



Israeli dance company makes impressive Cleveland debut at Ohio Theatre

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By **Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer**

A world of dizzying images fills "Oyster," the work with which Israel's Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak Dance Company made a winning Cleveland debut Saturday at the Ohio Theatre in PlayhouseSquare.

We appear to be at some sort of circus (or asylum), with the cast in whiteface and crazy wigs, as if they're clowns on the loose. What unfolds is a smorgasbord of funny, endearing and grotesque vignettes, a mixture of commedia dell'arte, Fellini and Barnum & Bailey.

In "Oyster," the most frequently performed work in their company's repertoire, Pinto and Pollak use dance and theatrical elements with inventive expertise. Many relationships are suggested in the interactions of the 12 tireless performers who keep the narrative on its topsy-turvy, and occasionally poignant, course.

A two-headed man in an enormous coat dominates much of the activity as the inhabitants grimace with Chaplin-esque whimsy or engage in child-like playfulness with a dour clown and a ballerina whose bottom is bedecked with a little chair.



Eyal Landesman

Noga Harmelin floats on air in "Oyster," the work that Israel's Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak Dance Company is performing this weekend at the Ohio Theatre.

Many of the characters in "Oyster" spend more than little time tethered or otherwise. The most captivating

moment finds Noga Harmelin, a dancer of remarkable grace and dexterity, floating in the air thanks to a harness and a colleague who sends her aloft as if ringing a church bell. At one point, she inches her way on pointe along the arm of another dancer.

The dour clown, played with a marvelous poker face by Rina Rosenbaum, walks two ballerinas around with red ribbons, as if they're promenading poodles. The clown soon cuts their ribbons, leaving them free to go their way.

Details both fanciful and dark pervade "Oyster." The two ballerinas bend down and perform a pas de deux bearing only their bottoms. In one scene behind a false proscenium, the two-headed man, dour clown and chair-bedecked ballerina enact a tale of violence and love to the Intermezzo from Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci."

The impeccable use of music extends to the work's other sections. A trio that becomes a quintet of bobbing clowns dances to a bit of Harry James. Another quintet of wigged-out circus denizens shimmy and shake to the strange, stratospheric vocals of Yma Sumac. One hot number, set to "Jalousie" played by Werner Muller and his Orchestra, features a couple dancing what amounts to a tango interruptus.

"Oyster" is such an intoxicating blend of movement, costumes (by Pinto and Pollak) and lighting (by Yoann Tivoli) that it's almost a let-down when the two untethered ballerinas amble tenderly upstage as the curtain falls only an hour after the work has begun.

But what could serve as an apt appetizer or dessert on a program with "Oyster"? As catapulted with exceptional energy, sophistication and personality by the Israeli company, the piece is a hearty theatrical dish that stands – and often performs pratfalls – on its own.

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REVIEW

Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak Dance Company

What: The Israeli company performs "Oyster" under the auspices of DanceCleveland.

When: 3 p.m. today.

Where: Ohio Theatre, PlayhouseSquare, Cleveland.

Tickets: \$25-\$55. Go to tinyurl.com/ch24luz or call 216-241-6000.