

# Ephemeralist

by Susan Yung

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## Petronio at 30—C'mon baby, see the Locomotor



Joshua Tuason and Melissa Toogood in *Locomotor*. Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

Stephen Petronio's group premiere, *Locomotor*, is a stunning dance and a worthy milestone to mark the company's 30th year. It isn't easy to continually produce new work for three decades, especially if, like Petronio, you generally shy from narrative and gesture. That said, there are moments in *Locomotor* that profit from this dearth of emotion, so touching are they when finally shared. In keeping with the collaborative tradition, the beige and black geometric unitards are by haute designer Narciso Rodriguez; the soundscape, shifting from crisp clicks and church bells to shimmering drums, is by Michael Volpe (appetizingly nicknamed "Clams Casino.")

The work's premise is simple: movement, both forward and backward. In a leadoff solo, guest artist Melissa Toogood slips perfectly into Petronio's precise, demanding style that somehow requires both dangerous kineticism and stillness at the same time. The company's remaining eight dancers enter in pairs, carving arcs from and into the wings. Two men, one in front of the other, hold hands as they dart about the stage—a simple, ingenious device, and one of those "why haven't we seen this before?" moments—and pivot and loop their arms like ballroom dancers; at a point, one kneels and receives a kiss on the head from his partner. It's like they're locked into the idea of forward progression, and yet their mutual bond is as much a necessity.



Barrington Hinds, Nicholas Sciscione in *Locomotor*. Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

Raised legs are at right angles, feet crisply pointed, torsos bent and twisted to preset degrees off-center. The technique is modern, but with a highly classical skeleton; it can pound into the floor, but the overall effect is to instigate flight, if for a split second. Petronio's choreography is reliably exciting to watch, but his singular invention and sui generis technique are polished to a diamond brilliance here.

Surprisingly, the most captivating move, and one that is clearly not easy to pull off with grace, is the reverse leap, which occupies the final thrilling movement. Prior to that, Nicholas Sciscione and Josh D Green—both muscular and dazzlingly fleet—partner Toogood, flinging her high, or feet overhead,

flipping her around a leg rotisserie-style, pulling her from a prone position as she flutters her arrowed feet in unexpected, delicate battements.

Petronio danced the other premiere on the Joyce program (through April 13th), Stripped. This brief solo is to Philip Glass' Etude No. 5; the visual punchline is designed by artist Janine Antoni—a headwrap of neckties, which meets a linear fate in the finale. No further spoilers. The third piece, Strange Attractors, was created in 1999; its silken pajamas (by Ghost) and Michael Nyman score are the only indications of its pre-millennial age. It showcases well the standout, eclectic company, in particular the ageless Gino Grenek and an eloquent Jaqlin Medlock. The program rightly travels forward—and backward—with gusto.