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Petronio captures dance as it disappears

Posted by Shelley Padilla on Nov 19, 2012 in [Features](#) | [Comments Off](#) on [Petronio captures dance as it disappears](#)



The [Stephen Petronio Company](#), in its first ever show in Dallas, demonstrates how modern dance can stretch viewers' thinking with a new work that makes one stop and ponder.

Petronio's dance company tours widely in the U.S. and abroad and is directed by the New Jersey-born choreographer who is considered a genius among his generation. The New York-based company, which has been around for many years, marked its North Texas debut performing at the Winspear Opera House on Nov. 16 as part of TITAS' 2012-2013 season. Charles Santos, the artistic director of TITAS, the longtime performing arts presenter, called Petronio's work cerebral while introducing the concert.

In the first piece, *Architecture of Loss*(2012), there was no neatly laid map for viewers to follow. It

unfolds into a series of disappearing acts and the audience is challenged to solve each puzzle. What was Petronio asking viewers to “lose” in each vignette? Some structures were clear, such as a duet with a male dancer providing continual support to his partner. Her need for his strength implied that she couldn’t find the strength to stand on her own, showing her loss of physical power. Another duet between two men involving one blocking the other was a little more challenging to decipher. One interpretation could be loss of personal space, another could be a blocked view. Group dances had multiple games happening but all included dancers standing in stillness from time to time, perhaps acting as architecture or demonstrating loss of involvement. Whatever Petronio’s intentions were, he created opportunities for introspection. This performance demanded thought.

Stephen Petronio Company. Photo courtesy of TITAS.

The choreographer considers dance an art form which disappears just as quickly as it is created. Unlike visual art, there’s no final product that can stand still to be admired or pondered. Investigating this concept becomes an oxymoron as he tells the story of a disappearing art using the very form he feels

evaporates. The lower body vocabulary appears to be inspired by ballet, while upper bodies move with a modern dance influence. Capitalizing on the fully extended long lines of his dancers' legs mixed with supple upper body movements, Petronio spins his tale. The dancers executed his technique with articulation, but the emotion behind the dance was somewhat absent. Perhaps this was intentional so the audience could draw their own conclusions of disappearance and loss. Unfortunately, it came across as lack-luster. Jaqlin Medlock was the star of the night, finding the right mix of softness and strength.

Supporting the movement, Petronio collaborated with visual artist Rannva Kunoy, whose faint and simplistic paintings created an atmosphere of being barely there or disappearing into the background. The images were projected onto the cyclorama behind the dancers.



The final projection was the absence of art, creating a

silhouetted still shot of the dancers. Designers Gudrun & Gudrun's loosely knit costumes added images of unraveling threads and disintegrating materials. The music was created by Valgeir Sigurdsson, Shahzad Ismaily, and Nadia Sirota. Providing an inconsistent tempo, at times it felt industrial while other moments were almost poetic. These juxtapositions did not serve to link the movement and music adding another layer for contemplation.



Stephen Petronio Company dancers. Photo courtesy of TITAS.

The second piece, Excerpts from UNDERLAND, premiered in 2011. Its concept was a journey from dark to light. Much of the format and movement in this piece felt like Loss, with the exception of the quartet “The Ship Song.” Danced by Davalois Fearon, Gino Grenek, Emily Stone, and Jashua Tuason, the dancers remained in constant contact throughout the

entire work as they investigated personal relationships between every possible pairing among the four. The uniqueness of Petronio's use of space was a welcomed change. The movement implied physical and emotional contact between the dancers as well as direct contact. One memorable moment included a long kiss between the two male dancers as the women held each man in an embrace. Music for this work was created by Nick Cave. Aided by the use of lyrics, the effectiveness of this musical choice came from the tone of the song which mimicked the emotion of longing. Costumes were designed by Tara Subkoff. The two women wore simple peasant dresses, one man was almost bare in an open overcoat and underwear, and the other man had on medical scrubs.

(Top photo: The Stephen Petronio Company. Photo courtesy of TITAS.)