

## Liam Burke: Stephen Petronio Dance Co. Bringing ‘Underland’ to UCSB

Experience the magic Monday as the music of Nick Cave blends movingly with visual art and fashion



The Stephen Petronio Dance Company will perform “Underland” on Monday in UCSB’s Campbell Hall. (Sarah Silver photo)

By Liam Burke  
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When the Sydney Dance Company approached Stephen Petronio about commissioning a dance piece, the New York choreographer couldn’t wait to get his hands on the music of Australia’s Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds.

He engaged visual designer Ken Tabachnick and video artist Mike Daly, as well as costumes by Tara Subkoff, renowned for her fashion label “Imitation of Christ.”

You see, this is what Petronio does best — he creates dances that incorporate new music, visual art and fashion, and collages them to create an evening of entertainment that makes us shiver in our seats.

UCSB Arts & Lectures will host the Stephen Petronio Dance Company when it performs “Underland” at 8 p.m. Monday in UCSB’s Campbell Hall. Tickets are \$40 for the general public and \$20 for UCSB students. [Click here](#) for tickets and more information.

Once Petronio let his dance work loose on Australian audiences at the Sydney Opera House, news of the electrical fire got back to the National Endowment for the Arts. It wanted to get its hands on it, too. Now “Underland’s” Australian fire has been extinguished and it is heading our way, funded in part by the NEA’s American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.

It is the poetic beauty of Cave that lends itself to Petronio’s mastermind-full art of dance, and with apocalyptic occurrences of the 21st century in mind, he creates a kind of physical calligraphy inside these “murder ballads” of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds.

With lyrics like “Oh then I’m so sorry father, I never thought I hurt you so much, This is a weeping song, A song in which to weep,” Petronio reveals a commonality in all the world — the pain of regret. Setting this against a cinematic backdrop of Daly’s video art, it commands the audience’s utmost attention. If you can picture images from the physically destructive world we know (crash-test dummies included), microscopic images of our procreative nature (madly wriggling sperm) and all the chaos of the world in between, then herein lies one artist’s vision of an “Underland.”

This may seem bleak at times, but I suspect this artist wants us to remember that we have collectively created all of this. And because it is done in dance, you are guaranteed redemption and release, as the darkness turns to light and beauty is revealed amid this seemingly horrific backdrop.

Expect to see highly trained contemporary dancers extorting (from themselves) a vocabulary of movement that doesn’t seem possible. “Underland” works magic and promises to be an experience, indeed a happening, inside Campbell Hall. This is living art — breathing, pulsating, and procreating.

On Monday night, what else is there to do but experience art? Trust me; you don’t want to miss it.