

REVIEW

Troupe finds a haven for expression

DANCE

Freespace Dance and Rebudal Dance Group

Where: St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, 10th Street and Second Avenue, Manhattan

When: 8:30 tonight and tomorrow

How much: \$18 (\$15 for students and seniors). Call (212) 674-8194.

BY ROBERT JOHNSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

NEW YORK — The directors of Freespace Dance in Montclair found an excellent spot for the company's New York debut. The company looked fabulous Thursday, performing at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery on a program shared with J.M. Rebudal's Rebudal Dance Group.

Home to the Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church is a main stage of New York's downtown dance scene. The high-vaulted sanctuary, with its polished wooden floor, lends itself naturally to lofty thoughts. Watching dance here, it's easy to feel that one has embarked on a high-minded enterprise. On a purely formal level, by sharing the same space as the audience, the dancing becomes immediate and gorgeously transparent.

Together the companies offered three premieres. In the duet "An Otherside," Rebudal and Donna Scro Gentile, of Freespace, played catch-as-catch-can, toying with each other affectionately. Their figures were loose and undulating, and their movements broad. They choreographed this piece together, splitting the dance into three segments to make a clever frame for the evening. An amusing trifle, "An Otherside" opened both halves of the program and concluded it as well.

Rebudal's company presented "Mercurial Relapse" — a premiere also described as a work-in-progress — and "Past (The Third)," created last year. Both pieces addressed the relationship between a soloist and a group. In "Mercurial Relapse," Kate Cross was the focal point, seeming to channel the group's energy and emotions. She gave a bravura performance studded with pirouettes and deep backbends, while the others crept away from her or stood stock-still — their bodies flattened planes in space that echoed the soloist's angular gestures. While the group seemed at odds with Cross' boldness, and even rather stealthy, at the end they gathered to support her in a series of lifts.

"Past (The Third)" introduced a simple yet powerful device: a line of white powder along the floor that ruled the space. Everything the dancers did became a response to this feature of their environment. Yet the line of powder, which might have symbolized law or tradition, also invited rebellion. Karen E. DiIuro led the group in revolt. When they failed to discover an alternative structure as compelling as the line, however, DiIuro rejected a return to conformity, and departed alone.

Freespace Dance appeared boldly athletic in two works inspired by the lift-and-carry aesthetic of Pilobolus. Gaspard Louis, a former member of Pilobolus, choreographed "Innercurrent" in collaboration with Scro Gentile. The premiere employed three couples, whose active embraces created beautiful formal patterns. The men pressed the women together in the air or shelved them above one another in an angular design.

A trio for the men displayed additional patterns and some lyrical beefcake. In their own trio, the women appeared linear and elastic, with more delicate articulations.

Suddenly, the women began to appear heavy, as the lights dimmed. This weightiness became concentrated in a duet for Scro Gentile and Louis, which either proved the solidity of their relationship, or suggested a burden that could not be carried forever. The duet would benefit from dramatic gestures more clearly defined.

"Fourplay," a partner-switching dance of liquid sensuality, completed the bill.