



Stephen Petronio (left) in the studio of his eponymous residency center. Photo by Alon Koppel, courtesy Petronio.

Stephen Petronio Company's 40th Will Bring an Evening-Length Premiere—and the Likely Closure of the Petronio Residency Center



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The Stephen Petronio Company is about to officially enter middle age, and the 40th-anniversary celebrations for the contemporary troupe—including a world premiere at NYU Skirball this month—will come alongside some major organizational changes.

Most significant among them: the likely closure of the idyllic Petronio Residency Center, located a few hours north of New York City amongst the Catskill Mountains and designed as an early-stage choreographic development center for dance artists. Purchased in 2016 and [officially opened in 2018](#), the center became financially unsustainable during the pandemic.

“I borrowed a lot of money to make it through the pandemic,” says Petronio. “I began bringing people up because they needed to work. And I thought, I’ve been raising money for 40 years. I’ll borrow this money, we’ll get through this, and then I’ll raise the money. And then the funding fell off a cliff.”

Now, with a large Small Business Administration loan to repay, lagging funder support, and earned-income streams severely down post-pandemic, the company has [listed the 178-acre property for sale](#). While this probably means the end of the center, Petronio hasn’t given up entirely and is still attempting to fundraise to save it. “Who knows what’s going to happen,” he says. “I wanted to put it up for sale before it got scary, and before it became, Oh, my god, we *have* to sell. I look at it like I’m cooking a meal, and I’ve got several pots simmering, and one of them is going to turn into a dish.”



PETRONIO RESIDENCY CENTER. PHOTO COURTESY PETRONIO.

With property values in the Hudson Valley having skyrocketed in the past several years, Petronio hopes that, should the center sell, the liquidation will put the company and its other programs on solid financial ground for the future, and allow it to continue to support the research and development of new work. It's a story similar to [that of Lumberyard](#), which also listed its upstate residency center for sale earlier this year, citing funders' shifting priorities and the opportunity to put earnings from the sale towards other impactful programs.

The decision to list the property was a heartbreaking one for Petronio, who also lives next to the site and had long dreamed of a space where he could pamper artists as they make work. (The residencies came with a 6,500-square-foot house with mountain views

and a private chef.) His balms during a challenging time: getting back in the studio to create and the music of violinist Jennifer Koh. The fruit of both will be on display in his new work, *Breath of the Beast*. “I felt that with the closing of the retreat, it was crucial we come out with something big,” he says of the evening-length piece. For Petronio, the “beast” of the title “is that creative, intuitive person that lives in you, that goes into that trance that’s required to make work that’s irrational and nonnarrative.” *Breath of the Beast* [will feature](#) guest artist Jerron Herman, along with members of Petronio’s company, and live improvisation by Koh.

It’s not a traditional anniversary retrospective—Petronio says that may be coming later—but, in a way, celebrating the “beast” feels like an homage to Petronio’s last 40 years of creative process.

And while the loss of a center devoted to that process will be deeply felt, Petronio will still be leaving a lasting legacy upstate: With the help of the Doris Duke and Howard Gilman foundations, 77 acres of the property will remain a “forever wild” preserve, protected from development indefinitely. “When I’m long gone, one or two of my works might move forward—who knows?” says Petronio. “But my legacy is that the Stephen Petronio Company saved a little part of the Catskill Mountains, with the help of many people. And I’m very proud of that.”