

“THE BEST PHOTOGRAPHS OF A CHOREOGRAPHY I HAVE EVER SEEN”

PRINT VERSION



[Black Milk \(the book\)](#)

Douglas Wright
photography by John Savage
Craig Potton Publishing

at A bookshop near you,
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Reviewed by Jennifer Shennan, 23 Dec 2009

This book is a remarkable dance document for the way it evokes, some three years after the event, the live pulse and atmosphere of the theatre-piece, choreographed by Douglas Wright. The work awed its audiences on a national tour back in 2006. These photographs by John Savage wind back that experience.

Published at the same time as the dance, Wright's book *Terra Incognita*, published by Penguin, was his diary of the life experiences bound in to the choreography of *Black Milk*. Reading that gave us a unique chance to follow how ideas can seed and grow in a fertile choreographic imagination.

This new book is its graphic alter ego, and includes a stimulating critical study of *Black Milk* by Leonard Wilcox, reproduced from Landfall. That in itself also marks a unique achievement, that New Zealand choreography should be viewed with the same attention as literature or visual arts.

Savage's photographs are clear and incredibly powerful. Some of them catch a moment in the studio with dancers so intensely focussed to the task in hand that you want to turn the page ever so lightly for fear of disturbing them. Others are a mercurial flash of action as fast as the real time of the performance.

I spend most of my waking hours writing and reading about, or studying iconography of dance. These are the best photographs of a choreography I have ever seen. John Neumeier in Hamburg, Pina Bausch, Susanne Linke and Sasha Waltz in Berlin have commissioned photographers to do similar catch of their works. Savage's photos are as good as any of those; none are better than his.

I see from Creative New Zealand's website that a sizeable grant has been awarded for the workshopping of Wright's new theatre work, *The Hallelujah Project*. He has always had a winning way with titles, of both his dances and his books, but I'd say this one is particularly well named.

At \$50, the *Black Milk* book is great value. Unity have it in stock and I'm glad about that because it's all I want for Christmas.