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the village

VOICE

TRISHA'S SPAWN

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Stephen Petronio and Vicky Shick both danced in Trisha Brown's company—he from 1979 to 1986, she from 1980 to 1986. In their very different mature styles, as in Brown's, movement pursues a complex path through the dancers' bodies. But whereas the flow of Brown's choreography suggests currents swirling in shifting directions, Shick's fluid phrases linger longer at small, imagined obstacles, and Petronio's choreography rushes along like a torrent smacking against the concrete walls of a twisty canal.

Petronio celebrated the 20th anniversary of his troupe with a retrospective of key pieces marking five-year intervals: *MiddleSexGorge* (1990), *Lareigne* (1995), *Prelude* (2000), and the new duet *bud*, part of *Bloom* (upcoming in 2006). My two decades of writing about his work track not only his development but my perception of physical crisis as a shaping factor in his choreography. In 1985, I thought of his style as built "on the principle of the barely controlled collapse." In 1990, I wrote that "his marvelous dancers perform as if gearing up for an unknowable apocalypse." In 1992, I found it reassuring to watch people "who are clearly flying apart, and at the same time holding it all together." In 1995, I used the words "death-defying." His dances seem to have scared the hell out of me; sensuality, risk, and uneasiness unite at levels of speed and density that render the performers heroes in a ricocheting world.

Only the immediately post-9-11 *Prelude* allows melting. Facing us in a line, eight dancers never travel from Ken Tabachnick's window of light, but clinging to one another, rise and sink softly into individual poses suggesting despair and succor—as if a frieze of a battle's aftermath had roiled into life. *Lareigne*, on the other hand, begins with a long solo, in which Gino Grenek, dancing fabulously to David Linton's fierce score,



Petal pushers: Gino Grenek and Stephen Petronio in *MiddleSexGorge*

leaps and whips his arms and legs around in a storm of contrary ventures. *Lareigne* stays almost numbingly at a boil, rarely dropping to a simmer, except for moments when individuals solo through a grove of motionless others as if this were a fevered chess game.

But, God, the beauty of the dancers, the ease of their intensity! In *bud*, Grenek and

Thang Dao wear red trunks and black half-jackets secured across their torsos with black bindings (by Tara Subkoff/*Imitation of Christ*) and perform to music by Rufus Wainwright, Ravel's *Bolero* seeping through his foggy vocals. Although they plant their feet wide apart, swing each other into the air, and thrust their limbs about like gladiators, the men aren't inimical. Dao, fallen, hauls himself up by clinging to Grenek; as the lights fade, Grenek is hanging on Dao. And in *MiddleSexGorge*, with its provocative costumes by H. Petal and its sexy use of the pelvis, what's thrilling is not only the way Petronio skeins his patterns but the ardor of Gerald Casel, Elena Demianenko, Ashleigh Leite, Jimena Paz, Shila Tirabassi, Amanda Wells, Dao, Grenek, and Petronio as they band to lift now one, now another high, or kite into solos and duets.