

FROM A DANCE CRITIC'S DESK

BY GIORA MANOR

INTERNATIONAL STRIPTease

On 7-14 of November '95 an event entitled "Dance '95 - International Exposure" took place at the Suzanne Dellal Centre. It was in fact a first exposure for only a few of the works performed, most of which had been chosen from

among the choreographies of the previous season.

Apart from a very poetic work by Tamar Borer (executed with Yael Mandler and a huge "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves" type earthenware jar) to music by Arik Shapira, there was little cause for celebration. Mandler also serves as a pair of spare legs for Tamar, whose own legs are paralyzed. The symbiosis between the two is perfect and even for a moment there is no feeling that Tamar has not the use of her legs. The jar serves them to disappear and emerge again. The work is a triumph of imaginative, poetic choreography.

The amiable duo "Vertigo" (Noa Wertheim and Adi Sha'al) also showed something new, again in collaboration with a foreign company, this time one from Hungary.

It began promisingly with the whole stage barricaded by a wall of jerry-cans. There were plenty of interesting, but not yet fully developed ideas. Their second work, the quartet "Limbo" to music by Dan Bagno, had good movement design and was well danced.

The word "International" in the event's title referred to the presence of several foreign Dance Festival Directors - potential buyers. I am afraid this exposure was rather a striptease, revealing what is underneath current Israeli fringe-dance, but exposing nothing that really whets the appetite.

TO THE SOURCES OF THE GERMAN TANZTHEATER

Pina Bausch and her group from Dusseldorf performed three of her oldies (at the Opera Hall in Tel Aviv), offering a young generation the opportunity to watch a variety of seminal works which, about 20 years ago, formed the basis for her Tanztheater style.

In "Caffe Muller" - the Ur-Tanztheater - one could see many of the now familiar elements, Pina Bausch herself dancing in the role of the lonely woman in a white dress and the relentless, obsessive repetitions human beings make in the strange but at the same time banal landscape of the "sad cafe". Unfortunately, many of the youngsters who attended the sold-out performances found this early Bausch classic too slow and "obvious". They have seen all these devices copied and used by so many other choreographers...

However, they gave a standing ovation to the pre-Tanztheater fabulous "Rite of Spring" from 1975, created when Bausch still worked in the framework of modern dance.

The second programme of the Wuppertal Dance Theatre consisted of a later masterpiece, "Viktor". In a huge quarry, or, perhaps, mass-grave, life goes on for three hours of curious love and hate making with enigmatic and very personal rituals taking place. It was fascinating.

PINA BAUSCH, "VIKTOR", ILL.: SHEMUEL KATZ



Especially pleasant was watching her faithful veteran dancers, several of whom have been in her company since the 1970s.

WHY DO MEN DANCE?

"Only Men Dancing" is the title of an annual show of male dancing organized by Yair Vardi, the head of the Suzanne Dellal Centre. It is certainly worthwhile to encourage young men but by putting them in a sort of "male-only ghetto" the would-be choreographers are deprived of the important element of female dancers and the variety and possible confrontation that the mixture of the sexes brings with it.

Ilan Leshem's "Eshet Ish" (a high register Hebrew word for wife) was a send-off on the evening's main theme, when the technically brilliant dancer took off his trousers and stood there in a stiff "tutu", with a long phallic tail in his able hands.

Ido Tadmor intends to form a new independent company, a trend recently noticeable in Israeli dance, and is an artist worth watching closely.

After a notable career as a dancer in Batsheva, Lar Lubovitch and other companies, Tadmor proved (again) that he is an inventive and original choreographer. He performed parts of his new dance "Cell" (see article about him on page no. 16)

BACK TO THE GREEN FIELDS

I was happy to notice that the Kibbutz Dance Company outgrew the policy of dance managements in Israel (for me strange and negative) never to invite Israelis who live abroad to create in their homeland. Avi Kaizer, who has lived for many years in Belgium and has lately danced and created for the Suzanne Linke company in Germany, came to Ga'aton and offered the K.C.D.K. dancers a new experience. His work "Kri-ah" (the Hebrew for "severance") goes back to flowing folk-dance based movement, using simple dresses looking like working attire in white, black and khaki, in an attempt to capture memories local patriotic in nature.

Bales of hay add a pastoral atmosphere to this enjoyable dance, which was well executed by the dancers, who seemed to enjoy this newly gained "oldfashioned" lightness. No one is flung brutally to the floor, no one is allowed to fall when hugging a partner. It is a tender dance, so its name is a misnomer. Nobody is torn apart, except perhaps the choreographer, who, I assume, feels torn from his childhood and homeland.

THE BAT SHEVA ENSEMBLE IN THE DARK

During the last days of 1995, Batsheva's junior company, directed jointly by Ohad Naharin and Naomi Perlov, performed a programme for which Naharin reconstituted his early, brilliant solo, "Pas de Pepsi", a very funny dance for a Pepsi-addict and a supermarket cart which follows him like a faithful dog.

The "Ensemble" dancers are impressive and have real stage presence, but the young dancer who danced Naharin's solo on the night I attended, Hillel Kogan, was unable to imbue the tricky piece with the witt and effervescence it originally had.

It seems a contagious disease, with symptoms over dance stages around the world - to under-light the stage to a degree of pitchblack darkness, which conceals the dancers and makes it a real effort to see what they are doing. Because of this unfortunate trend one could hardly see Naharin's duet "Passomezzo". Why use the spice of obscurity as the main dish?

"Pandora Garage" by Sa'ar Magal (the best executed part of the performance) is a whimsical piece and, being well lit, could be enjoyed without special night-sight equipment.

The Ensemble also presented Noa Dar's "Lachrimosa" (to music by Purcell). She is a talented choreographer whose works are not focused enough yet.

Naharin also created a special farewell solo for Hana Weisman, a petit dancer whose figure appeared on all the company's posters and became a sort of trade-mark. She was visibly pregnant when performing Naharin's solo and made a touching figure.

The Ensemble evening was interesting but please turn on the lights!

BAT DOR IN WHITE AND GOLD

Gigi Caciuleanu, the Rumanian born choreographer who works in Paris, returned to Israel to prepare a new piece with the Bat Dor dancers, entitled "Lunaris". It is a tongue-in-cheek dance piece, nominally about "madness" induced by the full moon (a theme used in past years by several choreographers). The music is by Francois Boieldieu, the set - a formal block of artificial flowers, like one may find in a hotel lobby, was designed by Dan Mastacan. He also devised the costumes, which make the Bat Dor dancers look like creatures from an old "Playboy" magazine: the women are dressed in white body-suits with white fur piping in all the right places, complete with a cute little bunny-tail. The boys looked even more provocative,

clad in trousers (over skin coloured body stocking) with cut-out pieces, emphasizing their (shapely) buttocks. To top off the cute kitsch, all wore golden-blond wigs. A really funny chef-d'oeuvre. (At the official premiere held in March some vigilantes decided to make the girls look more decent and amputated the bunny-tail.)

The Bat Dor dancers looked rather solemn and went about their business with a serious visage, missing the "campy" send-up of this quasi-elegant atmosphere entirely.

The programme opened with "Cantares" by Oscar Araiz, a well wrought conventional piece, and Caciuleanu's "Acto", fitted out with new music due to copyright problems. The Dvorak quartet lent this very good dance - about the eternal race after time, symbolized by a huge clock with moving hands designed by Dan Mastacan - an appropriate atmosphere.

THE BEST OF FRIENDS

Tero Saarinen, a welcome guest from Finland, and his Israeli friend Yuval Pick arrived to present an evening of duets and Saarinen's "eternal" solo, the brilliant "B12" (by Jorma Outinen).

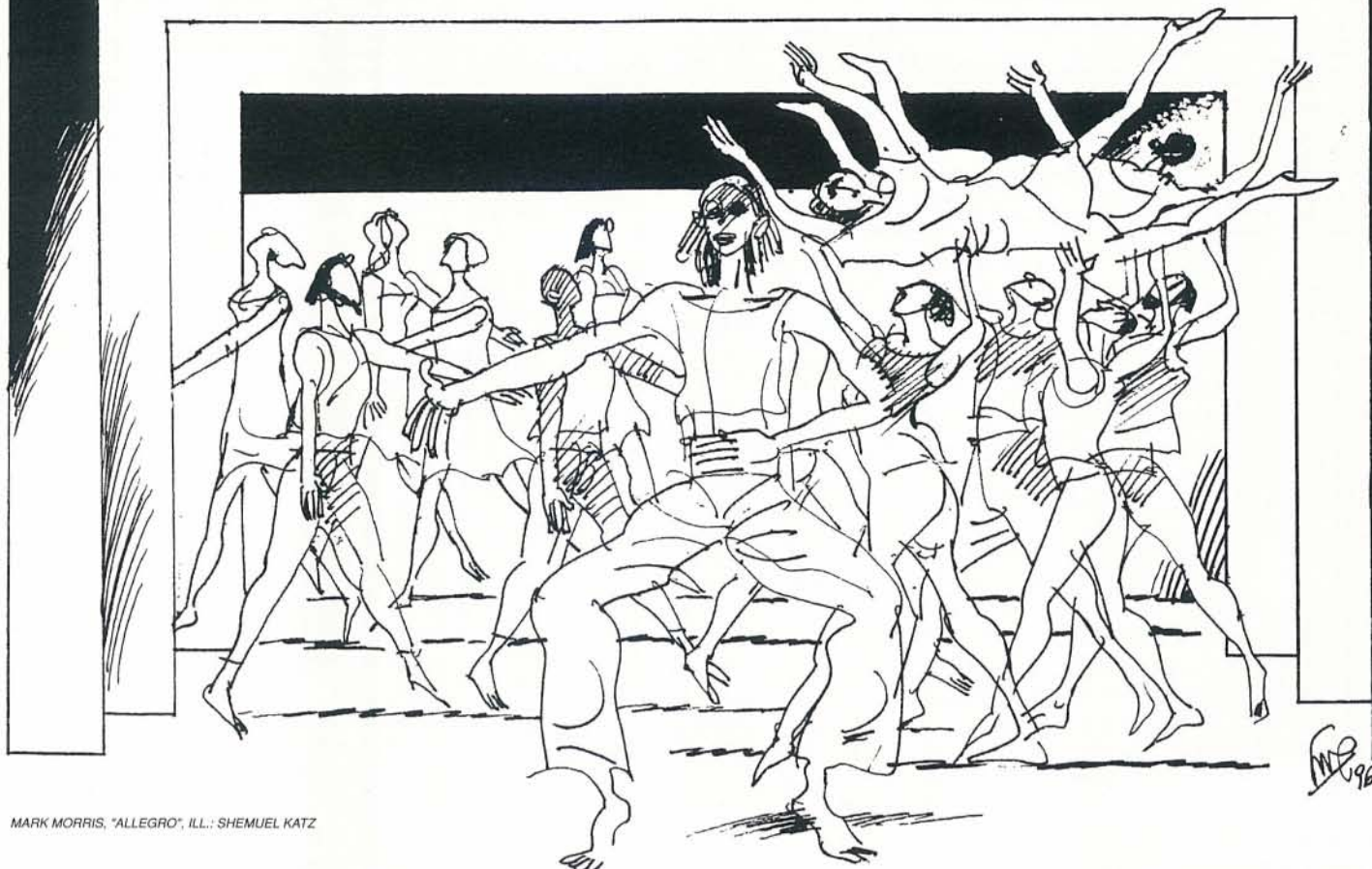
Both new duets were rather sombre. The first - "Evol" is danced to the lurching rhythms of a London homeless's lament. Both are excellent but dissimilar dancers and they are so attuned to one another that it becomes obvious they are not just stage-partners.

The second duet, to music by Henryk Gorecki, seemed to deal with characters like the two tramps in "Waiting for Godot". What a pity that both duets were so dimly lit - due to the unfortunate fashion of murky stage lighting - that it was a strain on the eyes to see what the dancers were doing.

THE ETERNAL OPTIMIST

Everybody expected some outrageous, provocative things from Mark Morris, who came with his company to perform at the "Mishkan l'Omanuyot Habamah" in Tel Aviv but both the company's programmes were sunny, very sophisticated (overly so), enjoyable and very human indeed.

The first evening moved swiftly on the wide stage, which changed colours in geometrical patterns, reminding one of Piet Mondrian's squares, to music by Handel. Morris has a very special way of using entrances and exists - important devices often neglected by choreographers - and most of the movement is in elliptical forms, especially the arm movements.



MARK MORRIS, "ALLEGRO", ILL.: SHEMAEL KATZ

The second, "mixed" evening saw the choreographer himself dancing a solo to Gershwin preludes with charm and agility, giving lightness to his rather bulky body and a not so good attempt at a narrative dance in "The Office" piece to music by Dvorak.

Altogether, to see such sunny, sometimes funny, often tender and moving (in both senses of the term) dances from America was a pleasant surprise. Nothing epochal, but very good choreography and dancing.

GUESTS FROM EUROPE AT BATISHEVA

Last season Tero Saarinen created a whimsical dance for the Batsheva Ensemble entitled "Flock". I remembered it as rather funny but this time around, either because of my failing eyesight or because of the latest awful fashion, the stage was so dark I am unable to report about it with any degree of certainty. It seemed to me that the dancers were not as good as those who danced it last season.

The world-premiere was a piece by Paul Selwyn Norton, a Britisher living in Holland, called "Rogue Tool", to original music by Fred Frith.

It began with all kinds of strange torture contraptions suggesting medical tools, such as a gynecological looking examination bed onto which dancers were strapped or from which they were suspended. But after this enticing beginning not much happened. It seemed to me to be the so familiar case of starting to create a

dance with just one idea. As every seasoned choreographer knows, be that one idea as brilliant as they come, one should not begin rehearsals until one has at least three good ideas and especially one for the end. Otherwise one may run out of ideas long before the music and the dance ends. That was the case with Mr. Norton.

A STALE COPPELIA

For 12 years Tamara Mielnik stubbornly and steadfastly keeps her group, rather grandly called "The Jeusalem Dance Theatre", active. Usually this school-like company invites visiting choreographers to work with its dancers and certainly this is a most commendable venture.

For the purpose of celebrating its 12th birthday it offered young audiences a very reduced version of the classical "Coppelia", staged in an oldfashioned and humourless way by the ballet teacher Ya'akov Lifshitz, who also was Dr. Coppelius. Notice that I did not say he danced or acted the part - he was simply on-stage.

Even the gifted and experienced Richard Orbach was rather silly as Franz. Instead of a rustic cheeky youngster he had become in this version a sort of impoverished prince, God knows why.

"The Jeusalem Dance Theatre" has some pretty good dancers but they sorely need a choreographer if they are to be appreciated.

Showing such a trashy production to impressionable youngsters means putting them

off classical ballet instead of making them fans. Sorry, I came to praise Tamara Mielnik (who also had the unfortunate idea of playing the doll herself in the first act) not to bury her, but the production was hopeless.

