



Cecly Placenti 🏠 Feb 2, 2020 2 min read

Drastic Action

January 24, 2020

Take Root presented by Green Space

Choreography: Aviva Geismar

Dancers: Randy Burd, Aviva Geismar, Jenni Hong, Mengying Lin, Kendra J. Ross

Watching Aviva Geismar move is like witnessing the unfettering of a soul. She contorts and contracts, flinging trauma from her splayed fingers. A powerfully dynamic, captivating performer, Geismar is in one moment a rag doll, her heavy limbs heaving her body into orbit, and in the next a hummingbird, swiftly arresting energy into a circling hand or reaching foot. Her gripping solo, *Up End*, highlights her remarkable clarity in indirectness and she appears to be influenced by a gravitational pull known only to her. As the piece progresses, Geismar's convulsive thrashing gives way to suspended balances, her chest and neck arched in prayer. Climbing a support pole on the stage at Green Space Studios and using the adjacent wall for leverage, she pushes and writhes, determined to escape conflict and pain.

Although the four pieces Geismar and her company, Drastic Action, present at the Take Root festival are shown separately, they can be perceived as parts of a whole, like chapters in a book. Familiar imagery of molecules under pressure pervade the work. Physical, emotional, and mental tension transform Geismar's body and the body of her dancers into conduits between the redemptive world of spirit and the human condition struggling against obstacles and oppression. The nuances of her movement vocabulary, characterized by swift shifts in dynamics, vacillate between bound and free, explosive and surrendering. Although

repetitive movement patterns and similar dynamics shape the evening, the effect is not lulling. The polarity between internal tension and physical release is a captivating through-line that Geismar weaves expertly. Her dancers share her ability to easily move between spurtive, sustained, and percussive movements all while maintaining a dazzling specificity.



Photo by Aviva Geismar

In *Pressure/Vapor*, performers Randy Burd, Jenni Hong, and Mengying Lin find moments to connect in solidarity before absorbing back into their own personal experience. At times they appear to be held by invisible hands as they mutate. Lin and Kendra Ross erupt in frantic vibration in *The Bind*, their pointer fingers tracing haphazard circles in the air. Terrorized by inner demons, silent screams shape their lips as they move through trance-like gestures. Moments of awareness puncture their haze, but inevitably they cannot escape, and succumb again to the forces dominating them. Humor lightens dark undertones in *Urge (excerpt)*. Lin and Ross tempt Jenni Hong with grapes held up to the light like emeralds. Intoxicated, she allows them to be shoved into her mouth one by one, instructed not to bite. Once her mouth is full, her face contorted in confusion and desire, she can no longer resist. She heartily consumes the grapes to the dismay of her torturers, a small victory of spirit triumphing over tyranny.