Heron chic

In his new work, Scott Heron flows with The Water

Scott Heron sees the world through a special set of eyes. Or perhaps he's just invented a universe of his own liking. His beautiful dance-theater works, with their extravagant costumes and sets, create a dreamy, surreal paradise or a frightening hell, depending on your point of view. In the opening scene of The Water, which will premiere at P.S. 122 on Thursday 6, Tanya Gagne, dressed as a policewoman, is perched high atop a trapeze bar. Heron is in drag from head to toe, wearing a gaudy black wig, a Mexican wedding dress and high heels. After Gagne shoots Heron dead, Cathy Weis, another bizarre character (at one point, she's a clown; at another, a country-western singer), is choked with lard so she pulls the wig off his head by a rope attached to its top. The effect—both haunting and hilarious—serves as a perfect mirror of Heron's own witty, fastidious brand of dance-theater.

For The Water, Heron, 37, has gathered an impressive cast of performers that reads like a who's who of the downtown dance scene. Their participation isn't due to Heron's fine recruiting efforts, but to each dancer's desire to work with him. "Everyone in this piece asked to be in it, and I didn't say no to anyone," Heron says. "That was one of my conceptual constructs." In addition to Gagne, whom Heron met while performing in Jennifer Miller's Circus Amok and Weis, whose work he also appears in, the choreographer showcases the talents of four other wonderful dancers: DD Dorvillier, Jennifer Allen, Cydney Pullman and her nine-year-old daughter, Zane Fraser.

"This piece makes me realize that most of my work has focused around me as a solo artist," Heron explains. "I've invited other people to perform in my dances, but they've tended to function as secondary characters. This brings up my whole relationship with choreography: I think choreography is the most ridiculous thing. I can't figure out why people make it, and now I'm making it on these people.”

For Heron, sequential individual movement doesn't have meaning on its own. "I work from an internal story process," he says. "The idea of saying, 'Raise your arm, hop over there and repeat it backward' seems ridiculous to me."

The Water stems from Heron's decision to spend some time outside the city. Two years ago, he relocated to a Tennessee commune about 80 miles southeast of Nashville. "It's part of the Radi-