

## Dance

# Dancing Platform Praying Grounds, New York – from dossier to dance

Five choreographers interrogate the 200-year history of Danspace Project's East Village site



Edisa Weeks's 'Arise' © Simon Courchel  
Apollinaire Scherr MARCH 13, 2018

New York's downtown dance scene has long envied the art world, with its theoretical savvy and deep pockets. So it was only a matter of time before the curator-centred “platform” — grounded in heavy themes and laden with lavish catalogues and hours of ruminative talk — would descend (like a spaceship) on the old-fashioned, entertainment-oriented “show”. The first adopter has been Danspace Project at St Mark's Church in the East Village.

This season's multi-week series, “Dancing Platform Praying Grounds: Blackness, Churches and Downtown Dance”, takes up the venerable project's purloined letter: the site itself, the luminous, still-active 1799 chapel.

As curator, choreographer Reggie Wilson has had the church's history, including its collusion with slavery, dug up. For *The Dossier Charrette: a series of working dance essays*, five New York choreographers, among them award-winners Miguel Gutierrez and Beth Gill, were handed a 25-page dossier on the 200 years of St Mark's and environs for the equivalent of the architecture student's charrette: a burst of creation delivered sweatily at the last minute.

The results tended more towards the desultory than the feverish, with the detailed record evidently barely glanced at. Still, each piece had its moments, whatever their source. In the opening procession of Edisa Weeks's *Arise*, for example, three dancers balanced upended chairs on their heads as adroitly as rural African women with their water jugs, and they gazed through the slats of the wooden chair-backs as through bars. Coiled in glowing white papier-mâché tree roots, the choreographer took up the rear — an earthy Medusa. But after a mesmerising spell of seated semaphoring, the dance's focus widened to a blur.

Only Jonathan Gonzalez's goofy, spooky *Eurythmics in the Southern Burn* felt sufficiently thought through. The short piece was giddy-making in its unpredictable scatter of allusive sparks, from hokey haunted house to the charged geometries of an occult rite. Gonzalez rendered the terrible seriousness of history as it often comes down to us: tangled up in kitsch.

★★★★☆☆

*Platform ends March 24. Gonzalez premieres 'Zero', based on his charrette, April 12-14, [danspaceproject.org](http://danspaceproject.org)*

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