

# DanceTabs

## DELIRIOUS Dances / Edisa Weeks – 3 RITES: Liberty – New York

By Susanna Sloat on January 15, 2020 in [Reviews](#) · 0 Comments



Edisa Weeks in *3 RITES: Liberty*.  
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### About author



Susanna  
Sloat

Work for DanceTabs

Susanna Sloat is a writer and editor in New York City who has written about many kinds of dance, recently mostly for Ballet Review. She is the editor of *"Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures"* (2010) and *"Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity"* (2002), both available from University Press of Florida.

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### DELIRIOUS Dances / Edisa Weeks

#### *3 RITES: Liberty*

★★★★☆

New York, Kumble Theater

10 January 2020

[www.deliriousdances.com](http://www.deliriousdances.com)

[kumbletheater.org](http://kumbletheater.org)

[www.651arts.org](http://www.651arts.org)

In DELIRIOUS Dances/Edisa Weeks' work in progress, *3 RITES, Liberty* is in the middle between *Life* and *Happiness*, as it is in the Declaration of Independence. Weeks is a choreographer, an Associate Professor of Dance at Queens College, and the founder of DELIRIOUS Dances. That *Liberty* is an audacious solo, unlike anything else, is immediately apparent when entering Long Island University's Kumble Theatre's basement blackbox, coming through an installation of branching white twigs (made by groups of people recruited by Weeks).

Weeks is installed on a white chair, the braids of her hair pulled up by cords balanced by hanging symbolic objects, a bible, a wig, a penis, a gun, a small round watermelon. She looks – and acts – like no one you have ever seen. A light tan African American woman wearing a short red and white checked gingham apron with a bit of white floral skirt hanging below, she wears no top.

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**New York City Ballet**

@nycballet

A celebration of 19th century French music & dance that concludes with a waltz by the principals, Balanchine's *La Source* has been described as "very fluffy, very sophisticated, and very chic."

See *La Source* on the All Balanchine program opening JAN 22: [nycballet.com/balanchinewint...](http://nycballet.com/balanchinewint...)



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Brown flowers attach red balloons with white polka dots to her breasts, arms, and back.

She wears translucent wrinkled white plastic gloves and high aqua boots, topped by socks. Her face is whitened, her lips very red, and her eyes are encircled in aqua, matching her boots. There's a table covered in yellow gingham to one side of her, for props like cleansing cream, and a big brown bowl on the other side. Though she's made up in a kind of clown face, and she makes noises – gleeful or roaring – but is otherwise not verbal, her eyes are alert and watchful.

Weeks stretches and splays her hands. She erupts in shakes and giggles, waving those gloved hands. There are cycles of shakes and guffaws, and roars and strange cries, the cycles punctuated by moments when the laughs or bellows and waving or flapping hands subside into small quiet shakes. Then she erupts again, mobile face and arms and mouth expressing glee, or a sly smile, lashing out angrily or unleashing a ferocious growl. She gnashes her teeth, shakes, and pants.



Edisa Weeks in 3 RITES: Liberty.  
© Leo Jimenez for 651 ARTS. (Click image for larger version)

These cycles of outrageous glee and roaring anger, jiggles and gestures, continue for a while, with Weeks varying them adeptly, virtuosically. We still have no idea what will happen. She mimes a need for water and a woman brings a cup of it to her – and also cups of water to a few audience members. Weeks drinks, smears water over her makeup, and spits a mouthful out. She seems to be struggling to speak, whispering the beginnings of the word “welcome,” until shaking and happy, she gets her “Welcome” out.

While we hear the voice of a man reading about how the psychiatric community has led African Americans into higher rates of hospitalization and diagnoses of schizophrenia and retardation (it is part of a lecture “The Pathologizing of the African American by Psychiatry” by Gary Null), Weeks takes off her makeup. She puts white around her eyes and stripes of black across her face, until she blacks it entirely, except for the white framing her eyes and newly reddened lips. We continue to hear about medical madness, illnesses once bizarrely attributed to people from Africa, and fake sciences eugenic racism. And on to the sterilization of the feeble minded.

Weeks begins to unbraid her hair, standing, gesturing, reaching, still attached, still bounded, enslaved by her braids to the pulleys that raise the symbolic objects. With wild gestures she stamps her feet and pulls the strings, cries, and

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Jan 15, 2020

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**Didy Veldman 50yrs+ Worksh...**  
Diddy's classes are a fun mixture...  
[danceeast.co.uk](http://danceeast.co.uk)

5h

**DanceTabs**  
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Tonight and tomorrow folks...  
<https://twitter.com/ENBallet/status/1217422358279073792>

6h

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Bowling along now - been given some priority. Outskirts of North London!

6h

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**Johan Kobborg**  
@KOBORG

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begins to whisper and sing, her singing becoming stronger, declaring that though being born on the bottom, we will never return to the bottom. Freeing her hair from the braids until it sticks out, she lowers the objects on the strings, asking help for the heavy ones like the watermelon.

She asks us in her normal voice (as unusual a shift as the more theatrical ones) to join in singing a song of freedom and unity. And we do. Holding the melon in her hands she tells us about a brother who wanted to peel his skin off to become white.

While taking off the blackface she tells, in a slightly Southern accent, the story of her great great grandmother Edith who, after Emancipation, grew prize watermelons to support her family. But after Reconstruction, when Southern white people instituted harsh discrimination to regain their power, watermelon was used to caricature black people.

Weeks deftly cuts up the watermelon and we all get a piece to eat. She asks us to be accomplices and affirm and sing with her "I will undo racism and oppression." As we do, she sings and dances fully until she dances around the set and out the door. She doesn't return to face the applause.

Weeks has accomplished these transformations, from the bizarre and entrapped to the facing of unjustness to rallying us against it, with remarkable and inventive theatrical adroitness. "Liberty" in the Declaration of Independence did not mean "liberty" for the overwhelmingly large percentage of African Americans who were enslaved people. It did not mean "liberty" for many people in the Jim Crow years and does not for the over-incarcerated now.

*Liberty* is in the middle of *3 RITES*. At Kumble it was co-commissioned and presented by 651 ARTS. In Fall 2021 all six hours of *3 RITES*, "an interdisciplinary experience" with discussions and shared meals, installations and performances, will come together as part of 651 Arts inaugural season in their new space opposite the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I'm looking forward to it.

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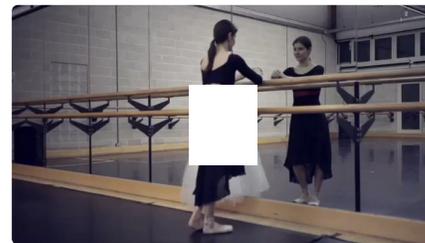


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23h

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Love it... "How was your journey?" email questionnaire just in from Caledonian Sleeper! Ans: currently 3 hours late and counting...

7h

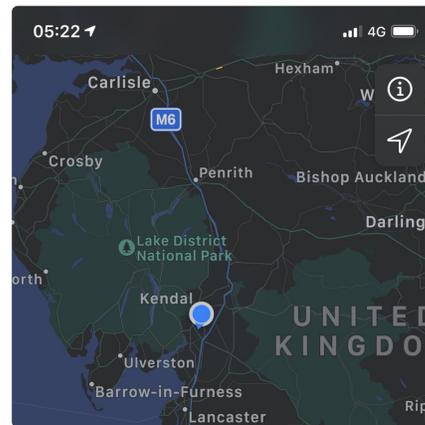
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The journey from hell at the moment and info keeps changing - arrive in London at 2 or 3PM, but now looks a little earlier. Special stop to let people off who are doubling back to Scotland since they will miss what they planned in London...

8h

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My goodness 5:20 and we are still up in the Lake District rather than on the home run into London...



11h

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