

the world is at once perfect, but still astonishing.

Moses Wang, a well-educated Chinese businessman who founded YMM Arts Education schools in China, Europe, Canada, and the United States, first encountered Duncan in a philosophy class. He was so taken with what he learned about her and her attitude toward dance and art, children and life, that he decided he would establish Duncan Dance Academies at all his campuses, with an Isadora-inspired curriculum they'd figure out.

He had not yet heard of Lori Belilove, the New Yorker and fourth-generation Duncan dancer who keeps Isadora's actual choreography being performed for grateful audiences. She has been teaching Duncan classes using all the strengths of its classically inspired movements coupled with the philosophy of art and life espoused by Isadora. Wang couldn't believe such an incarnation existed and that Belilove was such a great artist. He was ecstatic.

When Moses Wang finally did learn of Belilove and the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation, he immediately offered the directorship of the Duncan Dance Academies in China to her, starting with three schools, beginning with the younger spectrum of a curriculum designed for four-to-eighteen-years-olds. There would be a national tour of China with dancers in 2016, and a five-year contract – and a long list of literature and music with which to become acquainted.

What a phone call. She said, “Yes.”

The contract keeps Belilove in China more than one month each year. She is responsible for training the teachers and setting the curriculum. She will also be designing a Duncan Dance Academy rollout across the YMM Arts schools around the world.

Dance transmission is a subject that interests me greatly and about which I have various kinds of experience. The Isadora Duncan dance transmission has not been carried out by enormous numbers of people, but it has retained its purity. For example, it is in much better shape than Martha Graham's lineage.

(Graham technique was taught worldwide for many years, but it is waning and not taught in as many places in Asia and Europe as before, and surely with less-qualified teachers. The company's legacy has fallen apart and is trying to get together again.) Duncan's never faltered.

Now the Duncan tradition, in its purity and practice, is being seeded in China, with the only and absolutely best person to direct it, Lori Belilove, the Isadora of Now.

I sense this could be an alternative educational movement akin to the Waldorf Schools, a concept from Rudolph Steiner and Anthroposophy. Much has peeled away, but Waldorf Schools, adaptive and relevant, are a staple in many communities across the world today. Steiner and Duncan were contemporaries and part of a shift in Western consciousness.

Another great, liberated dancer rising from that time was Sybil Shearer, a young contemporary of both Duncan and Steiner. Shearer was a practicing anthroposophist all her adult life. There was a freedom in these ways of thinking and moving.

Good luck, Lori! Good luck, China, especially on that “individual thinking” part. First storming America and Paris, Isadora Duncan participated in the Russian Revolution. Now she is being empowered in our century by another Communist nation, China. Her greatness continues to unfold.

New York

Karen Greenspan

New York Live Arts, under the artistic direction of Bill T. Jones, is hosting a variety of programs that serve as a megaphone for artists wrestling with political ideas – especially those that are most challenging. This sense of engagement is the inspiration for the annual Live Ideas Festival, this fourth edition focusing on cultural transformations in the Middle East and North Africa. The two-month festival includes dance, art installations, film, music, master classes, and plenty of moderated conversations.

For starters, Israeli choreographer, Arkadi Zaides, premiered his solo work *Archive*. Zaides, a former dancer with the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel, began his independent choreography career in 2004, and spent the last seven years primarily focusing his work on Israeli/Palestinian political and social issues. Like much of Zaides' oeuvre, *Archive* aims to spark critical debate. He does this with the help of screened video footage selected from the "Camera Project" initiated by B'Tselem (Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories). In 2007 this non-governmental organization (NGO) provided video cameras to Palestinians living in high conflict areas for the purpose of documenting human rights violations and exposing the reality of life under occupation. The video footage is almost entirely of Israelis – as seen through the Palestinian camera lens.

Zaides organized the stage with a medium-size, white, video screen located upstage right. The typed captions identifying each archive were projected against the black backdrop to the left of the video screen. A small laptop on a table was located downstage left so that Zaides could control the video throughout the piece. He danced much of the choreography with a remote in his hand – playing, freezing, and replaying segments at will as he performed the roles of witness, participant, and commentator through his choreography.

We view video clips of Orthodox Jewish settlers attacking a Palestinian home, tearing up an olive orchard, throwing stones at Palestinians, shooing away a Palestinian shepherd's sheep as Zaides walks up to the screen, observes it, freezes the frame, and assumes the same body position as one of the people in that frame. He does this with several different videotaped episodes. The pace eventually picks up when he is mimicking the settler kids throwing stones. He expands spatially and "dances" this movement pattern all over the stage. Since the sinister intention is absent from his performance of the action, it is actually quite a beautiful demonstration of the physical act of throwing.

During a clip where Zaides takes on the gestures and shouts of an Israeli soldier driving Palestinian sheep away from their grazing land, Zaides turns off the video but retains the audio track of the gruff commands of the soldier. Zaides stops moving and simply focuses on his shouting match with the audio track. He finally adds back the physical movements as the shouting match gets louder and louder. The repetitive movements and loud noise become so oppressive that you simply want OUT – part of his commentary on the political situation.

Zaides raises the pitch of the piece one last time as he imitates the movements of a videotaped settler and runs circles around the stage flapping his arms out to the side urging the imaginary sheep off the land. By the end, Zaides has worked himself into such a frenzy of settler body language that he literally performs a dance of ecstasy typical among ultra-orthodox men on Friday nights during celebratory singing and dancing after the Sabbath meal. The religious zeal that impels this ecstatic dance of joy in communion with God is the same fanatic passion with which the settlers claim the contested geography – the archive of which is the source of the movements of his choreography.

As Zaides appropriates the gestures and voices of violence from the archival material for his dance, he asserts that through "performance" of the language and gestures of "the occupation" day in and day out, the speech and body language of violence become the lingua franca of the Israeli nation. By the end of the piece, one could infer that Zaides' body has itself become an archive of the body language of settler aggression. His embodiment, however, lacks the emotional intention and the physical tension and intensity of real violence. For the most part it is extracted gesture and an interesting intellectual exercise.

Zaides conceived a provocative choreographic concept. However, his execution is too simplistic to be an accurate archive. There are more artistic choices to be made and more documentation details to be identified. The result

is potent and possibly dangerous because it does not archive the shades of complexity of the conflict. Israelis play multiple roles in the selected footage. For example, there are the aggressive settlers, there are Israeli soldiers who have the responsibility of keeping order among all the parties, and there are Israelis identified simply as “activists” who show up at the scheduled weekly demonstrations on the West Bank to act as a human buffer against settler attacks on Palestinian property. In some of the clips the settlers are the aggressors and, later, they are restrained by the soldiers. Zaides takes on the gestures of both. My guess is that some of these details are completely lost on Western audiences because the viewer could easily assume that all the aggressors were Israeli and all the victims were Palestinian, which was not the case.

On the other hand, in a programmed conversation about the work, a couple of Palestinian dancers took issue with Zaides’ video choices calling them “the light version,” as their experience of the situation is how it frequently escalates into scenes that are much more violent. Zaides clearly achieved success in creating a work that sparked critical debate!

Later in the week, the stage was peopled by ten Palestinian dancers performing *Badke*, a work collaboratively choreographed by Koen Augustijnen and Rosalba Torres Guerrero, from the Belgian company Les Ballets C de la B, and Hildegard de Vuyst of KVS (Royal Flemish Theatre). The title *Badke* is a play on the word *dabke*, the name of a Palestinian folk dance traditionally danced at weddings and celebrations and now a symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance. The piece emerged as a collaborative effort of the dancers and the artistic staff, the latter having led performing arts workshops in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 2007. As explained by the artistic directors in a preperformance conversation, the *dabke* is really the only acceptable dance form in traditional Palestinian society. There is no audience for any other form of dance. So they decided to create a produc-

tion from the Palestinian dancers’ point of strength.

What was clear to the festival curators, who programmed several moderated conversations with the artists (and after attending them became clear to me), was that both works – *Archive* and *Badke* – are as much about process as about product. The artistic directors of *Badke* auditioned dancers during a four-week workshop in Beit Jala (near Bethlehem). The ten dancers came from very different backgrounds and attitudes within Palestinian society, different locales in the Palestinian Territories and Israel, and different levels and types of training – circus, ballet, modern dance, hip-hop, capoeira, and traditional *dabke* (there are highly polished performing *dabke* troupes). For the month in Beit Jala and another two months in Brussels, they engaged in workshops generating material from questions like: What does the *dabke* mean to you? How do you relate to your own body? How do you relate to other people’s bodies? What is masculinity? What is femininity?

What emerged from the process is an exuberant updated expression of collective identity articulated through the framework of a popular dance/folk form through which many subplots, dramas, solos, duets, and trios interweave. Throughout it all, the dance prevails and prevails and prevails – a metaphor for the Palestinian people.

Badke opens in darkness as a line of dancers stomps out rhythmic footwork with calls and clapping. Lights come up and various dancers move forward to perform solos or duets. One woman wears headphones and dances and whoops obviously grooving in her own experience. The desire to hear her music builds in the observer just as the initial desire to see the dancers built while they were cloaked in darkness. And finally the infectious rhythm and spirit of Naser Al-Fares’ wedding party music pipes up as the group of dancers break out in duos and solos of high-spirited joy. Dancing classic *dabke* moves – earthy stomps, jumps, leaps, shoulder shimmies – the entire group travels en masse around the stage, each

dancer twirling a wrist overhead referencing the traditional dabke line leader twirling his rope.

This raucous party has virtuosic stunts, man-to-man competition, a couple's drama, dress-up, humor, a male spoofing a tantalizing female belly dance, a silly group dance. All of a sudden, there is a staged power outage (we were told the real thing is a common experience). In the darkness a girl asks, "Is it okay?" The lights come up very dimly and the dancers start to whistle a tune. One dancer grabs the water cooler standing at the back of the stage and uses it to drum the irresistible dabke rhythm. Another dancer initiates a call and response chant with the group. And in the darkness, they restart their dance to their own clapping accompaniment. The music and lights follow. More wonderful dancing and mini-dramas (both universal as well as culture specific) continue interrupted by interludes of altered soundtrack and slowed-down motion reflecting aspects of the Palestinian experience, such as little space for individuality within a societal structure in which the collective must always be maintained. The piece ends during one of these interludes – the dancers clasping hands in the dabke line downstage performing the dance in slow motion with a siren blaring over the music.

The first week of performances and discussions at the NY Live Arts Live Ideas Festival offered an important take-home message – neither side of the political debate in the Middle East is a monolith. Arkadi Zaides responded to Palestinian dancer Samaa Wakeem's taking issue with his choice of "settler light" video footage by explaining that his goal of engaging Israeli viewers could only be achieved if they didn't turn their backs and walk out of the theater. He made the choice not to use the most violent archival

footage so that the Israeli audience would stay with him through the journey.

The Live Ideas Festival managed to bring art, artists, and audiences together for conversations that many heads of state are unable to have. Perhaps artists can keep nurturing these essential discussions, urging all parties to keep talking, keep talking . . . Just keep talking.

Williamstown, MA

Joel Lobenthal

Two summers ago, I returned to the scene of the *coup de foudre*, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Just as it was fifty years ago, the Clark is home to Degas' *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. The statuette riveted me as a child in the 1960s: positioned dead center in one of the Clark's largest galleries, onstage by virtue of being elevated well above the floor, surrounded on all four walls by Impressionist paintings. Now I was returning to step back . . . back to look at her again, placed in a new setting within the museum, back to recall the experience and wonder how and why and by what I had been so fascinated.

During the sixties I was in Williamstown because one of my grandfathers was a biology professor at Williams College, nearing retirement after thirty years teaching. Some-

times we'd visit my grandparents during the summers. When my mother was growing up there in the 1930s and 1940s, there was no Clark. She and her family lived in a semi-attached house on Chapin Court, further north on South Street from the green hills where the Clark was built in 1955. She'd go sledding – winters were snow-bound – on the long slopes of the golf course across from where the museum is. As a native daughter, my mother retains a loyalty to the Williams College Museum of Art, but she knows that the Clark did a



Clark Art Institute's *Little Dancer*.