

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Mr. Gaga

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, February 1st, 2017

In 1990, when Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin was appointed Artistic Director of Batsheva Dance Company, it launched both him and his internationally assembled group of dancers into a new phase that has influenced the approach to contemporary dance and choreography worldwide. Although he didn't begin formal training until the relatively late (for a dancer) age of twenty-two, growing up on the kibbutz and for as long as his conscious sense of self goes back, Naharin remembers always moving in a way that essentially just *was dance*. So in developing a movement "research" that pushes dancers' limits, Naharin, who works routinely without mirrors and describes his approach as being about "*how do more with less*," spawned the birth of what is now known as "Gaga".

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A dancer in rehearsal practices falling

This week the west coast's premiere organization for the international genre of dance media, Dance Camera West (DCW), presents what promises to be a rousing film about Ohad Naharin called **Mr. Gaga: A True Story of Love and Dance**. **Mr. Gaga** zeroes in on the "elusive beauty of contemporary dance" and "the creative process behind Batsheva's unique performances." Directed by Tomer Heyman, and produced by his brother Barak Heymann, the film also explores the man, his genius, and the personal history behind the movement approach he launched that has now gained international stature.

One of the first screenings of Mr. Gaga will take place at the new USC Glorya Kaufman School of Dance in Los Angeles on February 8th. The new school, established in 2012 by a generous gift from Glorya Kaufman, has been on the forefront of hosting leading artistic voices and charting new frontiers in dance at a level in league with Juilliard. And in fact this screening, which will be preceded by a workshop with the film's director and USC students, marks a new partnership between the school and Dance Camera West and will be the first of five to take place in conjunction with DCW over the next year, with each one profiling a different dance film.



A scene for the masses from "EJAD MI IODEA" a work of Ohad Naharin performed by Batsheva

I had a chance to speak with Tonia Barber, Executive Director of DCW, and ask her about **Mr.**

Gaga and more:

SE: *Can you talk about the new partnership between Dance Camera West and USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance?*

TB: It's a pretty exciting idea that we are working on. They have beautiful space and a need to create crossover between dance and film. We have films that come to us throughout the year that need a different place to screen. USC has the venue, the desire, and the curiosity to push this field further and to celebrate more of these films as they come in.

SE: *Variety has referred to Mr. Gaga as "possibly the most exciting documentary for fans of edgier modern dance since (Wim Wenders') 'Pina'". Can you talk about what you think the importance of this film is?*

TB: So many things come to mind... However I think it will tap into many peoples' hearts and souls because it comes from personal experiences translated into dance and movement before Ohad even knew that what he did was dance. The need to connect emotionally brought out this movement in him that became Gaga.

SE: *Naharin describes Gaga as a 'new way of gaining knowledge and self-awareness through the body' and one that provides 'a framework for discovering and strengthening the body and adding flexibility, agility and stamina while lightening the senses and imagination'. He is also the first to say: 'Gaga is not a style, or a method. It's about listening to your body before you tell it what to do.' What do you think is important for a new generation of dancers to glean from this film and from Gaga itself?*



Another powerful moment in performance from "EJAD MI IODEA"

TB: One of my favorite quotes in this film is from a dancer who speaks about when Ohad came up to him and said 'How dare you! How dare you!' (about what how he was dancing). Its not performance driven its experience driven. He wants you to get in your body and experience it: 'Don't perform it for me... Don't rehearse it for me.' Even their rehearsals are really intense. When you have to fall down over and over and over again, you have to figure out a place in yourself where there's a truth. It's about finding truth in your work and finding truth in yourself... that authentic place. Not just a rehearsal or performance.

SE: *What can you tell me about the filmmakers and the film itself, which as I understand was 8 years in the making, and about any reported initial hesitation on Naharin's side to have it made in the first place?*

TB: The filmmakers really get into the underbelly of what's going on. Like their subject here, the filmmakers are big personalities. You couldn't just casually walk in and really get in depth with the people they're following. It had to be these guys to handle the kind of personalities at play, the scope of work, and the dynamics. And there was a shared passion for the art. The Heymann brothers don't ask easy questions, they want the story. They're real investigators of life and what makes human beings tick. It's about truth. They want nothing but the truth.



Batsheva in a moment from an unknown work

While as I understand it the screening on February 8th with Dance Camera West is sold out, the film's theatrical release in the US begins just two days later on February 10. And coincidentally, on the same day as the DCW screening, February 8, a new work by Naharin entitled **Decadance 2017** is being performed by Batsheva Dance Company at the Segerstrom Center for the arts in Costa Mesa. An embarrassment of Gaga riches.

And stand by for Dance Camera West's upcoming 16th Annual Dance Media Film Festival happening this April 20-23 at UCLA's Fowler Museum and Royce Hall, and the Gloria Kaufman Hall UCLA. Dance Camera West is a cultural destination for seeing the best in new dance media from around the world. For more information or to purchase tickets to the festival go to: www.dancecamerawest.org or for questions to: festival@dancecamerawest.org.

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