



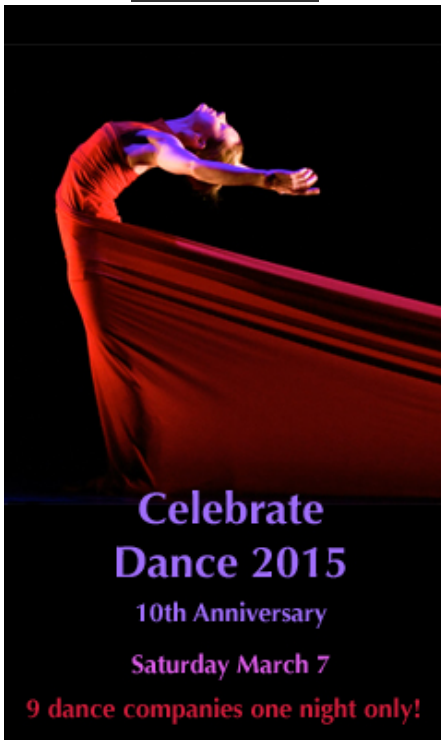
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Kibbutz and Koresh highlight Philly's unofficial Israeli dance festival

by **Lewis J Whittington**
November 18, 2014

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An Israeli dance festival unofficially took place a mid-November weekend in Philly, with the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company performing at the Dance Celebration series in the Annenberg Center on the University of Pennsylvania campus, while across town, Philly's own Koresh Dance Company was dancing their home season program before embarking on an European tour.

Roni Koresh, born and raised in Israel and was a member of Batsheva 2 Dance Company there before he emigrated to the US in the 80s and danced with the Alvin Ailey Company. He established Koresh Dance in Philly in 1991, is the company's director-choreographer creating a repertory of over 40 works. Koresh's choreography is often infused with Israeli cultural aesthetic.

Kibbutz artistic director-choreographer Rami Be'er has created over 50 choreographies for the company. Be'er was a cellist before studying dance with KCDC founder Yehudit Arnon, and became artistic director in 1996. While in Philly, the directors and dancers got together for a dance cultural exchange, and morning dance class, at Koresh studios.

Seeing both companies in the same week it was interesting to take note of first how aesthetically different they are, despite their shared national origins, but to note the similarity in the esprit of the dancers and the commitment of the companies to their particular artistry.

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Koresh was just back from tour stops in the mid-Southwest and rehearsing one of Roni Koresh's 2009-piece "ev.o.lu.tion". It is one of Koresh's long-form works that is technically very different from many of Koresh's pieces in its physical demands on the dancers.

In its gripping opening, Asya Zlatina lurched across the stage in writhing, isometric development; the body coming out of the primordial (in this case) dance ooze. Then the natural dance selection began as the ensemble moved in various stages of evolved states- hunched over or in deep second position plies, clawing over the terrain and at each other.

The origin of species is a big theme, but Koresh's choreography escapes thematic bloat by being humorous and in key spots, simply poetic. Koresh doesn't get literal more than he shows a mosaic of movement ideas with an invisible thread of physical expressions of our evolution, bouncing from animalistic impulses and discovered musicality.

Cast off articles of clothing indicate time lapses on the evolutionary scale. And even in the modern segments, Koresh puts refined behavior next to movement that has more bestial beginnings. How evolved are we, as we still awkwardly try to communicate in all ways intimately, intellectually and philosophically?

Standout solo work from every Koresh dancer and the scrambled precision of the ensemble phrases. Among the standouts in Koresh's uniquely primal duets- Krysta Montrone- Joe Cotler, Micah Geyer- Melissa Rector and Robert Tyler- Kevan Sullivan.

In another segment, men as behaved mechanized men, but flashing apish elegance in Boss suits instead of animal skins. The women also looked happy doing sprightly dances in flowy dresses, but they have much more to say in sweaty dance togs, dancing full out with liberation and not as patriarchal objects.

Ev.o.lu.tion had an unnecessary intermission, but it hardly diminished the sustained performance level of this company. And I would be remiss if I didn't mention the entre act of Melissa Rector's Koresh Youth Ensemble in a group piece called "Debris" set to music by Armand Amar, showing their pulsing unity and esprit.

The next night on the Annenberg stage Rami Be'er's "If At All" was, if not stylistically like Koresh, nonetheless also packed with fluid ideas, unpredictable movements and many choreographic morphs. An opening solo by Shani Cohen was a volcanic tour de force that set the theme of cryptic content and swarthy physicality. The music was a sound mashup of everybody from Max Richter to the Nine Inch Nails.

The men sweep on bare-chested with black Samurai skirts they roll in lines and proceed with pulsing unified rituals. Single dancers break out and execute convulsive layouts, judo kicks and dance flagellation. The men and women are segregated.

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The women, in dance tunics and togs, dancing in separate spotlights, are just as athletic as the men, but without much choreographic variation. On balance, this struck as ponderous and Be'er could strengthen these segments with more choreographic invention. Before the sexes join forces, Be'er ponders in choreographic neutral. Meanwhile, Be'er's dynamic lighting design keeps giving us dramatic stage pictures.

Suddenly, there is a female dancer in a flesh body stocking being flung around and lifted by the men; her hair completely hides her face. It seems like an outtake from "The Rite of Spring," but she is paired with a male who has broken away from the ritualized group. The couple leads in Be'er's series of hypnotic and completely electrifying male-female duets. Each couple part of a dreamlike flow and intimacy, past just sex, against bleak intrusion of incongruously menacing group movement behind them.

One vignette has the soundtrack of people screaming with sirens and gunshots going off. The dancers drop as if stricken but vault back up in the rhythmic group line,

symbolic of lineage, solidarity and survival.

The ending tableau with the men and women in waist sashes, checked skirts and ropey tops, is a visual mystery, but they come together in for joyous communals with everyone dancing amok. Be'er's narrative threads just seem to evaporate frustratingly, before there is any lucid line, but the visceral impact of this work and the performance level throughout was deservedly met by the lusty applause of the audience.



A scene from Rami Be'er's "If At All," performed by Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company

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