

Head to Head: Rufus Wainwright & Stephen Petronio /

Interview SCOTT ANDRESIEK
Photography DOROTHY HONG

Dazed & Confused April 2006

*When the American ballet choreographer **Stephen Petronio** approached **Rufus Wainwright** to collaborate on a dance project, he just couldn't say no.*

Stephen Petronio and Rufus Wainwright both share a passion for the dramatic, so it comes as no huge surprise that the pair have teamed up to collaborate on *Bloom*, a dance project involving two great American poets, a number of supremely flexible bodies, and a 44-member youth choir. American-born Petronio is used to working with performers who he admires, having previously choreographed pieces to the music of rock icons Lou Reed, Nick Cave and Wire, along with creative input from Tara Subkoff and visual artist Cindy Sherman. Set for a New York debut next month, the project features a Rufus Wainwright hits medley and "Bud", an original score by the flamboyant firebrand, with lyrics borrowed from both Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Here, the two innovators discuss the art of co-operation, the recording industry's reliance on idiots, and the sexual availability of male dancers.

Rufus Wainwright: I remember being on tour when Stephen contacted me. I was really exhausted and was not in the mood to do anything. I didn't know if I had the energy. But then he really hunted me down.

Stephen Petronio: I pursued him like a tiger. I flew from Austria to Redding in California, because I thought that if I didn't go and confront him on his tour bus then it would never happen.

RW: And then he brought up the idea of using a choir, and I thought that it would be a really great opportunity. The choir director, Francisco Nunez, is really nice. He believes that this piece is going to win the Pulitzer Prize, so that's the plan. *(Laughs.)* A lot of the score is thanks to technology, because in my work I often use ProTools and computers to create harmonies and record myself over and over and just, you know, plunge more and more into me. So I was just able to do it that way, and that's how I wrote the choir – I created 44 Rufuses.

SP: Artmaking is social. How could I make dance without music? I look for people that move me.

RW: I just want to have sex with a dancer.

SP: I've got a few for you, come to rehearsal!

RW: I'm still pretty new to collaboration with other mediums, which is really exciting for me. The greatest thing about doing something like this is that it has absolutely nothing to do with the recording industry. There's no like, 'what's our target audience? Is this going to be a single?' It's so amazing to not have A&R people and lawyers wondering how this project will relate to idiots. *Bloom* premieres at The Joyce Theatre, NYC on April 18.

www.stephenpetronio.com

www.rufuswainwright.com