



Photo by Quinn Batson

Experience Matters: Stephen Petronio, Wendy Whelan

More Articulate than Ever

Stephen Petronio speaks clearly at the Joyce

By Quinn Batson

Thank you, Stephen Petronio, for putting yourself in context before launching into your 2012 Joyce show. Your Vivienne Westwood t-shirt story from 1989 London neatly ties threads of you and your worldview together with humor and mild shocks, making light of darkness and celebrating progress. Tackling the undocumented 1970 Steve Paxton solo *Intravenous Lecture* is risky business, but your autobiographical prelude only makes your version stronger.

Lecture is a lecture, after all, and Petronio chooses body politics as his main focus, speaking of America's peculiar breast obsession and the strange tripping points that put Americans over the fretting edge, into censorship. That he is walking and dancing across the stage tethered to an IV drip bag, which has been attached to his arm with medical correctness by RN Matthew Turner, seems either incidental or essential, but it sets up his ending: "This is my intravenous lecture, and this is my body [chest-baring t-shirt rip], and tonight it's for you." His solo is a deeply felt, soul-sharing artwork of physical and spiritual grace, and it is every bit as compelling as the rocket-fueled solos of his youth. Thank you, too, Steve Paxton, for making improvisation a pillar of modern dance.

PETRONIO 2012

Choreography by: **Stephen Petronio, Steve Paxton.**
 Dancers: **Julian De Leon, Davalois Fearon, Joshua Green, Gino Grenek, Barrington Hinds, Natalie Mackessy, Jaqlin Medlock, Nicholas Sciscione, Emily Stone, Joshua Tuason, Amanda Wells.**
 Music by: **Laurie Anderson, Nick Cave, Valgeir Sigurdsson.**
 Costumes by: **John Bartlett, Tara Subkoff, Karen Erickson, Gudrun and Gudrun.**
 Lighting design by: **Ken Tabachnick with Burke Wilmore.**
 Artwork (Loss): **Rannvá Kunoy.**
 Musicians (Loss): **Sigurdsson, Shahad Ismaily, Nadia Sirota, Nico Muhly.**

SCHEDULE

The Joyce Theater
 March 6-11, 2012



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Architecture of Loss (L-R): Jaqlin Medlock, Davalois Fearon, Amanda Wells, Natalie Mackessy, Emily Stone (legs)

Trisha Brown, Petronio's other choreographic parent as the self-proclaimed "bastard child of Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown," has some influence in his 2002 *City of Twist*, shown next. Smart structure and flow, and interludes of stillness, give this *City* depth and pleasure. And dancers forged in the heat of Petronio's furnace keep impressing. Emily Stone uses her long limbs with grace and precision in her opening solo; and newcomer Jaqlin Medlock owns Petronio's movement already, with just the right combination of speed and calm. Ease in the face of complexity may be the gist of *Twist*; propulsive music by Laurie Anderson and slinky black costumes by Tara Subkoff give the whole a smooth, rich feel, and swirling arms and soft-spinning jumps tie in with knifing/folding legs. That it is "a kind of love letter to New York made in the aftermath of September 11" only makes it more beautiful.

Ethersketch I is over in a flash, a wisp of vanishing ether, leaving only shards of Wendy Whelan's sharp angles stuck in mind. This brevity is bracing, like a quick slap to the ass. "Painting with energy in space" is Petronio's definition of ethersketch, and Whelan is a master.

The Architecture of Loss takes more time. It is grand in scope, with large, distinct sections and often with eleven dancers onstage, and yet it ends inconclusively, unexpectedly. This seems to be a new theme with this new piece. Petronio says it best: "Absence and what is concealed in this dance are as essential to me as what unfolds." Barrington Hinds finds something in his opening solo; again the Petronio forge is working, creating a finished dancer from a giant hunk of raw metal. And Amanda Wells continues to be startling in the best sense, here in a sharp duet that feels like loss. A glowing, uptempo middle section is beautiful, especially placed as it is between a darker, deliberate section and the oddly dark, silhouetted section that ends the piece.