

Dance & Theater



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TimeOut Interview Galit Liss

Ready, Set, GO!

A stunning performance art piece, *GO* shows us the beauty of getting older

■ By Jennifer Greenberg

WHILE CHOREOGRAPHERS ARE ALWAYS IN SEARCH OF NEWER, YOUNGER TALENT, GALIT LISS HAS DONE SOMETHING INCREDIBLE. She's shifted the focus onto 18 women aged 60-82 in an exploration of the movement of the body in its later years. *GO* creates an artistic space for women in the later chapters of their lives to express themselves and send out the message that self-realization and development is very possible and prominent in older age. Here's what Liss has to add.

What motivated you to create such an inspirational piece?

Eleven years ago, my younger brother died of cancer at the age of 30. About two weeks before he lost consciousness, we went for a walk in the forest. His body was already weak, so I had to support him. As we walked, he told me something that changed my view of life entirely: "I know everyone around me is worried, but this is one of the happiest times of my life." This insight raised so many questions: What does it mean to "live" a meaningful life? And how much responsibility do we have over how we live? After his death, I went into the studio to deal with these questions. I worked with three women: two women, aged 20 and 40, who were both wonderful dancers coming

out of the Batsheva Dance company, and a 70-year-old woman without any prior dance training. During rehearsals, I fell in love with the older body – it surprised and excited me. I parted from the professional dancers and stayed with the 70-year-old Talma Dim (now 82 and a dancer in *GO*), and added four more women aged 70-80 without any formal dance background. I set out with my first creation, Gila ("joy" in Hebrew), which reflected the spirit of those who choose to dance at any age.

Are the intimate stories the women share during the performance scripted or biographical?

I always enter the studio with an idea, but each process of creation changes according to the nature of the work. With *GO*, the

women themselves were part of the creative process. The monologues performed on stage are refined, edited versions of their personal stories.

Is *GO* part of a larger initiative?

As part of my artistic and social agenda, I want to create an artistic space for older women who are non-dancers, and to promote the idea of a society that enables development and self-realization in the adult body. When I create, the adult body is the "material and the spirit" at my disposal. First of all, I need to understand how to work with this specific body: What is it about this body that translates what I want to say better than any other? I next ask what exactly is the dancing body and how it exists within a certain space.

Why the Suzanne Dellal Center?

I chose to promote this kind of show especially in a place that sanctifies the virtuosity of the young dancing body. These women are neither dancers nor pretending to be, they are what they are in their non-dancer bodies.

What are the most beautiful things you have discovered in working with older women as opposed to younger dancers?

I found that the movement of an older body has a "physiological aesthetic" that in the context of the stage has implications with the personal, social, and political representation that I am interested in touching upon. I felt that working with the older body sends us to a delicate place where we constantly wonder: Is it possible? If not, then how can it be? Questions that my dear brother dealt with every day.

I'd love to know about the costumes, particularly the one-piece uniforms. They contain blatant military overtones, as do the whistle calls and airplane motifs woven through the performance.

I wanted to address the ways in which we conduct our lives: whether we live in a body governed by social perceptions or we allow ourselves to do what our passions tell us.

In this show, this issue arises through the desire to start dancing, especially in old age and in an untrained body. I realized that so many women box away their desire to dance during childhood due to its promiscuous implications.

Alongside this framework comes a military framework – the daily conduct of a

combat squadron, moments of alert for missions, official events and ceremonies. All these have clear rules and structures that dictate the body's identity, location, and conduct. I was intrigued to join two "seemingly" unrelated bodies that are stereotypically distinct in our society: the female adult body (perceived as weak), and the male body (perceived as strong). In the performance, a fighter pilot, a ballerina, and an older woman move side-by-side. The work seeks to expand the discussion beyond the

body to our existence as individuals and as a society.

What were the greatest obstacles you've had to overcome so far in putting this production together?

GO features 18 graduates of the "Gila" workshops who have danced with me for several years. We have common mileage in the studio, and a movement language that has developed over the years. I know the women and their mobility skills, so the challenge was to embroider that movement into a creative work...it took a year.

Another great obstacle involves the mind. The women often deal with mental obstacles that reach far beyond physical coping. In my previous work, 557, many of the women were hesitant before the performance because they were worried the audience would see their struggles in getting up off the floor, that it wouldn't be "aesthetically pleasing." A portion of *GO* takes place on the floor, parallel to my workshops, which use the floor and crawling as a kind of landmark. From the moment the body finds interest and pleasure in the floor, the woman undergoes a transformation – both physical and conscious, free to study the body and its possibilities as they improve their movement language.

***GO* has already had some successful performances this winter. What types of responses have you gotten so far from the dance community?**

Most of the reactions have been wonderfully pleasant. I definitely feel that this show is a movement in space. The difficulty I encounter is in receiving support from art foundations because I do not work with professional dancers, so I do not meet the criteria. All over the world, there are choreographers who work with unskilled bodies as part of their artistic agenda. Today the world of art is breaking through more and more boundaries, so we can only keep hoping and doing what we're doing.

Do you feel that you've successfully changed the minds of ageists?

A work of art does not make a person see or feel in a certain way, it gives them the opportunity to do so. When audience members see women like them dancing on stage, they understand that it's possible. It's

an inner experience that goes beyond words – like a spark that illuminates a desire for dance that has been trapped inside them all these years. Someone told me that watching the show was like ten years of therapy. That is the power of art: the "magic" that is created from the emotional connection between the viewer and dancer.

What is the most inspirational thing anyone has ever told you?
An 11-year-old boy saw the show and this is how he described his experience: "At one point, I simply forgot the age and bodies of everyone in the world. I forgot who was who – that I was me, and they were them."

→ Apr 30 & May 1 at 20:00. Suzanne Dellal Center, 5 Yehieli St, Neve Tzedek



"The world belongs to everyone, not only young people"