



The Stephen Petronio Company perform *The Island of Misfit Toys* in *The Gotham Suite* at the Playhouse.

PICTURE: REBECCA HALLAS

Petronio's New York state of mind

DANCE REVIEW THE GOTHAM SUITE

By Stephen Petronio Company, The Playhouse, until tomorrow. Running time: 100 minutes

Hilary Crampton Reviewer

STEPHEN Petronio's dance aesthetic could serve as a metaphor for New York, that restless, edgy city that never shuts down. He presents an endless stream of

air. He has forsaken gravity and gravitas of earlier contemporary choreographers.

The Gotham Suite is a reflection on New York, and collaborative artists and dancers that Petronio has known and worked with there. He opens the show with a solo of *Broken Man* to music by Blixa Bargeld. It prepares us for the density to come. Initially, he suggests a calm stability. Standing centre front, his

City of Twist is a collection of character studies of his dancers who display extraordinary agility and stamina in an exhausting series of solos and group dances set to haunting music by Laurie Anderson. It is in the solos that we can find gestural detail and individual characteristics, only to be swept away by a burst of ensemble action. High-speed traverses, intrusions and manipulations inundate our



Melbourne International Arts Festival

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per territory; a seated Petronio, writhing fitfully while three men bound restlessly. Through a series of nine songs, the action moves at a frantic pace. Petronio positions crucial activities in semi-obscurity, sometimes on the periphery, or masked by busy action.

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STEPHEN Petronio's dance aesthetic could serve as a metaphor for New York, that restless, edgy city that never shuts down. He presents an endless stream of complex, high-speed movement. Hyper-extended limbs fling. Torsoes twist and whip. Actions are balletically precise, displaying turned-out, carefully placed feet, speedy pirouettes and fussy little jumps that mostly skim the floor but occasionally bound into the

air. He has forsaken gravity and gravitas of earlier contemporary choreographers.

The Gotham Suite is a reflection on New York, and collaborative artists and dancers that Petronio has known and worked with there. He opens the show with a solo of *Broken Man* to music by Blixa Bargeld. It prepares us for the density to come. Initially, he suggests a calm stability. Standing centre front, his arms reach out to the sides expansively, as if to present himself and embrace the audience. But things begin to fragment, fingers crumple, the head drops, the body twists. Arms stretch, then collapse. Everything keeps dissolving.

City of Twist is a collection of character studies of his dancers who display extraordinary agility and stamina in an exhausting series of solos and group dances set to haunting music by Laurie Anderson. It is in the solos that we can find gestural detail and individual characteristics, only to be swept away by a burst of ensemble action. High-speed traverses, intrusions and manipulations inundate our tentative grasps at meaning, washing them away. It is both tantalising and frustrating.

Finally, we are rewarded with an extended, detailed solo by an unnamed woman, every element contributing to a sense of desperate despair: the music, the



flashing lights that transform the cityscape backdrop, the fringed costume that reflects every whip, whirl and tremor. She performs brilliantly and leaves us in a state of anticipation.

The Island of Misfit Toys is set to music of Lou Reed, opening with Willem Dafoe's acerbically uttered version of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*. This is night-

mare territory; a seated Petronio, writhing fitfully while three men bound restlessly. Through a series of nine songs, the action moves at a frantic pace. Petronio positions crucial activities in semi-obscurity, sometimes on the periphery, or masked by busy action.

The costume designs by Tara Subkoff/*Imitation of Christ* suggest character traits, and Cindy Sherman's giant dolls, faceless or two-headed for *The Island of Misfit Toys*, are endearing and grotesque.

Petronio reveals cameos of subtle clarity, but the maelstrom of whirling limbs and leaping bodies becomes soporific, diluting the movement's potential.