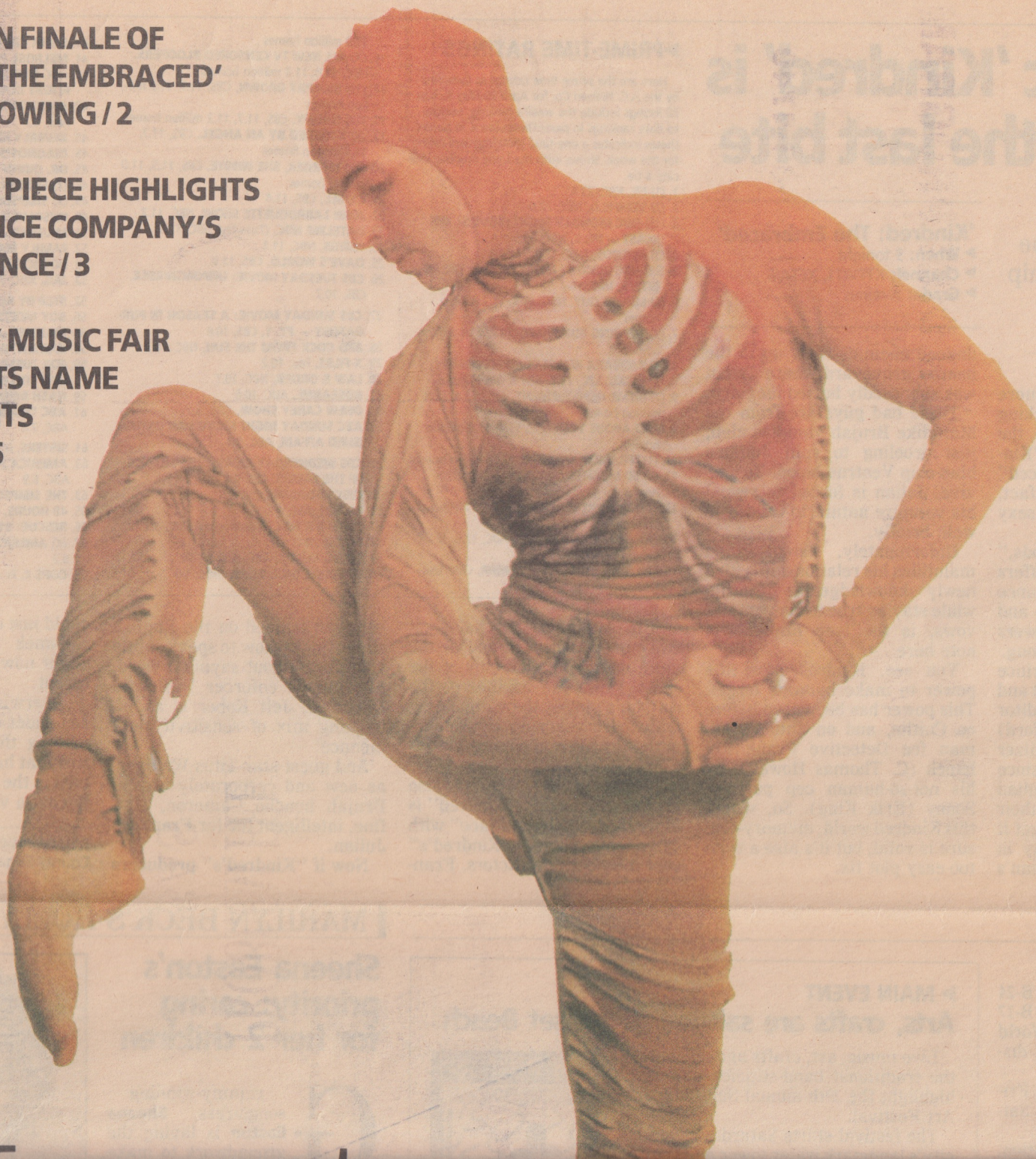


**THE SEASON FINALE OF
'KINDRED: THE EMBRACED'
KEEPS IT FLOWING / 2**

**McKAYLE'S PIECE HIGHLIGHTS
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**A COUNTRY MUSIC FAIR
CHANGES ITS NAME
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CONCEPT / 5**



Show Wednes



Wednesday

Hearts & Soles

STEPHEN PETRONIO

CELEBRATES THE BODY ECLECTIC
IN HIS DANCE COMPANY'S FIRST
O.C. PERFORMANCE / 4

MAY 8,
1996

THE ORANGE
COUNTY REGISTER

DRAWN TO DANCE

DANCE: Choreographer Stephen Petronio became a star of modern dance by constantly challenging himself.

By **LAURA BLEIBERG**
The Orange County Register

New York choreographer Stephen Petronio is thinking about "Drawn That Way," a new dance he has created, and he is glowing. Brightly.

The dance, which will be performed when Stephen Petronio Company comes to the Irvine Barclay Theatre for the first time Thursday, is the most satisfying dance he's created, Petronio said.

"The success comes and goes, and the glamour comes and goes. But I've made something that I'm really proud of," Petronio says by phone from his home in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. "I feel very satisfied. It's scary. It took me a long time to let me do this."

Petronio, 40, has been dancing and making dances for 20 years. In that time, he has consistently offered a strong new voice, both as dancer and choreographer, during a time when the dance world has seemed woefully quiet.

Though Petronio has had only limited engagements in Southern California, he has a loyal following in New York, where he is considered a leader in the downtown Manhattan modern-dance scene.

Since he founded his company in 1984, he has moved, if not uptown, at least into more presti-



writer Jennifer Dunning said that, after a distracting introductory section, "the main and seemingly unconnected body of 'Drawn That Way' takes over, dazzling the eyes with its continually shifting architecture and the effects of light and color created by Manolo's costumes ... whipping through subtle changes of light."

Petronio was raised in Nutley, N.J., the younger son of a truck driver and a homemaker (whose name was Loraine, one of the several meanings of 'the title "Lareigne"'). His mother hoped he would become a doctor.

Instead, at the experimental school Hampshire College, Petronio took a dance class his first semester and his fate was sealed. He filled his schedule with dance classes, and after

Stephen Petronio Company

- **When:** 8 p.m. Thursday
- **Where:** Irvine Barclay Theatre, 4242 Campus Drive, Irvine
- **How much:** \$26 (\$13 for full-time students with identification)
- **Availability:** Limited
- **Call:** (714) 854-4646

graduating, he moved to New York City. Within weeks he was invited to join the Trisha Brown Dance Company.

No more Mr. Bad Boy

Petronio performed with Brown's company 1979-86 and became a highly respected dancer there. After founding his own company, he immediately shot off in his own direction, forging his own reputation.

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Since he founded his company in 1984, he has moved, if not uptown, at least into more prestigious venues than the "dingy basements" in which he began. He just concluded what has become an annual season at the Joyce Theatre, and he has attracted an eclectic following over the years — from the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to the grandfather of experimental modern dance, Merce Cunningham.

While Petronio's dances and chief concerns have changed over 20 years, his commitment to challenging himself — and the audience — through movement has not.

Take "Drawn That Way." The title is a double-entendre, in part an amusing reference to the voluptuous cartoon character Jessica Rabbit ("Who Framed Roger Rabbit") who says: "I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way." But Petronio also had more serious intentions.

"Drawn That Way" continues an experiment Petronio began last year with the dance "Laraigne" (which is also on the Irvine Barclay program). Critics have praised Petronio's dances for their movement invention,

and Petronio said he knows he can get a visceral response out of an audience through the abstract, idiosyncratic shapes into which he can twist a body. His dances are known for their speed, aggression and movement invention.

But last year Petronio said to himself: "Well, drop one of (those characteristics) and see where you are, tough guy." I decided I'm going to cut out the movement invention. The invention is what I've stood behind, and I felt extremely naked (with-

out it)."

Family matters

For another dance, "Laraigne," the choreographer severely limited the way the dancers could use their bodies, restricting their arms, heads and spines. What he discovered, almost by accident, was a whole new way to use the stage, a characteristic that has interested other dance-makers, but which had not preoccupied him. At least before now.

In "Drawn That Way" he loos-

ened his self-imposed movement restrictions but still focused on making patterns, what he called using the "architecture of space through simple locomotion patterns." Thus, the second meaning of the title — a reference to the way he has "drawn" the dance.

"I set up a question or problem for each piece and it either gets solved or it doesn't," he said.

Apparently, he has solved this problem. In her April 11 review of the premiere of "Drawn That Way," New York Times dance



CONSTANT REINVENTION: Jessica Meeker and Steven Fetherhuff perform a portion of 'Drawn That Way.' Choreographer Stephen Petronio calls the work his most satisfying to date.

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He's known for commissioning original scores, working with composers such as Yoko Ono; he has worked with contemporary artists on his visual designs, such as Cindy Sherman; and he has worked with hip fashion designer Manólo.

His early dances had provocative explorations of sexuality. Combine all that with his shaved head, frank media interviews about his personal life and participation in the gay activist organization ACT-UP, and Petronio soon found himself wearing that bad-boy-of-the-dance-world mantle.

That was OK — then. But Petronio said he has moved on from all that. The constants in his life are the dances. Petronio doesn't care if audiences "get it," because there's nothing to get. He wants people to come and find their own meaning in his movement.

"I think people read the body many different ways," he said. "The vision is there, and I make it as clear as I possibly can. I work with constant motion. I try to make it so vivid that it looks like a frozen moment."