

HOLD ME TOGETHER

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

Ever since Stephen Petronio formed his own company in 1984, he has choreographed as if working on shifting ground. His dancers sketch an erect stance just often enough to underline how frequently they're canting, twisting, or rocketing at an angle, their limbs at cross-purposes. A forthright move may splinter into a fusillade of little impulses, as if the performers were cracking to pieces inside their silky skins.

His company's season at the Joyce last week reaffirmed that dialogue between stability and instability, but with a softened sensuality. The six black-clad people in his 2000 *Prelude* maintain their shoulder-to-shoulder chain so that even when some melt or collapse, they are cushioned, caught. In its companion piece from the same year, *Strange Attractors Part II*, you see a city grid form, dissolve, and re-form as dancers fall out of lines and into duets and intricate bouts of big slashing, punching movement.

In a 1986 solo, Petronio wore a suit and tie, and gestures and facial expressions passed over him and disintegrated in spasms. In his moving new *Broken Man*, he wears a shirt backward, and a jacket—covering only his right arm—is harnessed to his body, and he's subtly melting, hardly moving from one spot. Meditative, full of pauses, the solo suggests a man checking his own state of being. Even when Blixa Bargeld's haunted piano chords build into a fuller texture and Petronio expands his gestures, *Broken Man* queries the possibility of wholeness.

As does his marvelous new *City of Twist*. Begun before 9-11 but influenced by it, the piece honors the individuality of his heroic dancers. In quirky costumes by Tara Subkoff of Imitation of Christ (who also dressed the solo), they dance alone and together in a landscape compounded by Ken Tabachnick's splendid lighting, which includes shadowy projections of Venetian blinds, fire escapes, and a skyline, and by Laurie Anderson's rich score; uncannily, the instruments (viola, cello, bass guitar, keyboards, and percussion—heard on tape) make you think of voices rising from concrete and bouncing off buildings.



RICHARD TERNINE

CASEL IN THE AIR: STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY AT THE JOYCE

In his opening solo, Gerald Casel, wearing an oversized black silk jacket, is delicate in his precision and daring, while Jimena Paz, replacing him, seems to wind herself into figure eights and S shapes, and Gino Grenek is faster, somehow harder. Shila Tirabassi breaks into little walks on tiptoe. We keep learning about them and about Ashley Leite, Thang Dao, and Amanda Wells, as they whirl—or are whirled—through the choreography. In their curious individual outfits, their bare, oiled legs flecked with glitter, they fall into embraces, assist one another, make gestures that hint at emotions. But always they dance, as if their lives depended on it, as if even while connections sever and structures spin apart, this world's fragments carry the DNA of wholeness.

the village

VOICE

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