

# The Record

## THE RECORD APRIL 5, 1996 PREVIEW NEW JERSEY'S ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE



*Dance:  
Stephen  
Petronio  
pushes the  
envelope.*

**13**

### DANCE

## Pushing the limits, and then some

#### DANCE PREVIEW

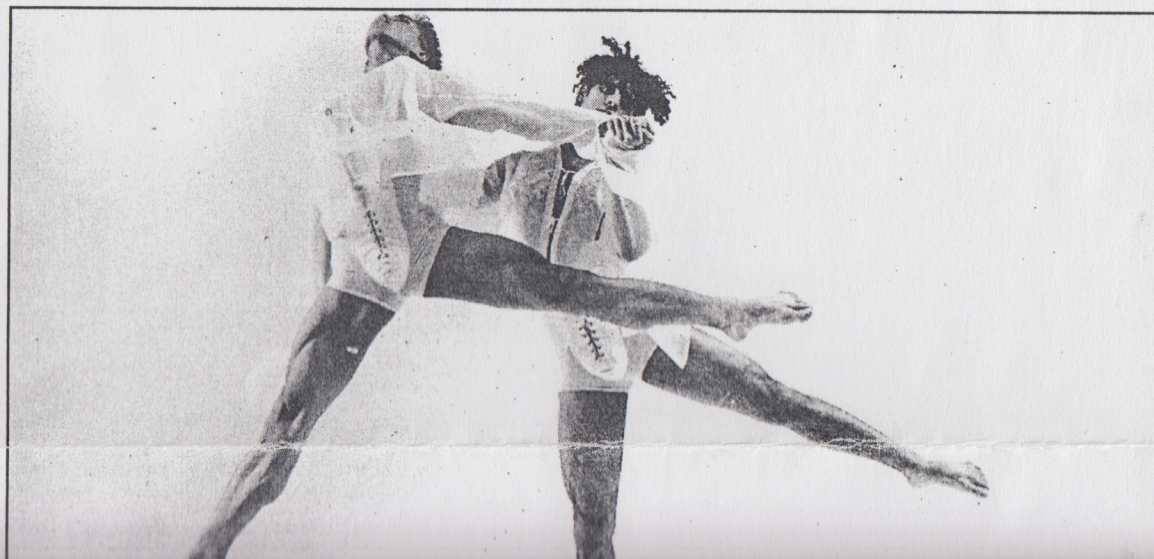
##### STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY:

"#3," "Lareigne," "#4," "Drawn That Way," "Accumulation With Talking Watermotor for Stephen" (opening night only). 8 p.m. Tuesday through April 14, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave., Manhattan. \$28. (212) 242-0800.

By **ELLEN DUNKEL**  
Staff Writer

Some people call Stephen Petronio the bad boy of modern dance. Petronio prefers to think of himself as pushing the limits of his art.

His style of choreography involves overloading the senses



# Pushing the limits, and then some

## DANCE PREVIEW

### STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY:

"#3," "Lareigne," "#4," "Drawn That Way," "Accumulation With Talking Watermotor for Stephen" (opening night only). 8 p.m. Tuesday through April 14, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave., Manhattan. \$28. (212) 242-0800.

### By ELLEN DUNKEL

Staff Writer

Some people call Stephen Petronio the bad boy of modern dance. Petronio prefers to think of himself as pushing the limits of his art.

His style of choreography involves overloading the senses. His dances are "very fast, very virtuosic ... it's a momentary visual pleasure." His steps are unusual, often of his own creation. He incorporates sensuality, sexuality, and violence.

"But my intentions are pure of heart," Petronio says in a telephone interview from his Brooklyn home. "I'm just trying to be honest."

Lest you don't believe him, Petronio says when he talks about violence, he is not speaking literally. He means a "violent attack of the space. It reflects and is part of New York culture. It's striking out into space."

And it is that violence, that speed, that use of space, and those unusual steps that define Petronio's eight-member company. It is also what won him many honors, including the first American Choreographers Award and a New York Dance and Performance Award, also called a Bessie.



From left, choreographer Stephen Petronio in his "Drawn That Way," and Gerald Casel and Tony Ramos in "Lareigne."

Despite his success, Petronio still raises a few eyebrows. His company tours quite a lot in Europe, less so in the United States. Europe, he says, has a lot more venues for dance and has been more accepting of his style. "America," he says, "is kind of colonial."

Before starting his company 11 years ago, Petronio was the first male dancer in the Trisha Brown Dance Company. Yet he came into dance quite by accident. The son of a van driver and a homemaker, Petronio, now 40, was born in Newark and grew up in Nutley. "We had no art in our house — we had TV. I couldn't read music. And boys didn't dance, especially in Italian New Jersey. But I was always different."

The first one in his family to go to college — he attended Hampshire College on a scholarship — Petronio was invited to a dance class during his first semester and became hooked. Still, he spent three years as a pre-med student before deciding he'd never be a doctor.

"I could be far more creative with my body than with a test tube or with organic chemistry," he says, adding that his father has always been supportive of his dancing. His mother died before his career took off.

Such a late start would be a hindrance to a classical dancer or a woman in any form of dance, but "it was the best thing that could've happened to me," Petronio says. "I was extremely hungry. I could have been quite

bored if I was dancing since I was 3.

"I didn't have the classical dancer's body, I didn't have the training, I didn't know how to choreograph. ... I had no idea what I was doing and that freed me up."

Even before he danced with Brown — from 1979 to 1986 — Petronio began showing his own work. "I couldn't really dance yet, but I could think anything was possible," he says.

It's just that kind of thought that has kept him pushing the limits of dance.

\*\*\*

Petronio's run at the Joyce will include two world premieres: "#4," set to music by Diamanda Galas (who will

perform it live on opening night), and "Drawn That Way," set to a commissioned score by Andy Teirstein called "Rhapsody for Boy Soprano and Strings." "Rhapsody" will be performed live by a string quartet, a string youth ensemble, and three boy sopranos.

"My daughter [6-year-old Bella] is studying the Suzuki method of violin and I've gone to her recitals," Petronio says, explaining the music for "Drawn That Way." "There is a hunger, an aspiration you have at that age."

On opening night, Brown will perform a solo — "Accumulation With Talking Watermotor for Stephen" — in Petronio's honor.

"That's almost unheard of for someone at her level," Petronio says.