

Israeli company in local debut

“If At All” by Kibbutz Contemporary Dance impressive but puzzling.

By Nancy G. Heller
 FOR THE INQUIRER

In its Philadelphia debut on Thursday night, Israel’s Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company (KCDC) presented *If At All*, by artistic director Rami Be’er. While this piece gave the dancers an opportunity to show off their strength, flexibility, and stamina, in the end it was only a partial success.

Be’er says he doesn’t tell stories with his choreography, so viewers can make up their own interpretations. But at points, the dancers drop to the floor, accompanied by sounds of gunfire and screaming; they also beat their chests and “stab” themselves. Given Israel’s turbulent history, plus the fact that KCDC’s original leader was a Holocaust survivor (as were Be’er’s parents), it seems more than a generic reference.

In the printed program, Be’er explains that *If At All* deals with “diverse and ever-changing interpersonal relationships.” That certainly applies to the work’s varied and fascinating du-



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ets. But it was unclear how those related to the beautifully executed unison work, or the mesmerizing solo that opened the composition (unfortunately, there was no way to identify individual performers).

Additional questions emerged. Why did the dancers change their costumes (cocreated by Be’er) so often? The women began in short tunics while the bare-chested men sported long skirts. By the end, everyone was wearing floral cummerbunds with checkered kilts. Was this a criticism

of the traditional “gender binary”?

Be’er’s choreography emphasizes extremely low, second-position pliés. From there, the women move slowly and confidently through yogalike poses, while the men are more likely to leap, kick, and roll on the floor. Everyone keeps moving, which suits the recorded music by artists from Nine Inch Nails to Olafur Arnalds. But viewers don’t have time to savor the shapes made by the dancers’ bodies.

Toward the end of the piece, a robotic voice re-

peats “I will always remember this as our last, lost chance.” This potentially evocative element quickly becomes irritating.

Since it is impossible to evaluate a choreographer based on a single work, I would welcome the chance to see KCDC again. Soon.

Additional performances: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday at the [Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts](#), 3680 Walnut St. Tickets: \$20-\$60. Information: 215-898-3900 or [www.AnnenbergCenter.org](#).

