

Yin and Yang in a Complementary Duet

By JACK ANDERSON

The Stephen Petronio Company, 20 years old this season, offered choreographic fireworks at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night. Yet it did more than dazzle.

Although Mr. Petronio delights in high-energy productions, he combines ferocity with formal rigor. And he can temper turbulence with an underlying sense of compassion.

He revealed the gentle side of his choreographic personality most clearly in the world premiere of "bud," which is to be incorporated into a longer work next year. This male duet's theme became evident in the costumes by Tara Subkoff, of a collective called Imitation of Christ. The dancers Thang Dao and Gino Grenek wore red shorts. But Mr. Grenek had part of a black shirt on his right shoulder, while Mr. Dao had the rest of that shirt on his left shoulder.

They kept supporting each other as they sank to the floor and rose again with floppy and rubbery movements to a melodic recorded score by Rufus Wainwright that included a snippet from Ravel's "Bolero." Mr.

The company continues through Sunday night at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea, (212) 242-0800.

Petronio made each man become the other's half. But neither was a better half. These characters moved affectionately together in a harmonious sharing of strengths and frailties.

Social harmony also pervaded "Prelude" (2000), an ensemble for eight quivering dancers moving in and out of line to a recorded piece by Placebo with David Bowie. Some-

Men bound in corsets, but liberated by choreography.

times pairs pulled slightly apart from the group and hugged. But they always returned. If this restless community occasionally looked troubled, it never totally disintegrated.

"MiddleSexGorge" (1990) can seem a choreographic act of provocation for nine dancers to a propulsive score by the British band Wire. The choreography is relentless, and the women in the cast sometimes gang up on the men like furies from Greek mythology. The very look of the piece is peculiar. Whereas the women wear simple costumes by H. Petal, the men are in corsets.

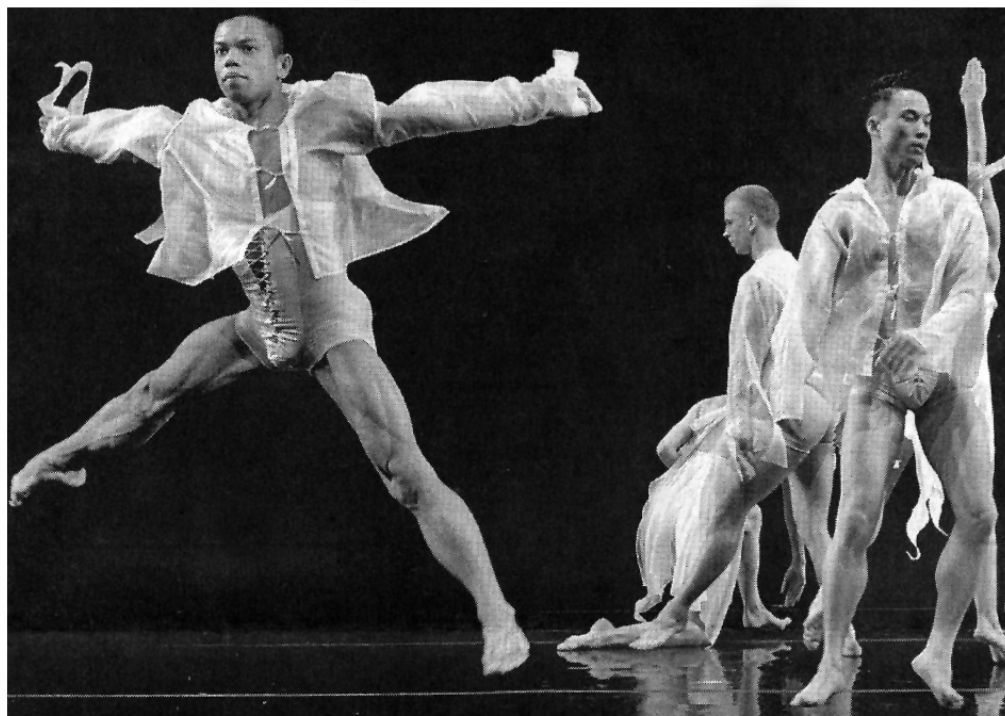
"MiddleSexGorge" can startle au-

Stephen Petronio Company
Joyce Theater

diences into thinking. Take those corsets: garments often denounced for confining women, but here worn by men, as if Mr. Petronio wished them to experience the constrictions of such apparel. Yet choreographic vigor liberates everyone. And Mr. Petronio does not settle for fury alone: two duets in the work included one filled with thrusts and shakes for Ashleigh Leite and Amanda Wells, another emphasizing kicks for Mr. Grenek and Mr. Petronio. Because both energetic sequences feature unison steps, Mr. Petronio makes his dancers companions, not combatants.

At the beginning of "Lareigne" (1995), a song by the Stranglers bewails the absence of heroes in our world as Mr. Grenek twists and turns through a windblown solo, while the fringes of a costume by Manolo flap about him. The solo gives way to an ensemble moving to propulsive music by David Linton. Sometimes Ken Tabachnick's lighting turns the dancers into wispy specters. Lights also brighten while the dancers seem possessed by some driving force.

Yet there are moments when everyone pauses in total stillness. Mr. Petronio's choreographic explosions do not produce disasters.



Stephen Chermín for the New York Times

Gerald Casel, left, and Thang Dao, far right, of the Stephen Petronio Company in "MiddleSexGorge"