

Stephen Petronio's newest dance is stunning at Newmark Theatre (review)

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Stephen Petronio's stunning hour-long dance "Like Lazarus Did," presented by [White Bird](#) at the Newmark Theatre through Saturday, moves from "Alleluia" to lullaby, from death to birth, in choreography that unspools like a meditation.

[Petronio](#), master of the unsettling image, lies in state at the lip of the stage, juxtaposed with the sweetness of the [Pacific Youth Choir](#) in the orchestra pit, their voices lofting in repeated refrains of "I want to die like Lazarus did." Above the stage hovers a helicopter-rescue carrier ornamented with bones and body parts. And against Petronio's repose, his company of 10 dancers,

bathed in golden light, fold and sway and twist and lash in extraordinary unison.

Petronio's dancers are mesmerizing. But it's the complexity of his theater, the marriage of slave songs to Son Lux's electronica and the choir, the lighting that renders the dancers like still-life paintings, the shift of moods from austere to dark in a single scene, that make this work so haunting.

As the complexity of the choreography accumulates onstage, the pace quickens. The reverence of the score is set against furious dance. Focus tightens and expands, from one dancer's undulations as he grasps long cords that fall from the ceiling to huge space-eating patterns of dancers moving in retrograde. Big balletic leaps share the stage with dancers seated and watching. And while the movement is dense with ideas, it isn't showy. Much of the choreography has the dancers' backs to the audience.

Nicholas Sciscione's final solo is a folded origami of twisting, writhing infancy, fearlessly danced as the youth choir sings "Hush now, baby, go to sleep." But Sciscione's contortions are all about rebirth.

Petronio fans have another treat in store: "Intravenous Lecture," at Reed College's Kaul Auditorium on Monday evening, revisits Steve Paxton's 1970 work about censorship, with Petronio in solo movement and spoken word, strapped to an IV drip.

--Catherine Thomas