

Up against the wall



Gillian Rougier performs in the Castillo Theatre production of "Homeland Security: Bringing Dr. King Up to Date."

Richardson and company explore security

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REVIEW. One of the country's sleekest modern dance stars, Desmond Richardson, is a Queens native who graduated from New York's High School of the Performing Arts and went on to star with the Ailey company and American Ballet Theater. With choreographer Dwight Rhoden he founded Complexions Contemporary Ballet.

Now, under the auspices of the All Stars Project, he is "giving back," working with a group of nine inner-city youngsters, mostly of college age, on increasing their skills and their self-esteem through what they call "developmental dance."

Their piece, "Homeland Security: Bringing Dr. King Up to Date," calls upon the kids to perform rudimentary gestural movement, to stomp in unison and to mime their daily pastimes (such as basketball, hip-hop dance and a kind of ritualized conflict) while quotes from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. flash on a screen behind them. Meanwhile, text written and recorded by the performers



themselves, relating their own interpretations of the term "homeland security," booms over the speaker system.

Red lights flash as the participants move, linked like a chain gang, around the large room where the audience, in folding chairs, sits facing a high platform containing a turquoise bench. The performers pound on the side walls. Photographic slides (of flowers and slums) and video (of cobbled streets in the rain) flash by on the screen. The cast uses its recollections of 9/11 as a springboard for statements such as, "My homeland security resides within me." Their polemics move very quickly from the political to the personal, without much real consid-

eration of the dynamics of making change. A young couple embraces on the bench. Photos of each participant are projected.

Richardson has spent a month working with these people, who have in many cases acted in other Castillo projects but are largely new to dance. Some attend community college, write poetry and sing. Their 35-minute presentation, which runs weekends through April 1, skims the surface of what is possible. Clearer diction, more demanding choreography, fewer platitudes and more direct interaction among them would provide a fuller aesthetic experience, for performers and audience alike.