the emotional content of a dance, imbuing his signature fast, glittering movement with nuances and texture of another sort. But emotions and recent history take an unusually central place in the two premieres presented by the Stephen Petronio Company on Tuesday at the Joyce Theater.

Mr. Petronio has told interviewers that his big new "City of Twist," a group work set to a commissioned score by Laurie Anderson, was created in part in response to Sept. 11. But the other premiere, a solo called "Broken Man," opens the Joyce program on a note of reflective sadness that recalls the terrorist attacks much more immediately, though the dance appears to allude more to the

choreographer's breaking of his foot and perhaps, at a supremely lithe and agile 46 years of age, to his encroaching middle years.

"Broken Man," set to darkly atmospheric music by Blixa Bargeld, is a stunning tour de force of performing for Mr. Petronio. Alone on a dimly lighted stage, he begins small, then expands with larger moves that spread into a larger area of stage space. What grabs the eye and heart, however, are his sudden shifts between near-total stillness and motion that are jabbing, elegantly taut and convulsive from moment to moment. Both decisive and dejected, "Broken Man" communicates a pervasive sadness and an uncertainty about life that cut to the heart of memories and fears generated by Sept. 11.

"City of Twist" ends the program, after "Prelude" and "Strange Attractors, Part II." And that is a problem. "Prelude" is a relatively short and emotionally persuasive piece,

choreographed in 2000 to music by Placebo, in which eight lost souls cling to and droop against one another, oozing out of and back into a staggered line across the front of the stage. "Strange Attractors, Part II," choreographed in 2000 to music by James Lavelle, is full-blown Petronio: dazzling bursts of dance, filled with non sequiturs, that elide with the smoothness of impulses traveling across healthy nerve synapses, enhanced by stylishly current music and set and costume elements.

"City of Twist" is hard to digest after the profligacy of "Strange Attractors, Part II." The heart of "City of Twist" is a long rootless solo for the dynamic Ashleigh Leite, which ends the piece. What has come before does include eloquent solo passages for a dreaming Jimena Paz, for an excitingly hyperactive Gino Grenek and for Gerald Casel, a broken Pierrot in the dark confusion of Mr. Petronio's tumultuous city. But there is also a good deal of the choreographer's habitual twist and skitter, making the new work seem like two dances at times.

Ms. Anderson's score is lavishly textured. Ken Tabachnick, the evening's lighting designer, and Tara Subkoff of Imitation of Christ, who created the costumes for the new dances, give "City of Twist" just the right hard, chic edge. The strong cast was completed by Thang Dao, Shila Tirabassi and Amanda Wells. Also in the company are Michael Badger, Elena Demianenko and Erick Montes.

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