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are obsessed with the anti-heroes
of Hollywood's classic horror flicks.

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Beatriz Schiller

In the groove

The Stephen Petronio Company

by Gia Kourlas

Stephen Petronio's company hits the stage like a thunderbolt — the sheer force of his movement seems to push past the boundaries of physical expression. As a member of the audience, it's impossible not to be captivated, as well as rejuvenated, by the constant swirl of bodies. The much-admired Petronio, who is often tagged the "bad boy" of modern dance because of his fondness for punk music and bare skin, has always set his sights on movement invention. Bill T. Jones has called him the "best movement maker of my generation." His '80s collaborations with British choreographer Michael Clark were both notorious and admired. Petronio is hardly lightening up, but it's clear that his most recent pieces, *Lareigne* (1995) and *Drawn That Way* (1996), mark a kinder, more gentle direction for the choreographer. In both works, which Stephen Petronio Company is presenting this week at Center for the Arts Theatre, the focus is less on specific movement invention and more on the overall architecture of the dancers onstage.

These concerts also mark the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the Bay Area: San Francisco Performance Center.

Choreographer Stephen Petronio

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These concerts also mark the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the Bay Area: San Francisco Performances, an established dance presenter, has selected Petronio's troupe to be its resident dance company. And if a new funding initiative — Audiences for the Performing Arts Network — is approved this June, the Petronio company will embark upon a four-year relationship with the performing arts community in San Francisco. Petronio Company Managing Director Robert Russo explains, "The program is to expand outreach activities on the basis of booking an artist in a city other than their own home."

In addition to working as an adjunct professor at Stanford University, where he will design a new dance and drama curriculum, Petronio will work with the university's technical departments of computer science and research in creating the visual elements for upcoming dances. In addition, the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens has been designated by Executive Director John Killacky as Petronio's second home.

"In the '80s there was a big dance boom going on," says Petronio. "The reason I'm still here is because we sold tickets. We had no contributed income. When touring got scarier, we sort of panicked for a while, but it's just really obvious to me that this company could sell other things. Dancers should be superstars."

You can see the Petronio superstars for yourself in this week's program,

Choreographer Stephen Petronio