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SHOWCASE

☆ PAGE 29 | WWW.SUNTIMES.COM | MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009 | EDITOR: AMANDA BARRETT | **Let's get into it.**

REVIEW ONLINE | *At suntimes.com, Hedy Weiss writes about Batsheva Dance Company from Israel*



Batsheva dancers give masterful performance in 'Deca Dance' Batsheva Dance Company of Israel in "Deca Dance" at the Auditorium Theatre

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BY HEDY WEISS Dance Critic

The opening segment of "Deca Dance," the assemblage of pieces created by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin and performed by his Batsheva Dance Company of Israel at the Auditorium Theatre this weekend, begins with these seductive words: "The illusion of beauty, and the fine line that separates madness from sanity / The panic behind the laughter, and the coexistence of fatigue and elegance."

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There, in a nutshell, is everything you need to know about Naharin's work, and about the strange, intense, sometimes grotesque, sometimes whimsical, frequently mysterious, at times provocative ways in which his dancers move and reveal themselves. Well, not quite everything. There also is the wonderful way Naharin suggests a sense of order and then suddenly fractures it, sending it into an exquisite chaos that ultimately resolves itself back into an ordered state again. And there is the compelling sense of watching 17 bodies that rarely touch, yet seem to exist entirely in close tension with each other, as if some palpable magnetic force were holding them at just the necessary distance.

There is, as well, the sense of an almost religious feverishness at certain moments. And then, at others, there is a secular heat, with vaguely scatological commentary that goads the dancers into a completely different state. Gesture is crucial -- whether the semaphore-like use of fingers and hands, or animalistic swivels of the back, or brief balletic moves that seem incongruous, yet calming and beautiful amid the frenzy. And there is Naharin's fascinating use of repetition, and the hypnotic incremental building up of phrases of movement and words so that things change and intensify and become imprinted on one's consciousness.

In mixing and matching sections from eight different works created between 1992 and 2008 -- pieces that use music ranging from synthesized classical scores, to traditional Hebrew songs, to spoken text, to 1950s lounge lizard pop -- Naharin creates a richly textured, highly individualistic collage of historical references, individual emotions and "psychodramas" that are ripe for interpretation. This is, no doubt, one reason that a post-performance discussion with the choreographer attracted such a large segment of the audience, and was filled with so many pleas for explanation, even though Naharin's dances are calculated to provoke questions but elude clearcut answers.

The first half of the program included several sequences familiar to Hubbard Street Dance Chicago fans who have delighted at performances of "Minus 16" over the years -- from the rousing "Anaphaza" (with its great semicircle of Hasidic-like dancers in folding chairs sequentially hurling themselves out of position, dispensing with hats, suits and shoes along the way in an astonishing exorcism of spirit) to "Zachacha," during which the dancers claim partners from the audience and whirl them into a blissfully dizzy state on stage.

But it also included the intriguingly erotic duet for two women, "B/ olero," set to Isao Tomita's fascinating electronic take on the Ravel favorite; the tensely lyrical "Mabul"; a male-female duet that suggested two nervous gladiators; and the seductive and subtle "Telophaza." Best of all was the audacious, superbly danced "George & Zalman" -- a piece for five women in short black dresses, set to a mock "rules to live by" text that created a fierce counterpoint between the proper and the vulgar, the highbrow and the crass.

The second half of the program was devoted solely to "Three," a 35-minute ensemble piece in which self-revelation was a big part of the game. The dancers periodically gathered in three columns, with several briefly mooning the audience, others teasingly raising their T-shirts to reveal a bit of torso, and a few even exposing some pubic hair, with the men playing at androgyny.

The Batsheva dancers, who come in many shapes and sizes, have mastered Naharin's fiendishly difficult mix of revelation and secrecy, full corporeality and stylized evasion.

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