

Two-Room Apartment - Double Circles

critic by Zvi Goren, "Ha'Bama". December 9th, 2012.

ARTISTIC QUALITY AND INDEPENDENT LIFE

There are two way of viewing Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor's "Two-Room Apartment", first performed as part of Tmuna's Dance festival in October this year.

The first and more obvious way, is to view it in context of the original work, created and performed by Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal in 1987, as part of "Gvanim Bemachol" Dance Festival.

Viewing it in this way implies that any critical observation of Sheinfeld and Laor's version will be done in conjunction with mentioning the original work, with its unique movement language and conceptual framework, as well as the initial shock the work created in both the local and European dance scenes, and the fact it's toured to major venues across Europe, to great acclaim, for ten years straight.

A few of us have seen the original version over the years, and as one of them, I can vividly remember its huge effect, the young couple's newly developed movement language and gestures, that since has grown so, and turned its Mitzpe Ramon home to a lively dance and spiritual centre.

But not via comparison should this new version be examined, which has received the blessing of the original makers, for which they deserve much credit.

It's obvious though, that Liat and Nir's version, danced by a man and a woman, will be intrinsically different to the same work when danced by two men, even if the entire mise-en-scene - the stage design, the lighting and the music, would have stayed identical.



Another way of viewing the work is as an independent new work, and that's how I chose to look at it, when I watched it twice this last Friday - in the afternoon and then again in the evening. It doesn't mean I am watching it with no recollection of the original work, but rather that the new version has its own vitality and is of a high artistic quality.

Sheinfeld and Laor had created their own fascinating version during their residency at the National Centre for Dance in France and Grand Theatre in Holland (residency made possible with the generous support of the Israeli Lottery Cultural Fund).

According to them, the work had accurately shifted from being a mere re-staging of the original work, towards imbuing its ideas and movements in their own, with Keren Levy as the process' artistic adviser.

The artistic correspondence with the original work didn't erase its original basis of small, everyday and often arbitrary gestures, as well as the use of Ori Vidislavsky's original score, but used it to create an entirely new space where - as occurred to me on the second viewing - the movements breathe in a variety of 'lives', dynamic and changing as they are in, always in the relation to its close-proximity audience.

In the afternoon it was the International Exposure festival guests who greeted the work with a standing ovation, while the night show saw local audience members cheering excitedly as the work finished. Sheinfeld and Laor were fresh for the professional afternoon audience, while in the later show they managed to create a warm connection with the local dance-lovers scene, despite the natural tiredness after a long day's work.

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

The work begins when the pair, in identical brown leather shows, grey jeans and black t-shirt (Sheinfeld) and singlet (Laor), mark the apartment on its two distinct spaces, with a shiny white marking tape. Already at this very early stage one can notice the obvious difference between the performers, which will later become even more evident as the work progresses.

Laor, tall, solid, darker and determined. Sheinfeld pale skinned, soft looking and very natural.

Right at the beginning of the work, as well as throughout the entire piece, they bring something so rarely seen in dance works - they look at each other, they observe, respond, comment, speak. And all of it, as I've discovered, is improvised and not pre-planned.



Once they completed creating the apartment they enter, each one into their respective space, and put on a hoodie, a blue one for Laor and a green one for Sheinfeld, and stand ready to embark on their meticulously choreographed journey.

From then on, under Netta Koren's sensitive lighting design, develops an entire relationship created from series of small identical physical gestures, with an army-like march music playing in the background.

Gradually the movements become more elongated, until something breaks, and the movement style becomes more individual, one that suits the makers' varied background - Sheinfeld who began dancing at Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal's company some twenty five years ago, and Laor who comes from a theatre background and started dancing - gradually - after having met Sheinfeld nine years ago.

The differences between the two become the basis for the wonderful texture of the unique relationship that's created on stage through the shift of the movement from complete unison to being distinctly different. It's a system containing a natural tension, connection and disconnection, occasional violence even, but more than anything an intimate, clinging intimacy, created during the unforgettable and moving climax of the work.

It happens when Laor, perhaps feeling threatened by his progressively alienated partner, undresses, one item after another, until he stands stark naked. Sheinfeld comes and hugs him, and then Laor clings onto him, and to the sound of Elton John's Goodbye Yellow Brick Road they create an original and very moving image.

Whatever comes later, forgiveness that turns once more into disconnection, agitation - where Sheinfeld creates quite a complex mise-en-scene, including what looks as if taken from the world of women washing their laundry on a river bank - leads the two to acknowledge that their connection is in fact stronger than the separating walls between them, and through a new type of movement, hand in hand, to the sound of a cover version of Elton John's hit they can now give them up.

Such is then Sheinfeld and Laor's new version of Two Room Apartment. Filled with original concepts born into Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal's original work. Double circles of twenty five years of Israeli dance at its best.