

'Three' doses of Batsheva

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Ohad Naharin's return to Batsheva as artistic director will be marked this week with the premiere of his new piece, *Shalosh* (Three). Challenging and distinctive, it is as loaded as any dance piece that has preceded it.

The evening divides into three parts: "Bellus" (beauty), "Humus" (earth), and "Secus," which, according to Naharin, translates as both "this" and "not this." The Latin title is amusingly apt for a choreographer who is notoriously evasive about the meaning of his work.

"There are three parts to the piece... Any further explanation is okay, but...", said Naharin at a recent press conference, reluctant to continue. "The best place for me to be in my work is with my feelings. And I wish for you to be in that place, too."

"Bellus" forms the first piece of the evening. Ten dancers - five male, five female - enter the stage. With carefully coordinated movements they partner off and mirror one another's actions. There is a puppet-like quality to their frontal, almost mechanically simple movements, hands rising and falling as if orchestrated from above. Accompanying them is Glen Gould's interpretation of Bach's Goldberg Variations: stark, unified and haunting.

"Humus" follows. A ginger-haired male walks onto the stage with a television under his arm. The screen shows his own face, grinning. The flesh version, meanwhile, is silent.

"Humus," says the TV head. "Hummus. HUUUUUMUS with a HAAAY."

Acting as postmodern Greek chorus and compere, the talking head reveals various details of the performance to follow: its length, lighting source and music. Rather than providing answers to our assumed levels of sophistication, Naharin seems to be suggesting this is what we really want to know.

The head and person retreat, and five female dancers enter the stage. They dance to Brian Eno's ethereal, barely-there music like fish in the sea, in possession of an aquatic, but arrested liquidity.

"Like racing cars travelling at 30 kilometers per hour," describes Naharin.

"Secus" is the final number, and by far the most energetic of the three pieces.

All 17 members of the Batsheva company perform, criss-crossing and giving the audience a visual rush. There are solos and duets, a rich explosion of movement all happening seemingly simultaneously.

"It's the pure pleasure of a moment," says Naharin. "Like a small taste of food."

Like the TV man in *Humus* who ridicules their banal questions, *Secus* also succeeds in taunting the audience. The dancers line up, stepping forward, revealing their torsos slowly and deliberately to a voyeuristic, flesh-hungry crowd.

Naharin states that each of the three pieces stands independently: "There is no relation between them other than the fact that they are performed in the same time frame."

Despite this, there is no break between the pieces, and the audience sees the piece as a whole.

The man behind Three's soundtrack - which in "Secus" provides 20-40 second snippets of music by everyone from the Beach Boys through to Kid 606, Seefeel and Chari Chari - is dancer, musician and choreographer Ohad Fishof.

Fishof met Naharin in 1992 and have been promising to work together since. The promise came good last year when Fishof - formerly a member of rock-group Nosei Hamigba'at - composed the soundtrack for Naharin's primarily musical performance, Playback.

"We worked really, really hard on Playback," recalls Naharin.

"Fishof was the person I saw most in the world in that period, and I think the music for Three became much easier to compile as a result of that work."

Says Naharin about Three: "I'm always connected to my sadness, although I think that the piece finds a way to laugh at itself, too."

In answer to whether the laughter is cold or warm, whether it mocks or comforts, Naharin answers: "Both. The warmth is always there. You have to reach out to find the cold."

The world premiere of Three takes place at the Suzanne Dellal Center for Performing Arts on February 12. Performances in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem continue through the month.

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