

The Boston Globe

DANCE REVIEW

Asherie's 'Odeon' a perfect opener for the Plimpton Shattuck



Richard Torres

Dancers performed Ephrat Asherie's "Odeon" at the New England Conservatory's new 225-seat Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

By Jeffrey Gantz GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | OCTOBER 27, 2018

For its first event at New England Conservatory's new 225-seat Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre, the Celebrity Series could hardly have picked a better work than Ephrat "Bounce" Asherie's "Odeon." Born in Israel and raised in Italy and New York, Asherie started out in ballet and modern dance, but it seems she was always a b-girl at heart. She won a 2016 Bessie Award for Innovative Achievement in Dance, and you can see why in the hour-long piece she and her New York-based company are performing at the Plimpton Shattuck this weekend.

"Odeon," which premiered at Jacob's Pillow this past June and was presented at the Yard in July, is Asherie's second collaboration with her jazz-pianist brother Ehud. It was his idea to perform to Brazilian composer Ernesto Nazareth (1863–1934), whose music was influenced both by Chopin and by Afro-Brazilian rhythms. One of Nazareth's gigs was playing piano for silent films at the Odeon cinema in Rio de Janeiro; he wrote a tango called "Odeon" that has

given its name to Asherie's work. At the Plimpton Shattuck, the 10 Nazareth compositions are played live by a downstage-right band comprising a pianist (Brazilian-born NEC faculty member Henrique Eisenmann), a bassist (Eduardo Belo), and two percussionists (Angel Lau and Sergio Krakowski). As Asherie said at Jacob's Pillow, "Music drives us and inspires us. We are nothing as dancers without musicians."

For all that, "Odeon" starts in silence as Manon Bal and Matthew West take the stage and start clapping, first in between each other's hands and then in time to their own body movements. Throughout the evening, clapping and stomping create rhythm, which creates dance, and that fits in with Asherie's idea of "being a musician with your physical body."

Still, it's more fun to break, or tango, when the musicians join in. And "Odeon" is all about fun. The seven dancers (of whom Asherie is one) gather downstage to wave at the audience. Bal and West cock their heads at each other like birds in a courting dance. Ousmane Wiles preens after a rapid-fire voguing solo. Linda Madueme and Valerie Ho cartwheel past each other. Teena Marie Custer blows a kiss to the band.

When they're not goofing, the dancers combine the individuality of street battle with the utopian community of house. They wear the same basic outfit — dark tops, dark running pants, dark sneakers — with variations. Gender is fluid; everyone dances with everyone else. Style is fluid; you can vogue with your hands and samba with your hips at the same time. When the band strikes up Nazareth's "Confidências," Asherie spins on her head, proving that even a Chopinesque waltz is no bar to breaking.

When Asherie finds herself in an onstage trio with Lau and Krakowski, she also proves that you can break and play percussion at the same time, though not without having to wipe your brow. The musicians do join in from time to time; in one sequence Lau, Krakowski, and Eisenmann engage in a percussion jam while the dancers sway and groove. In another, Krakowski and Madueme perform a seductive duet to the beat of Krakowski's pandeiro, a type of Brazilian hand frame drum.

With its minimal raking, the Plimpton Shattuck doesn't have the best sight lines for dance. But Asherie and her company are a sight anywhere they perform.

ODEON

Performance piece by Ephrat Asherie. Performed by Asherie, Manon Bal, Teena Marie Custer, Valerie Ho, Linda Madueme, Matthew West, and Ousmane Wiles. With musicians Eduardo Belo, Henrique Eisenmann, Sergio Krakowski, and Angel Lau. Presented by the Celebrity Series of Boston. At: New England Conservatory Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre, Friday Oct. 26. Remaining performance: Oct. 27. Tickets \$50. 617-482-6661, www.celebrityseries.org

Jeffrey Gantz can be reached at jeffreymgantz@gmail.com.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2018/10/27/asherie-odeon-perfect-opener-for-plimpton-shattuck/9yeuKqqnZ0XvZjHPUWzMbL/story.html>