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WAY OFF BROADWAY

where things start

ACROBATTY

SCOTT HERON MARRIES DANCE AND PERFORMANCE ART

BY TOM MURRIN

SCOTT HERON'S DANCE PIECES ARE often more like obstacle courses. He once ended a beautiful, grave Butoh dance by shooting a carrot out of his butt. He has wobbled awkwardly around the stage in a tutu and ballet shoes, then jumped onto an inverted plastic pail, amazingly landing *en pointe*. In last year's *The Water*, he walked barefoot across a rope four feet above the ground to the distressed sounds of his own breathing, amplified by a nose mike. His dances are amalgams of skill and absurdity, overlaid with a rich sense of humor. First you admire his technique, then he makes you laugh.

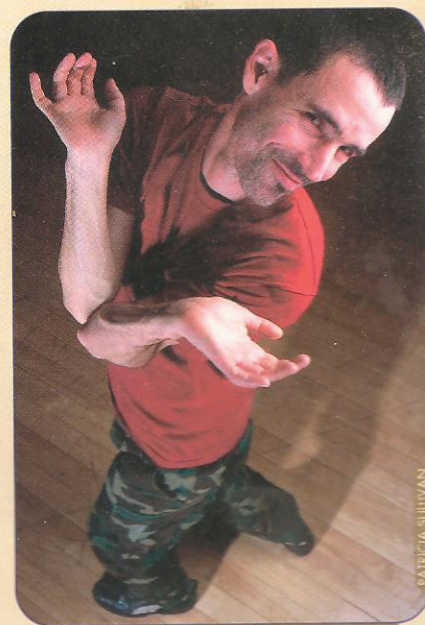
"Traditional dance is all about seeking perfection in the body, but my practice is more like finding the comedy as I come across the limitations of my body," Heron explains. "The comedy comes out of my struggle to get through a dance, and also my acknowledgement of the absurdity of dance as a form." Absurdity? "Dance is such a bizarre thing," he continues. "You see people emoting, silently. It's weird. They're not talking, they're using the body in a way that's very foreign, at least to Americans."

In his new show, *Tender*, a collaboration with guitarist Chris Cochrane, Heron structures the dance concert as a rock show. "The pieces are short, concentrated, and distilled, like songs," he says, "and the times in between are informal and personal." In contrast to his recent works, which have been ornate and filled with performers, *Tender* will be "an experiment in intimate theater." He wants to explore the bond between performer and audience, as well as between him and Cochrane (one of his best friends and occasional collaborator since the mid-'80s). "We will lay bare our trials and tribulations as gay men, navigating the minefields of love, disease, and various sordid compulsions," he promises.

Heron developed his acrobatic and clowning skills as a founding member of the joyous and political Circus Amok, performing in their raucous outdoor summer shows in all five boroughs. "We go into the real world and are

transgressive about sexuality and gender politics, and manage to pull it off through the delightful spectacle of free theater," he says, rating their success.

Heron, in his 30s, was born in San Francisco and raised in Nova Scotia, Berkeley, London, the Middle East, and Houston, because his father was in the oil business. "I grew up as a Fundamentalist Christian," he recalls, "attending church three times a week until I graduated high school." He began performing and dancing at Colorado College, and performed in the early '80s with Deborah Hay in Austin, Texas, moving to New York in '86.



PATRICIA SULLIVAN

HERON EXPERIMENTS WITH INTIMACY.

Heron left in '97 to live at a queer arts community in the backwoods of Tennessee, with chickens, goats, and an organic garden. "I still call that home," he says. He spends an average of six months in Tennessee and six months traveling and working, "getting the best of both worlds," as he puts it. "I live on \$10,000 a year, and happily," he claims, noting that many fellow performers his age have been disappearing from the downtown scene lately. "Many are becoming social workers or touring with heavily organized shows," he observes, but "I'm dedicated to inhabiting this niche of smaller-scale personal theater."

Tender at Dixon Place at Vineyard 26, 309 E. 26th St., (212) 532-1546. April 12-28, Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m. \$15/\$12/\$8. ★