

March 25, 2005

DANCE REVIEW

Posing a moving question: Are you hot to trot?

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY.

Choreography by Petronio. Through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue at 19th Street, Manhattan. Tickets \$40. Call 212-242-0800 or visit www.joyce.org. Seen Tuesday.

BY SUSAN REITER

"Are you hot?" That's the taunting question repeated often within the score for "MiddleSexGorge," the blazing final work on Stephen Petronio's incisive, juicy program at the Joyce. Its quartet of works, spanning the past 15 years, showcases Petronio's evolving fascinations but reveals him always choreographing from both his guts and his brain.

Petronio made the volatile, sensual "MiddleSex-Gorge" in 1990, when he was fiercely flaunting his homosexuality and deeply engaged in AIDS activism. It is full of intriguing confrontations between leggy postmodern bathing beauties in black leotards and compact men in pale corsets and dance belts. "What turns you on?" the dance seems to ask, as it offers something for everyone.

Petronio himself slices across the stage for a couple of brief turns, wearing not just a corset but sheer leggings that sprout orange ruffles. But the heart of the work lies in trios and quartets whose clustered dancers offer one another support. It's never clear from one moment to the next, which body will cede control, and be manipulated by the others.

Throughout the well-designed program, Petronio provides an energizing kick while also impressing with his savvy control over the stage. There is plenty going on, but never too much, within his subtly shifting scenarios.

In the tantalizingly bleak opener, "Prelude" (from 2000), eight dancers are lined up so close together that the slow undulations and shifts of their linked bodies resemble the segmented

activity of a single entity. Their expressions sullen, wearing raggedy-chic outfits, the dancers seem decadently detached and beyond caring. Or, they might be numb victims of a disaster, huddled close for comfort.

The lights had barely blacked out for the end of that work when Gino Grenek sailed onto the stage like some giant butterfly, trailing filmy white fabric, to introduce the expansive fluency of "La-reigne" (first seen in 1995). The prologue is set to the Stranglers' "No More Heroes," but Grenek cuts a heroically beautiful figure, seeming to float through fierce bursts of swirling, dynamic movement.

Seven others join in, shot forth so deftly that at times they seem like dozens, their lashing limbs and unfurling torsos expressing infinite possibilities.



Stephen Petronio Company's "MiddleSexGorge"

The beauty of their shapes and the wafting white fabric of the sexy costumes (designed by Manolo) evoke a serene, but perhaps deceptive, coolness.

Grenek and Thang Dao are definitely a hot pair in the new "Bud," set to a Rufus Wainright song that incorporates the melody of Ravel's "Bolero." Wearing bright red trunks and complementary halves of a dark blouse, these lipstick-sporting lads are perhaps two halves of a co-dependent whole. Their tough yet sensitive partnering has them maneuvering with springy resilience through tight clutches and surprising lifts.

"Bud" is one section of a forthcoming longer work to Wainright's music. With this tantalizing sample, Petronio certainly whets our appetites.

Susan Reiter is a freelance writer.