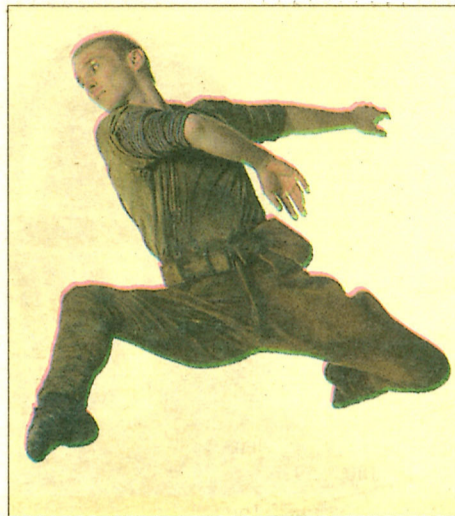


The Star-Ledger

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Troupe embodies fierce passions



Patrick Corbin is one of the featured performers in the Paul Taylor Dance Company, which visits NJPAC on Friday and McCarter Theatre on Wednesday.

DANCE

Paul Taylor Dance Company

Where and when: Friday at Prudential Hall, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark, and Wednesday at McCarter Theatre, 91 University Place, Princeton. Both performances at 8 p.m.

How much: \$13-\$51 in Newark, call (888) 466-5722 or visit www.njpac.org; \$31-\$36 in Princeton, call (888) 278-7932 or visit www.mccarter.org.

BY ROBERT JOHNSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

It started out as a simple catch-lift.

As Paul Taylor choreographed the new "Promethean Fire" in his New York studio, he asked dancer Lisa Viola to jump and let her partner, Patrick Corbin, grab her. But then the choreographer made her start farther and farther away, until Viola was running across the studio and diving backward through the air. As the distance to a safe landing with Corbin increased, Viola remembers asking herself, "You want me to go to New Jersey? Come on!"

Surprise! Now she really is coming to New Jersey, along with the rest of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, which will make two local stops this month. On Friday they

Paul Taylor draws out dancers' fire

have a one-night stand at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, and they will appear Wednesday at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton.

The repertory includes pieces that Paul Taylor Dance Company will not show in New York until its spring season at City Center. Princeton audiences will see the local premiere of "Promethean Fire," a majestic dance that Taylor unveiled this summer at the American Dance Festival in North Carolina, about the heat of human passions. In Newark, the company will present this season's revivals of "Images" (1977) and "Last Look" (1985). Both programs feature Taylor's popular Depression-era romp, "Black Tuesday," set to light-hearted songs of the period.

With a mirrored set by Alex Katz that suggests the glass architecture of a modern city, "Last Look" presents an apocalyptic vision of destruction. "If you're not having your frenzied moment, you're pretty much sprawled out

on stage, being a dead body," Viola says. "After what happened on 9/11, when the curtain goes up, it's a strange visual because you see the towering mirrors and then it just opens with a pile of people."

"Promethean Fire" also features a heap of bodies, and falling is a recurrent motif. Yet such images can be misleading. "It doesn't point to any specific event," says Taylor. "At least it wasn't intended that way."

"He kept telling us, 'It's about passion,'" Viola offers.

Glimpsed in rehearsal, "Promethean Fire" is a dance of symmetry and violent contrasts. The dancers grovel near the floor or leap high in the air. Their gestures can be lyrical or curt. Although Taylor uses his entire company of 16 dancers to match the grand sweep of a score assembled from three compositions by J.S. Bach, the piece zooms in on the duet for Viola and Corbin, and the group reflects their movements. Speaking of the duet, Viola says, "He wanted different moments in a relationship. We'd change

our emotions or our feelings toward each other."

The duet has its violent episodes, like a troubled romance, but after Taylor's protagonists fall, they get up again. "I try not to leave them lying on the floor all the time," Taylor says, teasingly. Later, he adds more seriously, "It's supposed to be the human condition. You know? Most relationships are in and out, at times."

The title and an accompanying epigraph — "fire that can thy light relume" — derive from Shakespeare, as Taylor slightly alters a quotation from "Othello." Unlike Othello's unlucky bride, Desdemona, however, Taylor's characters seem capable of returning to life.

Although another dancer, Michael Trusnovic, will perform Corbin's role in Princeton, Taylor envisioned the duet as another pairing of two dancers who have made sparks together on stage, notably in "Piazzolla Caldera."

Viola, intensely athletic and a 10-year veteran of the company, is arguably at her peak. She relishes all the parts she dances, but feels especially thrilled to have another role made on her. Speaking of Taylor, she says, "He's been able to pull things out of me that I didn't think I could do, which is great."



The audience at McCarter Theatre in Princeton will view the local premiere of "Promethean Fire," in which Taylor uses his entire company of 16 dancers.

PHOTOS BY LOIS GREENFIELD