



Ephrat Asherie's 'Odeon' presents dance that's both poetic and playful

By Tresca Weinstein Published 6:25 pm EST, Sunday, February 17, 2019



ALBANY — Ballroom, break and Afro-Brazilian dance converge in Ephrat Asherie's daring and delightful "Odeon," which her company performed Saturday evening at the University at Albany Performing Arts Center. Set to a selection of work by Ernesto Nazareth—with musical direction by Ephrat's brother Ehud—the evening-length work is a nonstop celebration.

A 2016 Bessie Award winner, Asherie (known as “Bounce”) has roots in club and street dance, but she’s infused her choreography with elements of jazz, tap, modern and West African dance. And she’s assembled a fabulous group of performers (Manon Bal, Teena Marie Custer, Valerie “Ms. Vee” Ho, Matthew “Megawatt” West and Ousman “Omari Mizrahi” Wiles), each with their own distinctive flair and personality, to embody her hybrid style alongside her.

In Nazareth, Asherie seems to have found a kindred spirit. A Brazilian composer and pianist who was influenced by African rhythms, he is best known for his work in the genres of Maxixe (also known as Brazilian tango) and Choro, an instrumental style characterized by speed, improvisation and joyful rhythms. His music is a perfect match for Asherie’s movement, and in “Odeon,” she lets the score set the pace and mood—from playful to poetic, from slower solos to exuberant ensemble sections.

Sometimes a piece begins with a single ripple of percussion, and the dancers respond to it note for note, gradually picking up speed and complexity in tandem with the layers of instrumentation. In the moments of silence in between selections, they build their own rhythms—clapping and snapping, jumping and stamping, the beat traveling through their bodies like sound waves made visible.

Asherie and her fellow performers can defy gravity with the best of them, but “Odeon” doesn’t put the focus on handstands and headspins. Rather, the feats are indivisible from the flow, as the dancers connect and separate, gliding seamlessly from one shape or relationship to the next, and from one spatial plane to another. Their hands are on the floor almost as often as their feet; one liquid duet between Bal and West is almost completely horizontal, with the two of them folding over and around each other as they slide across the stage.

“Odeon” brilliantly showcases Asherie’s skillful melding of vocabularies, and her mastery of both nuance and physical humor. But it’s the dancers’ intimate relationship with the music that makes the piece so satisfying, and it’s their glowing energy that makes it shine so brightly.

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

<https://www.timesunion.com/entertainment/article/Ephrat-Asherie-s-Odeon-presents-dance-13623968.php>