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A '60s Landmark in the Eyes of Children

By GIA KOURLAS

It's fitting that "40 Dancers do 40 Dances for the Dancers," a project conceived and directed by [Clarinda Mac Low](#), was ruled by children — at least on opening night. Part of Ms. Mac Low's intention for the event, as she states in program notes, is to recreate "a child's-eye view of the 1970s New York 'avant-garde' arts world." As the daughter of the poet, composer and performance artist [Jackson Mac Low](#), who died in 2004, she writes from experience. The children performing on Thursday evening at Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church — notably, the adorable Ignacio Achugar-Granoff — offered some of the evening's most genuine encounters.

Part of Platform 2012: Judson Now, a series celebrating the 50th anniversary of that 1960s landmark the [Judson Dance Theater](#), the work is based on Mr. Mac Low's book of performance-instruction poems, "The Pronouns: A Collection of 40 Dances for the Dancers." Developed from his earlier "Nuclei for Simone Forti," it provides the tools — in words and phrases — to construct improvisations. Audience members were encouraged to roam the space and gather around performances as they occurred. It was like a dance picnic, yet instead of a green pasture we were inside a steamy church.

The cast and dances changed each night; on Thursday there were 20 pieces and almost as many performers, including the Judson-era artist Ms. Forti. In "Making Things New," David Thomson and George Emilio Sanchez took turns sitting while the other stood to perform actions that were repeated and embellished, like a lascivious hip shake.

Mr. Sanchez got into it, amusingly so, arching his back in exaggeration. Another piece, "Seeing Lines," was interpreted three times, by Carolyn Hall, Paz Tanjuaquio and Abigail Levine; their dancing, at once pliant and choppy, brought a phrase to life: "doing something elastic & making herself comfortable, she lets complex impulses make something."

In "Being Earth," the poet E. J. McAdams read while his daughters, Lyla, 11, and Jane, 5, jumped on a trampoline and taunted each other in a sharp, sisterly way. In "Questioning," Mr. Thomson stood on the balcony of the church while shining a flashlight onto his face, ghost-story style, and speaking about a soon-to-be ex-lover.

In his text Mr. Mac Low instructs, "Then one questions some more, reacting to orange hair," and

Mr. Thomson obeyed with an aside about three German women: “They had this shocking, orange red hair — you know the kind you only see in Germany?” The crowd chuckled knowingly.

“40 Dancers” has much to do with becoming intimate with Ms. Mac Low’s artistic world and a result, theatrically, is that it’s too knowing and too nebulous. Making art, she hints in her statement, isn’t only about aesthetics. (They shouldn’t be forgotten, either.)

Ms. Forti‘s appearance was a relief. Performing “Nuclei for Simone Forti,” she spoke while crouching and rolling on the floor and brushing its surface with light fingers; her white hair and translucent skin gave her a strange glow. “Some things are delicate,” she said. “What’s the point?” Uninhibited, innocently sensual and direct, Ms. Forti, who returns to Judson Now with a show of her own in November, is the point.



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