

A Magical March

Pamela Peled

A night out, watching dedicated dancers whirling and twirling on stage, should not necessarily move the audience to tears. But as the lights in an intimate auditorium hit a sobbing mourner draped in anguish over a fresh grave, and the almost-military "Tomorrow" anthem blared in the background promising Israelis a better day,



photo: Danny Kitri

Choreography: Lior Tavori

all hearts in the Tel Aviv Suzanne Dellal Center collectively lurched for all our soldiers, killed so young. And then, crazily, the flowers on the coffin started to move, and turned out to be boxing gloves, not blossoms. And eerily, in a scene that haunts me every time I've visited my dead in the cemetery since, aching arms arch out of the mound, reaching for the mourner. The dead youth, with the weight of defending his country heavy on his skin, inches his way out of the grave and into his lover's embrace; she, full of the knowledge that she's only imagining the feel of him, dances her brains out.



photo: Danny Kitri

Choreography: Michal Blank

It's an explosive scene, a howl of protest; Lior Tavori and Shachar Brenner perfectly capture the pathos. Tavori, who choreographed the piece as well as dancing the lead, grew up experiencing the pain of loss: his young uncle was killed in action. The piece pays tribute to him as well examining the role of national ceremonies and solidarity.

The duo is from the Master's Program in JAMD's Department of Dance, which every year showcases outstanding student original works. This year Na'ama Arava contextualized what "home" means to her; a woman staring out of a window, or anxiously fussing in front of an unforgiving mirror. As "All We Need is Love" chirps in the background, the woman and her guests, cavorting in what should be a sacred space, seem not altogether at peace. The minimalist set - mostly signs that hang or are held - adds to the edginess; the dancing is fluid and fabulous but not quite free. It's dramatic stuff.

In "Longing" Michal Blank goes one step further, becoming a kind of puppet pulled in all directions. As she intones "Is Life Like This for Everyone?" the onlooker's blood curdles; the singing is bleak, although the homage to her mother is clearly empathetic. Blank is a powerful presence on stage; the piece is unsettling and strangely moving.

"These works represent the different styles, attitudes and emotions of our students, as well as drawing on their various backgrounds," explains Dr. Vered Aviv, head of the Master's Program of Dance at

JAMD. "A dancer's instrument is the body, and our dancers learn to use their bodies properly as well as artistically. The public performance in March is a culmination of their studies, where we present the top final projects."

Aviv is perfectly placed to guide the dancers to greater virtuosity. A neuro-scientist with a PhD in the regeneration of nerve cells after injury, she is also an artist. With experience in teaching about cognition and the senses at Bezalel she was an obvious choice to build and head the MA program of dance. Some ten years ago she, together with Ein-Ya Cohen, put together a curriculum based on two principles: the art of dance, and the academic freedom to look at multiple points of view. "Being in an academic framework we can get to the heart of the artistic process," she explains, "by taking a pluralistic approach. We emphasize that whatever specialization our students aim for - performance, choreography, theory - they first



photo: Natasha Shakines

Choreography: Naama Arava

need a comprehensive basis of everything connected to their art."

The two-year Master's Program in Dance offered at JAMD is the only one in Israel, and is comprised of twenty-five students, some of whom graduated from the JAMD's B.Dance Program. Students are taught to identify their center, and to use all possible tools to sharpen it. And when the department is headed by a hardcore neuro-scientist, the possible tools become extremely diverse. "The Somatics of Musicality" for example, examines how different dancers catch movements in different ways: some according to melody, others to the rhythm. Aviv's investigation into this resulted in an academic paper on which she collaborated with one of her students, Niv Marinberg.

There is more: the field of neuro-aesthetics, for example, examines questions like what can be abstractualized in dance. "There is always a human body," explains Aviv, "and we recognize the age, sex, and ethnicity of the dancer. We also understand functional movements like lifting a cup." Unlike in the plastic arts, in dance the basic shape cannot be eliminated. However, functionality of movement can be limited, offering the audience a non-habitual point of view and taking them out of their comfort zone.

Judging by the works on show last month, the students have totally grasped all those concepts. I, for one, am still recovering.



photo: Danny Kitri

Dr. Vered Aviv