

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

If At All: Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, November 19th, 2014

Coming this week to LA's Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is **Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company**, whose history alone is inspiring and moving as a testament to the power of human spirit.

The company's original founder, a woman by the name of Yehudit Arnon, who just passed away last year, was a Holocaust survivor. At the age of seventeen, her mother and she were taken to Auschwitz – which only she survived. She then went on to Birkenau where she shared her natural gifts for dance and movement with fellow inmates. Hearing of her talents, the Nazis ordered her to entertain them at Christmas. When she refused she was forced to stand all night barefoot in the snow as punishment. Soon after, amidst the arrival of the Soviet army and the German's flight, she miraculously survived a firing squad and vowed to devote her life to dance. Finally, in 1948, Arnon moved to the Western Gallilee area of Northern Israel near the Lebanese border to Kibbutz Ga'aton where she eventually founded **Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company**.

Arnon first met Rami Be'er when he was three and she was teaching nursery school in Kibbutz Ga'aton. Son of the Kibbutz's co-founders, Be'er was raised in a cultured family where music was played regularly and architecture, poetry and the arts in general were celebrated. In short order Arnon recognized a young kindred dance spirit and nurtured Be'er's natural talent and movement intelligence. Be'er grew up continuing to study with Arnon, and in 1980 joined the company as a dancer. In 1996, Be'er took over the company as Arnon's successor. The history and spirit of creative freedom inspired by the company's founder is honored in Be'er's approach and in all that they do. This past week I spoke with Be'er in Philadelphia where the company was on tour:

*“What is unique in the company is a whole vision that I try to bring to stage and translate to the different dimensions of movement, music, stage design, lighting design, costume design, and even text I chose to use... All these dimensions create a certain unity and a world on stage. The piece (**If At All**) is dealing with our existence as human beings in different circles... The circle of relationships in couples, the circle of society or groups, and the circle of individuals in society or in the groups. The idea of a circle is something I put in the dancer, in the movement, in the structure, in the composition.”*



A circle from *If At All*

I speak with choreographers and dancers regularly about dance but very few are verbally articulate, their language not being one of words. Despite the difference in our native tongues, I rarely speak with a choreographer who is as profoundly able to express the intentions of his work as Be'er, and even more rarely do I agree so strongly with those intentions. *“What I’m interested in is to bring to each spectator that he is part of a journey... He comes to theater, sits in his chair, the light goes down and the performance begins. I give him a certain rope, I lead him until a certain point, and then I leave him with himself, with his own associations, with his own memories, with his own feeling and thought. And maybe at the end of the performance, at the end of the journey when the lights come up, maybe he can take with him some questions, some thoughts, some of his own little stories. It’s not about understanding the piece right or wrong, it’s about the freedom I give to each spectator to flow with the piece. Each person’s experience is absolutely legitimate.”*

Be'er continues to pay it forward. For the young dance student interested in becoming a professional, Kibbutz Ga'aton has a unique village that includes both the main and junior companies. Twice a year for 5 consecutive months, Kibbutz Ga'aton is the site for Dance Journey, a program that accepts 40 dancers per cycle, many of whom go on to join the company.



A moment from If At All

Check out **Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company's** short promo preview for **If At All**.

Directed by Smovie.co.il with music by Ludovico Einaudi, it plays with the medium of screen dance by employing Dutch tilts, sweeping camera shots, and sped up and slowed down movement in editing. While a bit long, it provides a glimpse at an emotionally charged work and a beautiful group of dancers.

You can see **Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company** performing **If At All** November 19 -21st at the Wallis' Bram Goldsmith Theater. For tickets and info go to: <https://tickets.thewallis.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=4061>.

See you there.

[embedvideo id="oIefdk937ts" website="youtube"]

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