

# The New York Times

## Dance Review

### Explorations of Loss, the Personal and the Public

By GIA KOURLAS

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Stephen Petronio runs on drama. As he explained from the stage of the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night, his company's performances in New York are "about getting as many people together to make the biggest mess that we can." Such cultural chaos for this show involved a long list of artist-collaborators, including the ballerina Wendy Whelan, the composer Valgeir Sigurdsson, the design team of Gudrun & Gudrun and the visual artist Rannva Kunoy.



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times  
Amanda Wells and Joshua Green of the Stephen Petronio Company in Mr. Petronio's "Architecture of Loss."

Mr. Petronio's newest dance, "The Architecture of Loss," shows a slight shift toward tenderness from the choreographer, offering bodies that wilt, instead of his norm, which is dancers whipping their legs with swirling insistence. He also strives to achieve a cool mood, though this dance is rarely bracing enough.

The score, by Mr. Sigurdsson, includes violin, piano, percussion and synthesizers to create a diaphanous whole. Ms. Kunoy's paintings, which shift in tone from gray to rose, hint at mist rising off water and are shown as video projections on three screens at the back of the stage. The knitted costumes by Gudrun & Gudrun hang on the dancers' bodies like overdesigned seaweed, adding unnecessary bulk to the choreography. Mr. Petronio might shudder, but I fantasize about seeing his work performed in silence, with the cast in practice clothes.

“The Architecture of Loss,” for 11 dancers, rarely moves beyond the atmospheric and distracting surface dictated by the music, visual design and costumes, though a duet for Amanda Wells and Joshua Green comes close to evoking the title’s melancholy. The dance is framed around this encounter, in which Ms. Wells reveals a jagged looseness as she repeatedly drops her weight into Mr. Green and then pulls away from him or buckles toward the floor. It’s here that “The Architecture of Loss” contains the most emotion and direction and where fragility, however fleeting, finds a place within Mr. Petronio’s choreographic forms.

An even more elusive sight was Ms. Whelan, the celebrated New York City Ballet principal, who performed “Ethersketch I,” a revised solo from Mr. Petronio’s 2003 work “Underland.” Radiant in Karen Erickson’s gold top and silk shorts, Ms. Whelan is a marvel in how smoothly she blends Mr. Petronio’s signature pliability with her own nervous, hard angularity to create a sense of urgency. Unfortunately it was over in a blink, prompting a man in the audience to yell, “More!” Here’s to that.

Along with “City of Twist,” created in 2002 partly in response to the events of Sept. 11 (it remains slightly maudlin and retains its unfortunate projections, including the Manhattan skyline), Mr. Petronio presented his own version of Steve Paxton’s “Intravenous Lecture.”

The original, created in 1970 after authorities canceled another piece intended for 42 nude redheads, featured Mr. Paxton, discussing censorship and making the point that it was more shameful than nudity, as saline solution was injected into his arm. Mr. Petronio’s take on “Intravenous Lecture” — which involves movement and talking — wavers between being absorbing and self-indulgent, with a focus on gay rights.

It’s somewhat wince inducing when Mr. Petronio delivers emphatic statements like, “The heart that beats beneath my dangerous flesh is mine.” His points are better taken when he slips through space with the plasticity of a ribbon. The flesh is real; the movement coursing its way through his body is like blood.

Stephen Petronio Company continues through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, [joyce.org](http://joyce.org).