

DANCE SPIRIT NEWSLETTER
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All Stars Shine

By Tamara Johnson

Opening to a sold-out house at NYC's Castillo Theatre, the All Stars Project's latest piece, *Homeland Security: Bringing Dr. King Up To Date*, was emotionally powerful and intellectually sophisticated. Choreographed and directed by modern dance superstar Desmond Richardson, this production challenged nine inner-city youths to question the meanings of homeland, security, identity and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s message in the psychological and political context of a post-9/11 world. The result was 35 hard-hitting minutes of dance set to a varied music selection that spanned from Yo-Yo Ma to John Coltrane to Kurt Cobain. The impact was intensified by projected quotes from King and readings in the dancers' own voices, reacting to the terrorist attacks.

The All Stars Project is an organization dedicated to exposing kids from disadvantaged urban communities to the performing arts and involving them in creative processes. In the past, they've worked with such luminaries as David Parsons and Fred Newman to create and perform pieces of experimental political theater that have earned rave reviews. While some of the performers in the All Stars ensemble have taken dance classes, none are professionally trained dancers, so the chance to learn from a world-class talent like



Richardson is particularly special. "Working with Desmond is amazing!" says ASP ensemble member Gillian Rougier. "He is so professional that it rubs off on you."

In addition to tons of rehearsal time, Rougier credits much of the show's success to Richardson's focus on nurturing a connection between the dance, the dancers and the audience. "He taught us to not just do the steps, but to really think about why we're doing what we're doing, what we want the audience to feel when we dance. That's what makes the piece accessible," she explains. Richardson calls his involvement with the ASP an immeasurable opportunity to give back: "When you give kids something to relate to, you are

showing them an option, opening an avenue. I want to help young people be edgy and to think outside the box."

Homeland Security: Bringing Dr. King Up To Date will run until April 1. Visit www.allstars.org for tix and more information about the organization's many programs and events or call the Castillo Theatre's box office at 212-941-1234.

Pictured above: Foreground left to right: Jennifer Fomore and Leonora Martelly; Back row: Lisa Edwards and Gillian Rougier in the Castillo Theatre production of Homeland Security: Bringing Dr. King Up To Date. Photo by Ronald L. Glassman