



## **CREATURES OF DANCE**

**A Podcast on Contemporary Dance in Israel**

**Yali Nativ & Iris Lana**

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# **BoyzGirly: Girl Power**

**Gender play in the works of Yasmeen Godder,  
Anat Danieli & Omer Uziel, Merav Dagan and Roni Chadash**

**Episode 3**

## **With**

**Yasmeen Godder** Choreographer, dancer, and artistic director of the Yasmeen Godder dance company and the Moving Communities project

**Dr. Tal Dekel** Head of the M.A. program in Visual Literacy Studies at the Kibbutzim College of Technology and Arts & a lecturer at Tel Aviv University

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Transcription: Guy Dolev

Translation from Hebrew: Michal Shalev

IRIS: I'm describing a scene from "Love Fire" by Yasmeen Godder from 2009: Yasmeen and Eran Shani are onstage. The white floor is covered with items, leftovers from everything that happened before: red flip flops, high-heeled shoes, real-size animal fur, and red laces that are supposedly its internal organs... Yasmeen is in a black dress, and her pantyhose are torn; her head is covered with a piece of fur with horns. She puts on a belt to which the animal's red internal organs are inserted. Eran is in black, everyday pants, his torso is bare, and his toes are wrapped in black tape, parted in a V-shape to look like goat's hooves. In the next minutes, they dance to Tchaikovsky's Valse Triste. It's impossible to describe the abundance of subtle movements and expressions exchanged between the two dancers, and the spectrum of masculine and feminine images, swinging between cultural stereotypes and animalistic images, and the daunting relationship of all of the above with this familiar melodic music.

Imagine a fur and horns on her head, and red laces coming out of Eran's mouth while Yasmeen is holding the other end in her mouth, and both of them chew the laces together, from both ends... While all this is happening, he leads her by grabbing the horns on her head. Then he pulls at the fur with his teeth, so it's held under his face. The image immediately changes, and now the fur hides his face. They stand facing each other, and the

horns which are sticking out of his chin slide over her body from her face down to her legs; and then, they dance the Waltz. The familiar steps are almost perfect as he holds her by the laces in what seems like a Waltz, but in fact, it's danced more frantically, far from the decency and good old social order it represents. They are a man and a woman, and an animal and everything in between.

IRIS: In this episode, we will discuss contemporary women choreographers whose work focuses on femininity and the female body.

YALI: We will talk about works by Yasmeen Godder, Anat Danieli, Merav Dagan, and Roni Chadash – daring works, bold, looking square in the eye of what was once considered taboo.

IRIS: We will discuss dance and gender from a historical perspective

YALI: and in the context of feminist theory and the body.

HOST: You are listening to Creatures of Dance – a podcast on Dance in Israel. Creatures of Dance with Yali Nativ and Iris Lana. And on this episode: Gender Play - Girl Power -with the participation of Yasmeen Godder, choreographer, dancer and artistic director of the Yasmeen Godder dance company, and of the Moving Communities project, & Dr. Tal Dekel, head of the M.A program in Visual Literacy Studies at the Kibbutzim College of Technology and Arts; and chair of the Association for Women's Art and Gender Research in Israel.

Yali Nativ teaches and researches dance in sociological and anthropological contexts. She is a senior lecturer at ASA, The Academic College of Society and the Arts, and writes about art education, sociology of body, movement and performance, and about dance and Israeli society. Her current research examines ageing professional dancers. Yali is the chairperson of the Israeli Choreographers Association.

Iris Lana is a dance researcher and a lecturer at the Jerusalem Academy for Music and Dance. She served as the director of Batsheva Dance Company's Archive Project and was the director of the digital dance collections project at the Israeli National Library.

Iris is the CEO of Diver Festival.

The hosts and interviewees in this podcast are played by actors.

IRIS: Hi Yali

YALI: Hi Iris

IRIS: Dance is perceived as a feminine realm. It's usually thought of as a profession suitable for women, not men – women dancers or dance teachers, of course. In the 1990s, feminist dance scholars such as Christy Adair in the UK, and American Judith Lynne Hanna and Ann Daly had already argued that dance is culturally constructed as feminine, sexual, and maternal.

YALI: In our society, mothers encourage their daughters to practice dance. Why is that? Because it goes well with the fostering of a certain beauty, with weight control and maintaining a thin, athletic body; right, exactly these "wonderful" qualities each woman should have. How many times, Iris, have we heard, as dance teachers, mothers tell their daughters: "You should dance so you can be gentler and more elegant"? Or "you should dance so you will be able to hold your back up straight and be less clumsy"?

IRIS: Historically, Western theater dance began in the 17th century, in the French court of Louis XIV, as a cultural product of the aristocracy. In the 18th century, with the rise of French romantic ballet, and in the following century, with the development of Imperial Russian Ballet, the ballerina is at the center of everything – she is the protagonist of the story, and the center of the stage. She is the star everybody's coming to see. The prima-ballerina is created as a magical being, always young – an innocent, light-footed and delicate girl, gliding in Bourrée on her pointe shoes. This image has found its way to the 20th century and was

updated by George Balanchine at the New York City Ballet into the image of the slim, some would say anorexic, ballerina. This image becomes the most significant of the canonic, institutional dance world, a dream of countless girls and of the body that a dancer needs to this very day.

IRIS: A major transformation took place in the first decades of the 20th century. Middle-class women in the US and Europe, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Loie Fuller, travel the world and perform independently. This happened side-by-side with the achievements of the suffragist movement, which had been promoting voting rights for women since the late 19th century. Until then, all artists—choreographers, musicians, teachers, and managers—were men; but now these women were creating dances for themselves, performing and deciding where and how to stage them. These actions were perceived by them as acts of liberation of the feminine body from the chains of social oppression lasting hundreds of years, both inside and outside ballet. They got rid of all iconic ballet items – the corsets, tutus, and pointe shoes, as well as their coded and restrictive repertoire of movements; They danced in light dresses, sometimes covering nothing but their naked body, allowing themselves to expand the boundaries of their bodies with large and free movements. This breakthrough of modern dance by women pioneers set a new model for the next generation with women like Mary Wigman in Germany and Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey in the US.

YALI: I want to welcome Dr. Tal Dekel to our podcast. Hi, Tal.

TAL DEKEL: Hi, it's good to be here.

YALI: Tal, following this introduction, how would you describe the feminist art movement's attitude towards the body?

TAL DEKEL: The body is an extremely central topic in feminist art in general, and in particular from the second half of the 20th century onwards. It is also my field of expertise and the subject of my book, *Gendered Art and Feminist Theory*. Feminist art sees the body as a site,

an important site of knowledge, which contains and expresses significant knowledge, often ignored, even disregarded by our fundamentally patriarchal society, which tends to deny the importance of the knowledge this body contains. And feminist art realized that, and placed the female body at the center, as a result of this insight. Feminist art promotes the understanding that the feminine body is an important, authentic, relevant source of knowledge – for the entire world, for culture, not only for women; and that site, the woman's body, recounts the true experience of being inside a woman's body. I've been researching feminist art for many years, and it places the body at the center. It has no fear of describing it in a very, very direct, sometimes even harsh, manner. In the middle of the 20th century, there were whole artistic series created, works of art depicting experiences of sexual abuse, rape, and on the other hand, experiences of pleasure, of sexual pleasure, from a woman's point of view; or experiences of self-blame, body image, paintings, sculptures, photographs, performances. A portrayal of life with bulimia, for example, a whole life of anorexia, mental suffering caused by the myth of beauty, combined with the destructive effects of capitalism. How does all of this affect not only women in general, but the body, the very concrete body? But also experiences of motherhood. Mothers are suddenly portrayed in detail in feminist art. Suddenly, the female body, naked or dressed, becomes the main protagonist, if you will, and it is described unapologetically. But the main point, and that is what I want to emphasize here, is that unlike the past, it is not done from a male voyeuristic point of view, that is, from the outside, but by the woman herself, as if she were saying: "no one will tell me what it is like to be a woman, I will provide the knowledge that exists within me."

IRIS: In the work *Ana Vagana* by choreographer Anat Danieli in collaboration with Omer Uziel from 2016, a man and a woman propose a joint observation of femininity, the physicality of the flesh, the blood, menstruation, and birth.

The colorful stage and costumes place us in an ancient, happy nature. The movement of the dancers creates structures forming on the horizontal plane of the stage, close to the floor. The floor becomes earth, and the horizontally integrated bodies create a sense of primacy,

of pre-culture times. The structures formed at the encounter of these two bodies, his and hers, are closed and symmetrical in shape.

Sometimes we see them clearly; sometimes we only see the shape itself & sometimes we see the actual performers - Anat and Omer. These symmetrical shapes correspond directly with the vagina paintings of artist Judy Chicago, in her best-known feminist installation "Dinner Party" from 1974-1979. In addition, Anat uses feminist writing, including a text from the 'period song' by Spoken Word artist Dominic Christina, and through it, the performers provoke the world's attitude toward the female cycle, female body, and perhaps the aspect of materiality in us all. Together, they imagine a partnership of men and women close to their carnal source.

YALI: Getting back to dance history for a moment, we can also recognize the influence of the pioneer modern dance of the early 20th century, in Palestine/Eretz Israel, around the same time. Like in Europe and the United States, it's independent women teachers/choreographers/dancers, most of them Jewish immigrants who came from Germany and Austria with Expressionist dance backgrounds, working in small groups mainly in the young city of Tel Aviv. Among them are Margalit Ornstein, Leah Bergstein, Tehila Ressler, Gertrud Kraus, Elsa Dublon, Paula Padani, Katia Michaeli, Devorah Bertonov, Rina Nikova, and Valentina Arkhipova, who taught ballet, and Yardena Cohen.

These women were able to create for themselves independent spaces of significant creative and educational work, and it seems that within the constraints of a general gendered reality, they achieved some degree of freedom and liberty of action, maybe because they worked in small, autonomous, and non-institutional frameworks.

YALI: I am looking at two black-and-white photographs of Gertrud Kraus, from a book marking 10 years since her death. The book was published in 1988 by Hapoalim and the Israeli Dance Library and edited by dance critic and historian Giora Manor.

Gertrud Kraus was born in 1901 in Vienna to an upper-middle-class bourgeois family. At 20 years old, she had already gained publicity and recognition as a dancer and choreographer

both in Austria and in Germany. As an artist, she identified with her contemporaries, members of the German expressionist movement, who saw art as a platform for political activism to resist the institutional and capitalist order.

In 1935 she arrived in Tel Aviv, to settle in Palestine and soon after she becomes the prominent figure of the young dance scene – a choreographer, a dancer, a teacher and an artist; she was also one of the first women in Tel Aviv to be involved in non-secretive, if not openly lesbian relationships.

The photographs that I'm looking at appear side by side, on the same page (19), describing two moments from two of her solo works, created in Vienna, probably in the 1930s.

No dates or credits are provided.

In the right-hand photo, Kraus wears a long white dress, wide at the bottom. Its top part is tight-fitting and asymmetrical; her right shoulder is exposed. It's a very feminine, soft, even sexy dress. Kraus stands barefoot, legs spread apart and in a deep pli  . Her torso is curved and leans to the right, her eyes directed at the floor.

The second photograph, on the left, is entirely different. Kraus is wearing tight, colorful pants and a white sleeveless shirt. Her knees are bent, and her pelvis is boldly thrust forward. Her hands are forcefully stuck at her waist, so that the elbows are pushed forward, and her eyes gaze straight ahead. There is something androgynous about this photo, fluctuating between her figure as a woman dancer and the masculine, brutal, and even aggressive posture. Aesthetically, it's a rare image among other women choreographers and dancers of the time.

The relation between these two images reveals a unique theme in Gertrud Kraus's work as a Gender Trouble artist, playing with gender identities and queerness, which seems to have already engaged her then, in the first decades of the 20th century. Throughout the years of her career, she alternated between female and male roles, daring to challenge common expectations, testing the boundaries of gender and its representations. By the way, there are



similarities between these images of Kraus's and some of Yasmeen Godder's photographs. These may be viewed on our site.

YALI: We asked Ran Brown for a quick overview of contemporary dance and gender. Ran Brown is an independent dance researcher, dance critic for Ha'aretz newspaper, and head of the dance program at the Thelma Yellin High School for the Arts.

RAN BROWN: First of all, I think it's very interesting to examine what is often said about dance, that it lags behind other art forms, behind theory. And in this case, I think dance precedes theory. It's interesting that gender theories, at least those considered conventional today, the basic theories taught at Gender Studies Programs, like Judith Butler's theory of gender performance, or Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity, these are theories that arrive after international choreographers refer to this subject of gender in their work. Perhaps they do not formulate it in the same theoretical, professional terms as gender scholars do, but they do examine the same phenomena.

I'll be more specific: Butler's *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990. This is after Pina Bausch plays with gender and gender performance throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and after Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker does *Rosas danst Rosas* in 1983, where the place of gender and a repetition of gender, a repetition of actions, is a main principle in the work. Even more interesting, De Keersmaeker's *Achterland* premieres the same year *Gender Trouble* is published. This is the first work in which a man participates, and it plays with the repetition of actions considered "feminine" or "masculine". They change costumes, switch movements, and it makes theory, only through dance.

YALI: And what happens in Israeli Dance?

RAN BROWN: I think the issue of gender is always present in Israeli dance, as in all works of dance. It's some sort of unconscious political thing that is inherent to masculinity and femininity, as these are inseparable parts of our identities. In recent years, we see young choreographers referring to gender, no longer in an implicit way, solely through the selection

of a group of men dancers or female dancers, but referring explicitly to representations of masculinity and femininity, exploring the essence of these definitions. This happens in the second decade of this millennium, although it has precedent, or an artist ahead of her time, and that is Yasmeen Godder, who already in 2003 created *Two Playful Pink*, a work explicitly dealing with femininity.

YALI: Shalom to Yasmeen Godder, It's great to have you here

YASMEEN GODDER: Hi, it's a pleasure to be here

YALI: Yasmeen, tell us a little about your approach to gender in your works, *Love Fire*, and *Two Playful Pink*

YASMEEN GODDER: I think that in both of these works, it came from a place that on the one hand was related to having fun, freedom and playfulness that are connected to the subject of gender; and on the other hand, to an exploration of the ways we adopt our gender identities, consciously or unconsciously.

There is a spectrum inside these works, which brings to the front the place and will to play with gender and through it to create some sort of ownership over this content in a space that is open and safe. Let's put it this way; but at the same time I think there is an almost a real-time attempt to examine this dimension anthropologically, through our bodies; to observe, to take advantage of this status, that we are onstage being looked at, as performers, and how this social game is formulated through the performance itself and through the event of the performance; this place where people actually come to look at us, and we return the gaze, with the identity that we choose.

YALI: So let's begin with *Love Fire* from 2009. I think you were one of the first Israeli choreographers to even refer to gender onstage. How did you design the characters for this work?

YASMEEN GODDER: It's interesting, because if you examine my works throughout the years, I think this was the first time I created a duet; a duet with roles for a man and a woman; and there was something about it that always embarrassed me, like, "'okay, now I will compose something for a woman and a man'", something romantic that in my experience always fell into some sort of a trap. It's either "now I will show the difficulties" or "now I will show the fantasy", and I couldn't find my way around it. I couldn't find my way around my process with the audience, and I think what happened in Love Fire was that after many years of a very interesting partnership and dialogue with dancer Eran Shani, I felt it was time to delve into that question; at the same time, I received a commission from France, to create a work for a classic waltz. So, something in that combination, between a work referencing a certain perception of the relationship between man and woman, especially in the context of a waltz, and our relationship as dancers working together, as creative partners, but also with us playing our genders in that context. And I found it highly interesting to take that event, that opportunity to deal with the embarrassment I felt. And I also think it was the first time I used outright classical music, a very well-known piece of music too, which these days, could also be considered elevator music ... So, there is some sort of a cliché on top of a cliché on top of a cliché.

YAL: This music is also perceived as very romantic, right? Waltz is a partner dance.

YASMEEN GODDER: Right, but on the other hand, when I researched the waltz, well, today we know it's romantic and we imagine a man sweeping a woman along and so on, but, in the history of waltz, it was perceived as something forbidden, something that challenged boundaries and was very revolutionary; it activated me, the thought of being swept away, losing control inside this gender play, in this game of "I'll be the woman and you'll be the man, okay?"

But I didn't explore waltz as a topic; I was working with it from a cultural perspective of receiving a CD of classical music sent from Europe to Jaffa, to the post office in Jaffa on Jerusalem Boulevard, and I brought this amazing cultural product into the studio. I don't only try to be a woman in the waltz and he tries to be a man, but we also try to respond to the European invitation to be... I don't know, to respond to being all kinds of things.

There's another dimension here, where I am the choreographer and Eran is the dancer, and there is some sort of inherent hierarchy. I think this is very characteristic to my work, that sort of constant reference to these multiple layers. In the beginning, the dimension of power may be subtle, but it's there, it's impossible to deny this knowledge that exists between us; and it was also something that activated some of that gender play, maybe because it also contradicts the stereotype of the woman who is usually being led in the professional world as well. And our age gap, too, that was another way of examining gender from another perspective, as Eran is much younger than I am, and I am the more mature one, and yet – yes, both of us felt the embarrassment in playing the parts we were supposed to play.

YALI: But you are using this embarrassment, it's funny. There are some really funny scenes.

YASMEEN GODDER: Yes, absolutely. I think I have always found embarrassment interesting. To go onstage and feel embarrassed, that's something you are supposed to overcome as a performer, but it's an energy that exists, and it's an emotion that is there. There is always something, even when Eran walks forward in the beginning, after I stitch the fur into his jacket, that already contains that starting point of embarrassment, as in "okay, the lights go up, everybody is sitting and waiting in silence, now it's your turn." And not from a place of acting, I really think this is something I truly like, that it doesn't dismiss the embarrassment in performing; in being the one everybody looks at, and to say "it exists"; not to act it, not to say "okay, now we'll play a character who is embarrassed", but to be in the moment.

YALI: Did you think about the characters' gender fluidity?

YASMEEN GODDER: I think it's there, and I allow it to naturally be there. It's a question – what is natural and what isn't? If I look at my previous works, the work before *Love Fire* was, I mean, I am, in which I actually learned, in a very outright way, to imitate, to embody male gestures of physical climaxes. So that fluidity was there, and also a wish to physically put on a certain ambitious manhood on my own body, and act through it, express through it, so yes, that was really part of the practices we played with; and I think that in the dimension of dance, the femininity can emerge from the physical language that Eran may bring from himself; and from the many times in which I, for example, created content on my own body and then transferred it to Eran. This has that masculinity-femininity game.

And there is the narrative that is always interesting to me, that eventually we always carry our own existential embodied story. And even if we work with a certain technique, or if we learned certain forms or what not, this history exists inside us; In my method of work I don't deny it, on the contrary – I encourage that content to come out, sometimes not by necessarily calling it feminine or masculine, but just letting the person, the personality and the physical history of that person to come out. I find it highly interesting.

IRIS: Can you imagine you and Eran switching roles?

YASMEEN GODDER: Interesting question. I can imagine that, that's for sure. I also think it's expanding...; one of the things I am interested in is how I, as a performer, can extend my options – my physical, expressive, mental options – so yes, it's possible.

YALI: *Two Playful Pink* is a different story.

IRIS: I want to stay with *Love Fire* for a bit longer. With the props. How do you use them to represent this spectrum of masculinity and femininity?

YASMEEN GODDER: That's interesting, because I must say it was very much related to Eran, who is now a fashion designer and does a lot of visual work. Once I knew that there was going to be an animal, and we knew that there would be internal organs, we started

collecting objects; and I don't know, I think there is some freedom there too, perhaps concerning the meaning of things, or the way each object can look like many other things; and maybe in this context it can be gender-related, in the way that a shiny red necklace can be like intestines falling out, or like body parts, (Pause) so in that context there was also some partnership. But when I think about it now, my clothes for example, which I bought in New York and were in the closet, and I really liked them; I simply really like high heeled shoes and I never get to wear them, it doesn't work with my daily lifestyle, and people say "well, but you have premieres"; and it just doesn't work out; so anyhow, I had them, and it's like the stage grants me this place, I brought the shoes as, let's call it a prop, something that I wanted to work with; a side in me that I wanted to play with; the pantyhose, the tearing of the pantyhose; I no longer remember how things developed, but maybe it was somehow related to punk and to my punk history, where pantyhose were necessarily torn, and it was always part of the esthetics. And the dress, by the way, is my mother's; she wore it in the 80s to my brother's bar mitzvah, and it's somehow related to things I collect, to some sort of a biography. And then we recreated it, and Shuli (Enosh) performed in this dress. These are things that sometimes really activate something for me that I cannot even pin down. But I am activated, and it turns me on, and I just bring these things to the studio. Some of them disappear along the way, and others remain. And this femininity is undoubtedly linked to my personal history, to my mother, yes.

IRIS: You have pins, you have fur, you have flip flops.

YASMEEN GODDER: Yes, the fur. The flip flops are interesting because to me, this is Jaffa. The red flip flops are like "okay, now I am going to dance this Waltz with plastic flip flops", that's my way of reacting: you wanted a Waltz in Europe, right? So, I will bring my own kind of Waltz.

IRIS: A Jaffa Waltz

YASMEEN GODDER: A sad Jaffa Waltz, because it is a Waltz Triste. And again, the flip flops are really part of the identity, it's not as if – it's simply flip flops I had.

IRIS: You know, you started a trend with those flip flops.

YALI: Absolutely, each time I see a pair like that I go: Ha! Yasmeen!

YASMEEN GODDER: The fur is again from the perspective of wearing fur when it's hot, wearing those furs which also represent hunting; hunting as something very masculine, the violence that is inherent to it and the role play, once again, the aggressive hunter who has to take the animal apart.

YALI: But it's also that glamorous woman from the 50s who is wearing fur; It's an image on top of an image.

YASMEEN GODDER: Right, it's an image on top of an image, and the horns. There are really a lot of details, because the horns, for example, the hat is made of wool, and it's handmade. I mean, someone knitted it, and there are many things like that. In general, I have a thing that my props are never comfortable, they are never easy to operate, and there is no Velcro. It's part of the thing that doing it onstage is a real challenge, really. That's also true for Love Fire – we could have solved it in much simpler ways. We didn't have to really sew the fur, to really tie those things to me, to tear the pantyhose, maybe they are just a little ripped. And for me, there is something really interesting in making that happen, in having to confront it in real time in front of an audience. It does generate stress, but I guess there is also a thrill that turns me on, makes me confront that moment of having to face people. Even though that hat, tying the wool, is not like in the opera, where it fits your head perfectly and never falls off;

How do you make sure you tied it right? And when people work with that, Eran, too, is someone who likes working with materials. So, we had that partnership and that connection, which is also maybe something that should be discussed in the context of

gender. Because we did share many things – age-wise we are in different places, our personal history, too – but we did share many things in this work, through content we had in common; content which can be perceived as gender-related, and break gender barriers in their traditional sense, of course.

IRIS: Do you think these works transform you?

YASMEEN GODDER: Yes, absolutely, they are like life journeys that completely change the way I look at things, my interests, and what my next work will be. It's really like diving into some content which then affects my way of looking at things and of perceiving myself, the things I dare and dare not do.

IRIS: I must say that although I really love dance, I never want to dance; but I would love to dance, *Love Fire*.

" YASMEEN GODDER: It's great to hear that. It makes me happy. I would also like to say, in the context of humor, because you mentioned that earlier, that my works are somehow perceived as serious or sometimes difficult for people; there is suffering, there is human complexity, but at the same time I feel and think that humor is a fundamental thing for me. And going back to the first question about fun, about playfulness, that if it wasn't there, and I am always glad when people see that, that they can see it. There are some works, I can count them on one hand, in which it's maybe not up front, it might just peep out for a minute; but all my works have that playfulness, even childishness, which hold the possibility of playing with this content of gender; or maybe even playing with this kind of femininity for my own sake; again the high heeled shoes are an example of that, of playing the woman in me, playing the woman who enjoys walking on high heels and sings. By the way, there is another dimension here. I never sang before; I always wanted to, but I was afraid, and I made myself do it. So, every time I set myself some challenges, and in this case, one of them was singing on stage.

IRIS: I think it's not only gender, you're dealing with identity, it's wider than that.



YASMEEN GODDER: Yes, that's true.

YALI: So, if we are talking about playfulness, let's talk about *Two Playful Pink*. The very name of this work already designates the content you are working with.

HOST: And now, the choreographic DNA of *Two Playful Pink* choreography by Yasmeen Godder: on stage, Yasmeen Godder and Iris Erez- a duet of two women. Sisterhood. The feminine body. Playfulness. Gazing at the audience.

YASMEEN GODDER: Absolutely! It's interesting, because I must say that although there are some similarities between these two works, I never thought about them in the same context; and now I enjoy thinking about it this way; here too there is some sort of partnership with a dancer who has been and still is very meaningful to my work process, Iris Erez; and a very strong connection which also enabled this content to emerge and to go deeper.

Also, the work here started after years of working together and having a very strong connection, both on the personal and the professional level, diving together into mutual exploration, recognizing the fact that the two of us are soon getting on a plane again, going someplace, performing, and spending time together. And there is also our age proximity, as opposed to Eran, Iris, and I are closer in age; we were both more or less in our 30s then, and we wanted to work directly with this idea of two dancers going up onstage. With our relationship and with our gender identity. In front of the audience, in front of the world, with our physical experiences of hanging out or walking down the street. Sometimes these contents ended up at the studio in some other, indirect way, but even in walking down the street with a girlfriend, there is some impact, there is a gaze; there is us returning the gaze.

And it was there, on the stage. I mean, it was there. I didn't invent it, but I did want to highlight and focus that content and say: yes, now you are looking at two girls onstage, and let's go...

The work evolved around us looking outwards, and us being looked at. Our exploration of physical postures and embodied feminine behaviors we learned or acquired along the way, even by imitation, or through our identity games; and by playing with this place, and maybe even asking: where is the freedom in all of that; where do we play-out the female roles we were given, and where are we really open to our inner channels? So, I found it very interesting.

I think that up to that point I was dealing with the concept of performing a "character"; and in *Two Playful Pink*, it's not a character, it's Iris - and I. I went through a process that made me understand that this word, character, was alienating me from the place I was searching for, when we go up onstage and play roles.

Yes, we use our bodies to play the mean friend and the best friend, jealousy, competitiveness, the roles that are often attributed to women, and to relationships between women. But we are also Iris and I onstage.

And that is something that has remained with me, that everyone onstage may take upon himself or herself a certain form, certain tasks. But eventually it is us, and it is about finding ways to be more of ourselves, to open ourselves up, to confront ourselves, yes; and in *Two Playful Pink* there is also an attempt to claim it, to be the ones in charge of our own bodies, of the gaze; to be able to divert that gaze for a moment and to go into that body, treating it as nothing but a body.

The work is divided into three parts, and when I was thinking about that, the two are really more about two women in front of an audience; playful refers to the playfulness, and pink is

the body, the flesh. I always said we put on fake boobs, so it's like; "you wanted boobs, you got it, here are the boobs, and now we will give them to you all the way."

There is also a tongue choreography there, and it is really more about "now we will be this body," and we will give it to you all the way. But in the end, there is also some withdrawal into ourselves, even a mutual loss of identity into each other; being nothing but a body, these limbs that can be seen separately, only the leg, hand, breast, chest, hair.

Yali: So, in *Two Playful Pink*, you return to this work years later. Why this work, why at this specific time, and how did you perceive it from your point of view as an older or mature woman

YASMEEN GODDER: I've felt this need to return to *Two Playful Pink* ever since we stopped. It was not a decision that made it stop. Iris had decided to go her separate way as an artist, and I actually tried to replace her then; then I also decided to step out of it myself and find two other female dancers. I went through different processes with it, and it didn't happen. So, I decided to let it go, and for years it sat there, waiting.

Many women dancers I was working with asked, "Well, when?"

It is a very significant work in my development as an artist and my understanding of what interests me, and yes, it also touches somewhere deep inside.

IRIS: Did the work change?

YASMEEN GODDER: No, not at all. But I'm at a different age now.

I want to say that the first time I watched it in full length, it made me sad.

IRIS: The age gap? The separation?

YASMEEN GODDER: No, the women's state of mind. It's interesting, I can't put my finger on it, but it's not the passage of time, it's not from a nostalgic place, nothing like "oh, we were like that then and what am I now".

YALI: I was young, etc....

YASMEEN GODDER: No, not at all.

IRIS: You have a daughter.

YASMEEN GODDER: That's right, exactly, I suddenly realized, it suddenly hit me, like - wow.

IRIS: So, we are sad.

YASMEEN GODDER: That's the thing, I don't want to say that, because I don't feel sad. But looking at it, it managed to touch that place of feminine effort, of an attempt to try to solve something so complex; and almost grab each other by the nails, literally, the long nails, grab each like some kind of life saver, in a reality which traps you as a woman, and the loop of that reality; the repetitiveness you are trapped in, and the effort I recognize in this work, which is interesting.

At the time, it was considered very bold, like we were very bold, very harsh in our attitudes. But I also saw in all that boldness and harshness a desire to please, and that pleasing is also related to the stage, to being good female dancers, to please as performers, which I think, is part of the content of performance; but I want to direct some sort of spotlight on it. I say sad, but that word, too, is limited; it's like it had a depth that reached places that hurt, maybe that's a better way to describe it.

YALI: Maybe it's a realization that not so much has changed since you created it; that there is still so much to do, and so much to talk about.

YASMEEN GODDER: Yes

IRIS: I feel your works are like going under a house,  
into the basement with a flashlight to search and see what's in there,  
What's beneath

YASMEEN GODDER: Yes, well, lately I try to describe things that engage me, I suddenly realized it's not about new content in any way; it's more about where to place the light now. Performance is performance, our ability to perform, to connect to an audience, to touch, body, woman... man and so on and so on, more embodied expressions, age, ancient contents; but it's really more about where the flashlight is now, where it is, what does it shine on, where do I place it.

YALI: Thanks, Yasmeen.

YASMEEN GODDER: Thank you both

IRIS: We asked Tal Dekel to talk about the male gaze as a concept, and about its origins

TAL DEKEL: The gaze is a charged topic, both in theory and in practice. It has implications for various art disciplines because we are talking about the body and its visibility in space, and also about gaze relations between the dancers, or the artists, and the audience looking at them. But we also think in the wider sense, of the social organization of power relations in general, and so, for example, John Berger published a very important book titled Ways of Seeing, in which he formulates a seminal sentence about women learning to see themselves as men see them. That is, they internalize it, and they align themselves to that allegedly universal gaze, that is, the patriarchal male gaze. That is, both women and men adopt the

fantasy of the female body as it is supposed to be, according to this gaze. Laura Mulvey is another theorist who recognized this, and gave it a fascinating feminist-psychoanalytical analysis, discussing that mechanism, how we as women already discipline ourselves, look at the mirror, hold our bellies in, because we already remember this model, the cast for the ultimate fantasy, for the myth of beauty, what are we supposed to look like, so we construct ourselves and try to align ourselves to that.

YALI: We also asked Ran Brown about the gaze in Israeli works

RAN BROWN: I think that Merav Dagan's works are concerned with representations of femininity.

In a work she made in 2016 with Stav Marin, called *Come Closer*, it opens with two women, Stav and Merav, approaching the front part of the stage. There is something that looks like a large rock on one side, and two leaves on the other side; plastic leaves, but we have no way of knowing that, so what we see is a representation of nature.

Two women wear a shirt, and their underwear is sewn on top of their shirts, so there is some inversion of what is usually hidden and exposed; and the interesting thing is that for a long moment, they do nothing but look at the audience. This is how the work begins.

Along the performance, they use their voices, they tremble, they shake, and eventually they climb the rock and sing, just like the sirens in Greek mythology.

This work explicitly deals with representations of women in Western culture, including this dangerous image of seductive women, and of course threatening sirens; and as they are shaking out their faces and their outfits, so do they shake off that feminine image with their trembling, with their voice production.

RAN BROWN: In Roni Chadash's works, such as *Goofy (My Body)* or *Victims & Images*, she hides her face, literally makes her face disappear, so she forces the spectators to participate,

to take part in this action that conceals the subject, and to look at her body; she forces them to confront this gaze.

Not only does she make her head disappear and become a body, she uses her body to create a very clear vanishing point, which brings the focus of the viewer to the female sex organ, or in general, on certain parts of her body, so that it is impossible to escape them;

She manages to achieve in a live performance, in a very sophisticated way, what cameras usually help achieve in cinema. And she forces the audience to confront the ways these images constantly surround us.

IRIS: like Valie Export, a little.

YALI: If we are mentioning Valie Export - Tal, let's talk about performance art. How did feminist artists approach this medium?

TAL DEKEL: Feminist performance can be small and seemingly trivial, related to everyday life: how I organize my home, how I clean this body of mine when I have my period or when in preparation for a holiday, how do I get myself organized in front of my partner or other family members, in the domestic space, in the public space.

YALI: Can you give us one or two examples of performances working with the actual flesh, the fluids, the body?

TAL DEKEL: Of course. Carolee Schneemann, an American artist who was active in the 1970s, created *Interior Scroll*. In *Interior Scroll* she went and stood before an audience at a given time, but beforehand she had prepared a scroll on which she wrote her life experiences with her partner, about being a woman artist in the world; and she rolled it in and then, during the performance, she extracted it from her body, from her vagina.

IRIS: This is Merav Dagan in an excerpt from her work, *Bloody Mary*. *Bloody Mary* is a tomato juice-based cocktail, but women use this term to talk about their menstruation. Dagan uses a double meaning here – bloody referring to blood, and Mary, the mother of all pure women.

YALI: In Hebrew, this work is titled Mechurbenet with a slight disruption in the way it is pronounced. It is a slang word (meaning to be fucked up, messed up or disturbed). When we were young, Iris, we used this word. A terrible, terrible word. That is what we have learned from our mothers, friends, and other women around – to avoid saying the actual word: period. This is how we were socialized to hide it.

IRIS: The cultural significance of this word in Hebrew is enormous. It is related to destruction, defecation and also to a certain disappointment from the female body; it is also a time when, according to Judaism, orthodox-religious women are in what's called in Hebrew, Niddah; they are in fact cast out, excluded, forbidden to be touched by their male partners, and are required to purify themselves afterwards.

YALI: This is also a harsh statement on the female body, which is perceived at this time of bleeding as having a constant potential for danger, failure, and a missed opportunity of women's mission that is fertility.

HOST: And now, the choreographic DNA of BLOODY MARY, choreography and performance by Merav Dagan. Solo in gym attire. Menstruation. Voice - repetitive counting of the period from 1 to 28. Red props



Yali:     Ran Brown

RAN BROWN: So we can go back to Merav Dagan's work, *Bloody Mary*, that premiered at the Diver Festival in 2018.

In this work, she corresponds with feminist performance art, with women who were engaged in feminine art. In this work, Merav deals with the female menstruation, and this is something that new choreographers approach with an awareness of what has been done before them.

They correspond not only with the art, but also with substantive questions regarding the essential definitions of representation and essentialism, about definitions of representations, and the option of playing with them.

Their works are always double-edged, and when Merav is engaged in menstruation, unlike women artists who engaged in menstruation before her, she is not inclined towards the actual concrete material, but rather creates a hyper-anesthetization of menstruation through representations, through mediations.

There is no blood, no liquid. But there is plastic, a tape, and the number of days. The thing itself is not here, and yet it is present all the time.

I think Merav turns her gaze to the mechanism, to the choreography that regulates women's bodies; she zooms out and looks at menstruation as a serial and repeated pattern, referring to the repetitive pattern that is at the foundation of the construction of femininity and which regulates identity.

She does this, for example, in the way she uses voice, when she keeps repeating words in different ways, like teaching us that this repetition of femininity is an acquired process, a process we learn, a process that is constantly learned, from children's songs she uses to informative entries about femininity in the encyclopedia.

IRIS: It is clear she is familiar with Carolee Schneemann's *Vagina Scroll*, if we are talking about the cultural and historical awareness of these new choreographers.

YALI: When Judith Butler says that people are not only their bodies, but they essentially make their bodies, she refers to the way women and men learn from childhood to repetitively activate gender norms in their bodies, and to embody them throughout their lives. One may try to resist this process – and that's exactly what these women choreographers do – is play with the performance of gender, undermine and disintegrate its expected norms, whether by playfulness or by radicalizing the normative and exposing it, giving it visibility, voice, action, and space.

IRIS: We talked today with and about Israeli women choreographers who present daring and bold dance works and tell us that it's OK. We can and should talk about our bodies, this leaking, fluid, non-ideal body. These women pave the road for the next generation of young artists, and at the same time expand the discourse of dance to places that truly concern us all, as human beings.

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Music, by order of appearance:

Tchaikovsky, Waltz Sentimental Op. 51, No. 6, Josef Sakonov & London Festival Orchestra, from the album "Phase 4 Stereo Spectacular", released 2015, Decca Music Group LTD.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Jean Baptiste Lully.  
Le Concert de Nations, Jordi Savall. from the album  
La Musique au temps de Marin Marais, 1992

Aram Khachaturian: Masquerade - Ballet Suite No. 1.  
London Symphony Orchestra and Stanley Black, from the album  
""Khachaturian: Ballet Suites from Spartacus & Masquerade"" 2015,  
Decca Music Group LTD

Lonely House, Piano Accompaniment.  
Street Scene by Kurt Weill, 1946.  
uploaded to YouTube by Christina Pepper on  
13th February 2019

The Sky Lit Up, PJ Harvey from the album Is This Desire? 1998 Universal Island Records LTD  
Heart and Soul (original mix), Bea Wain, 1939, from the album Bea Wain-You Started  
Something 2009 Dazzling Dames.

Excerpt from *Bloody Mary*, Merav Dagan, 2018. Recorded live performance.

Arrow Arrow by Aglow Hollow 2019