

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

DANCE REVIEW

Stars are abundant in Israeli troupe's 'Deca'

By Sid Smith

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Ohad Naharin is one of the most original and confounding choreographers of our time.

The term genius should only be used with caution. But it nevertheless seeps into your thoughts during a performance by Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, where he's artistic director. That doesn't mean the concerts over the weekend at the Auditorium Theatre avoided inconsistency or artistic missteps.

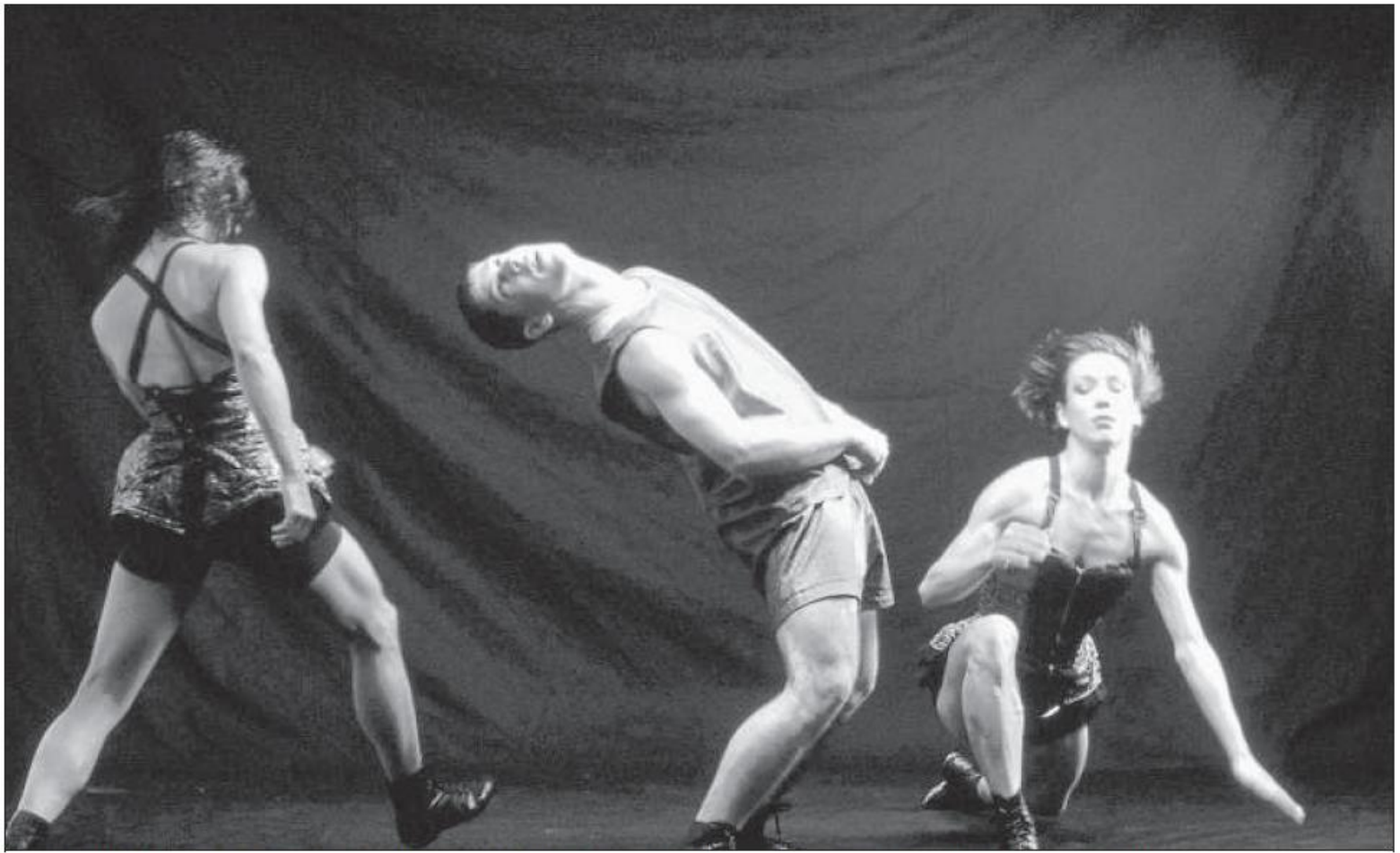
Nor does it make viewing any easier. Naharin is challenging, erratic and almost to a fault unconcerned with crafting pretty, accessible dance. The most romantic twosome Saturday was two men enacting a fey, ballroom sendup that mixed satire and steely male technique.

Naharin opts for the fetching only in ways you're unlikely to see elsewhere: the hilarious, exhilarating audience participation, originally from "Zachacha" and now part of "Minus 16" in the repertory of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

While Naharin is duly celebrated for such spectacle, one of the most amazing pieces in "Deca Dance," the weekend's umbrella collection, was a duet for two women to Maurice Ravel's iconic "Bolero." (Naharin whimsically calls the piece "B/olero.") It mixes classical form and everyday gesture, although Naharin continually finds movement that seems everyday but on closer inspection isn't.

The two women, dancing often in tandem, weave their arms in a circular motion recalling a windmill, or perform mechanical ges-

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Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, under the guidance of artistic director Ohad Naharin, is known for its muscular and expressive artists.

tures that transform them into human traffic signals. Grafted beautifully to more classically artful dance, Naharin's invention takes movement into unmapped territory.

Not that it always works. An excerpt from "George & Zalman," with five women, is less engaging, less compelling, and not particularly well served by lines repeated from gritty poet Charles Bukowski. The repetition devolves into the tiresome.

But that same instinct to mingle earthy and poetic finds tremendous payoff in selections from "Three," designed with a brash inventiveness that divides the dancers at one point into three separate groups, each performing a parade of movements as if students in line.

Because there's one dancer from each group performing differing sequences simultaneously, the viewer is in a mad scramble to watch all three. Here Naharin ingeniously employs gritty wit, with dancers innocently flashing their stomachs and, later, briefly, their genitals—although the men's genitals have been preposterously reconfigured to appear female too.

Batsheva's dancers can't be praised enough. They are a troupe of ferociously energetic, muscular and expressive artists who meet their leader's challenge that they all perform as if star soloists, which, much of the time, they are.

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