

Stage Notes: Dance company brings dreamlike work to Ohio

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By Kerry Clawson
Beacon Journal arts writer

Avshalom Pollak says it's difficult to define dance, in particular the off-kilter work Oyster, a signature work of the Inbal Pinto & Avshalom Pollak Dance Company.

Oyster, created in 1999 by professional and life partners Pinto and Pollak, creates a surreal circus world populated by oddly beautiful creatures. The Israeli troupe will make its Ohio debut Saturday and Sunday with its evening-length work, to be performed at the Ohio Theatre.



Inbal Pinto (left) and Avshalom Pollak, founders of the Inbal Pinto Avshalom Pollak Dance Company.
(Photo by Gadi Dagon)

Over the years, comparisons have been made between the dreamlike Oyster and the work of Cirque du Soleil, Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini and German choreographer Pina Bausch. Pollak appreciates those analogies but at the same time eschews them.

"I don't think we really should define it as something. It is what it is," he said.

Pinto and Pollak, both artistic directors, choreographers and directors for the company, have blended their work for more than 20 years.

She is a former dancer for Israel's Batsheva Company who began choreographing in 1990 and he, the son of Israeli actor Yossi Pollak, was trained as a classical actor.

Pollak, who grew up on the stage, said he has now spent more of his professional life in the dance world than the theater world.

"I've been drawn into this fantastic world of contemporary dance," said Pollak. One of the beauties of dance is that it often doesn't have to be explained, yet it makes sense, he said. One of the first dances Pollak and Pinto created was a trio they performed with his father.

Oyster combines modern dance, mime, ballet, gymnastics, vaudeville, clowning and commedia dell'arte. Its creators began with inspiration in the world of puppetry — the idea of being controlled by an outside force and being tamed, either psychologically or physically.

Freakish ballerinas with white makeup and wild blond wigs hop on leashes, led by a clownish-looking female actress. In another twist on the perfect ballerina norm, two others dance with their fingers connected to their toes by strings. Two men are controlled by a giant overcoat — imprisoned together in the same outerwear.

Oyster, Pollak said, explores imperfection and "how disabilities become something super special or unique, in a way." Ten dancers and actors, ages 20 to 75, perform in the work.

The Pinto/Pollak company has tour dates booked through mid-2013, including Norway, South America and Spain. Pinto and Pollak are immersed in a variety of projects, including an opera production their dancers will perform next

winter in Norway and another big project in the works in Japan. The duo creates one new work each year for the company.

Pollak said Oyster has evolved since its world premiere 13 years ago in Lyon, France.

"Of course it should be changing and evolving and refining. I think the heart of it stays. It has a very good and honest heart," he said in a Skype interview from his home in Tel Aviv. "Different dancers and actors add something new to the piece and I think it's improving over the years. It has so many things inside of it — so many details — it's really hard to get everything the first time."

He said Oyster offers an escapist experience for those who open themselves up to it. He prefers that audience members come without preconceptions so they can be surprised and energized, and feel unadulterated emotions.

"We definitely prefer that people will come blank," he said. "It's something that makes you more full." Cleveland is the first U.S. stop for the company, followed by Boston; New Brunswick, N.J.; and Philadelphia. Performances will be at 8 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday. Cost is \$25 to \$55. Call 216-241-6000 or see www.playhousesquare.org.

Yefim Bronfman returns

Pianist Yefim Bronfman had to cancel his last scheduled performance with the Cleveland Orchestra at E.J. Thomas Hall due to illness in 2009. But he'll be back at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday with the orchestra as part of the Tuesday Musical Association series.

He will play one of his favorite piano concerti, Brahms' Second. Bronfman, known as one of the most talented piano virtuosos performing today, last appeared through Tuesday Musical as part of a trio with violinist Gil Shaham and cellist Lynn Harrell in 2006. Tuesday Musical also has presented him in solo recital.

Bronfman, an Israeli-American who's a native of Uzbek in the former Soviet Union, is in residency this month with the Cleveland Orchestra in Miami, Cleveland, Akron and New York, focusing on the concerti and chamber music of Brahms. Also coming up is a winter performance at Carnegie Hall and the world premiere of Magnus Lindberg's concerto, commissioned for him by the New York Philharmonic.

In Akron, the Cleveland Orchestra also will perform Shepherd's Wanderlust and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 6. Tickets cost \$22-\$40. Students may receive free vouchers. Call 330-972-7570 or 800-745-3000.

Bronfman will perform an all-Brahms chamber music concert at 2 p.m. Feb. 5 at Severance Hall's Reinberger Chamber Hall. The program will include the Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor; Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, performed with Cleveland Orchestra Concertmaster William Preucil; and Piano Quintet in F minor for Piano and Strings, with Bronfman joined by Preucil, principal second violin Stephen Rose, principal viola Robert Vernon and principal cello Mark Kosower. Cost is \$36.

Finally, Bronfman will perform Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Cleveland Orchestra Feb. 2-4. See www.clevelandorchestra.com or call 216-231-1111.

Arts writer Kerry Clawson may be reached at 330-996-3527 or kclawson@thebeaconjournal.com.