

Curtain Up and Down

The showcase series "Curtain Up" takes place at the Suzanne Dellal Center annually to enable budding choreographers to present their work. In 1999, the series consisted of seven "Curtains", each named after a different hue. Among the works presented were excellent dances, such as Inbal Pinto's "Oyster" and Yossi Berg's "Goliath"; but there were also some very inferior works.

Such a mixture is to be expected in an artistic supermarket of this kind. It is unrealistic to expect any common denominator in such a medley. Nearly all the works presented began in a fashionably murky darkness, which did not enable the spectator even to know how many dancers were participating, let alone whether they were male or female. After a while, the lights become a little brighter, but this did not always happen. For example, Sonia de Orleans-Juste, who is a strikingly beautiful dancer, remained in dark shadows for the duration of her solo, owing to the whim of her light designer. What a pity!

One had to use a magnifying glass to read the program, so tiny were the letters of the text. What happened to the old-fashioned notion of supplying the audience with simple information in black on white?

Since Inbal Pinto's early work, "Dio-kan", an "action-painting" dance in the manner of Jackson Pollock, was presented a few years ago, it has been clear that she is a talented, funny, original dance creator. Her recent work, "Wrapped", has been successfully performed in several versions at home and all over Europe. In her new "Oyster", nobody swallows tasty mollusks, but it is a feast nevertheless. Like several contemporary choreographers, she uses devices borrowed from the world of the circus, such as garlands of colored light bulbs, acrobatics, stilts, and props that enlarge or diminish the height of the dancers.

Fortunately, Pinto is free of the fashionable foible of attaching quasi-philosophical "meanings" to her lively, entertaining and dancy pieces. Fat ladies and gentlemen with big mustaches add a French flavor to her "Oyster". This isn't surprising, since she choreographed it in collaboration with the Lyon Choreographic Centre in France.

Anat Shamgar's "Merchav Michya", meaning "space to live in" (Lebensraum in German, a term spoiled by its Nazi association), benefited by incorporating the Swiss dancer Bruno Stepanoni and the American violinist Malcolm Goldstein in her work. Not only are the paths traced by the two dancers and the amazing violinist beautiful to watch, even the forms carved by their movement in space are fascinating. The strange scratches and screeches that the violin produces, in spite of being "ugly" in the conventional sense of the word, are tender and even lyrical. Shamgar and her two partners do not follow prescriptions, but go their own ways, which is commendable. The lighting by Shai Yehudai (who also designed the lighting for other dances presented in the series) was free of the general low-key lighting fad and served the dancers well.

International cooperation, however, isn't a guarantee for success, as Vertigo's new work, "Ish Chuttim" ("The Gas Heart"), clearly shows. Noa Wertheim and Adi Sha'al, who run "Vertigo", have again collaborated with a Hungarian dance group. They set out to create a "Dada" piece, taking a long (very long...) nonsense poem by Tristan Tzara as their pretext.

The Dada movement of the 1920s was invented by a group of artists who wished to shatter the complacency of the art world by using provocative nonsense and meaningless sounds. There is hardly any real Dada anarchy in the present production. The poem is spoken in a deadly serious schoolgirl manner, with the dancer's

head protruding from a table that is trundled all over the stage for no purpose whatsoever. The work challenges nothing, debunks nothing; it is simply boring. Perhaps "Vertigo" and their Hungarian friends just didn't do their homework and are using the name "Dada" in vain.

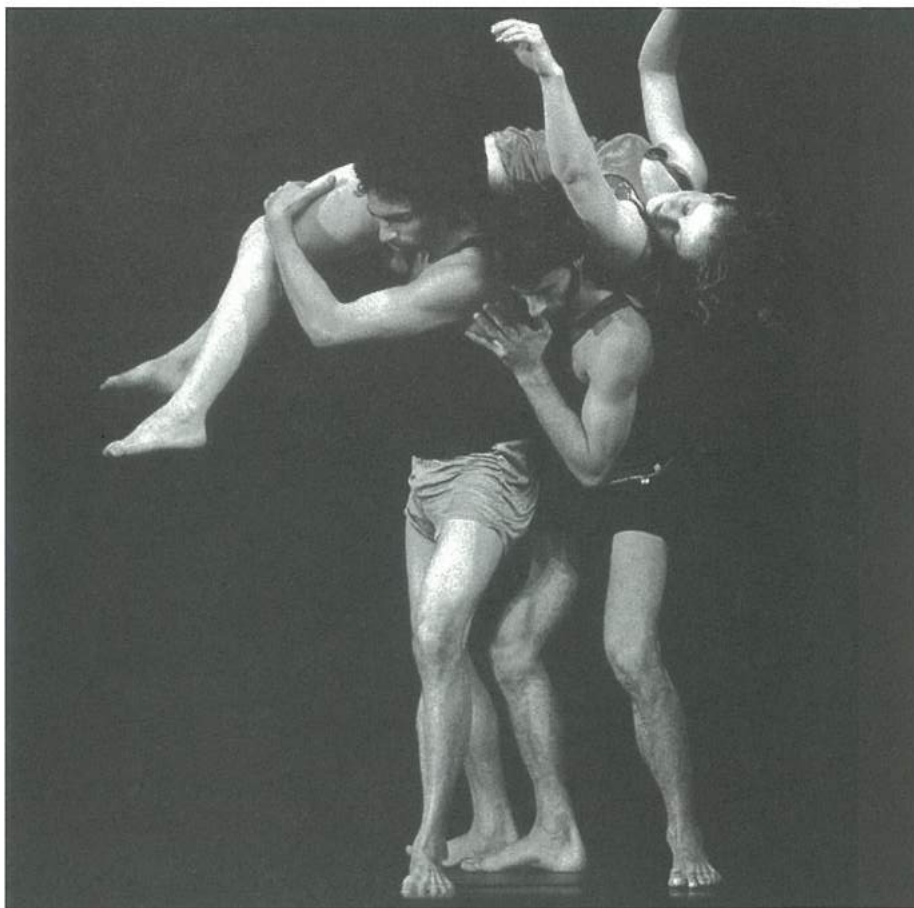
The Batsheva Ensemble excelled in a new work by one of their dancers, Yossi Berg, entitled for some obscure reason "Goliath".

Four boys in white plastic aprons bring plastic boxes on stage; the boxes are, as we see in the end, full of ripe, red tomatoes. This vegetable-market quartet moves briskly, does not take itself too seriously, is entertaining, and leaves the stage covered in nice red tomatoes – somewhat like Pina Bausch's "Carnations". The dancers move swiftly, the vegetables perform well; an altogether very good and enjoyable dance.

Another dance by the Batsheva Ensemble was Barak Marshall's "Zion", a duet plus several "invisible" helpers clad in black, in the Japanese theatrical tradition. The "invisibles" help the two dancers do "impossible" moves. Barak Marshall's movement vocabulary, though, is very limited indeed. In his work, everything becomes symmetrical and is done in unison, everyone copying each other. Even when he borrows the famous Nijinsky trick of jumping out of the French window and seemingly never landing (as in the conclusion of "Spectre de la rose"), it looks ridiculous. To name this trifle "Zion" and to use J.S. Bach's music as accompaniment constitutes pure insolence.

Noa Dar has become a very good and very professional choreographer and has outgrown the term "young talent". In her new work, she leaves surrealism behind; there are no more suitcases being carried about and no one eats lettuce any more. Her "Achilles Tendon" is based on steadily flowing movement in the manner of "contact improvisation". But not as is usually performed

by couples; now it's a trio. Usually contact improvisation is tender, loving, and rather sensual. Noa Dar adds a violent element. The term "Achilles tendon" normally points to a weak spot, but this dance is vigorous, well constructed, and well executed.



"Achilles Tendon" by Noa Dar, photography: Gadi Dagon
 "גדי אכילס" מאת נועה דר -הלחקה, צילום: גדי דגון

Even gifted choreographers who have proved themselves can sometimes produce disappointing work. I remember Anat Danieli's choreography as atmospheric, tender, full of changing moods. Her new work, "Yoffi, Yoffi" ("Splendid"), is disappointing. I fail to understand why she chose to make her young girls "ugly" by disfiguring their bodies with grotesque, artificial padding.

Emanuel Gat is a very musical and handsome dancer, as is his partner in his new duet. He choreographed, composed the music, and dances this duet with Galit Hamami, an excellent dancer. Instead of creating a real dance for two, he simply photocopied the movement. Duplication per se is no real choreographic structure and better left to machines. This duet is called "Kasha", the Yiddish for buckwheat grouts. Another disappointment.

There is no need to point out the great talent and historical role of Rina Schenfeld. She recently celebrated 40 years as a dancer and 20

years of activity at the helm of her independent company. The celebration started with ten minutes of pure beauty as she bounced and twirled a large translucent cube on which her past was projected and her present body became a poetic photomontage of her present and past self. Unfortunately, the duet she danced with Din-Din Aviv (who also composed the music for the piece) in "Curtain Up" was unconvincing. What a pity that such a great artist as Schenfeld, whom we remember from great past achievements, is not more self-critical. It is not easy to decide when the time has arrived to stop. Great artists like Rina Schenfeld owe such painful decisions to both themselves and their art.

Young Israeli dance is flourishing. Many foreign critics and dance journalists as well as directors of international festivals came to Susanne Dellal to watch the work of the new generation of Israeli choreographers. And for the most part, they were not disappointed. ❧



"The Gas Heart" by Gabor Goda and Noa Wertheim, Vertigo Dance Company, photography: Gabor Dusa

"איש חוטים" מאת גבור גודה ונועה ורטהיים, להקת ורטיגו, צילום: גאבור דוסה