

Four For Rina Schenfeld

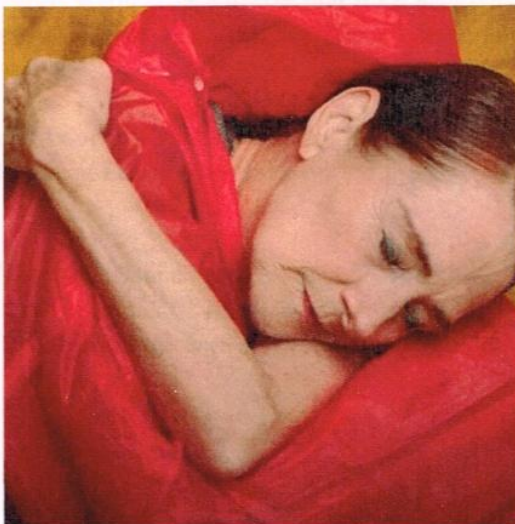
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Four Questions For Israel's "Godmother of Dance" Rina Schenfeld

One of the world's most renowned modern dancers, Rina Schenfeld, will be visiting Atlanta next week. Ms Schenfeld's busy itinerary includes workshops at Kennesaw State University, a lecture at Emory University and a solo performance at Goodson Yard as part of the Rialto Center for the Arts' Off the Edge Dance Festival. Ms. Schenfeld managed to find time between meetings and rehearsals in Israel to speak to Karen Isenberg Jones just days before her upcoming trip.



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KIJ: Israeli contemporary dance has really been sweeping the world over the past decade. Why do you think Israeli contemporary dance is so respected throughout the world? What makes it stand apart from other countries?

RS: I myself am shocked about it. I think when the Zionists first came to Israel there was a lot of dancing. So many of these Jews in exile - living in a new country - wanted to speak with their bodies. In my opinion dance is not only physical, but spiritual. It's the most spiritual language I know. Dance is primal and strong. When I first started training over 50 years ago I had a Russian teacher. Out of her little dance studio came some of the greatest dances that were received in Europe and other parts of the world... There is a strong energy that started in the beginning of the country that goes on deeply and strongly today. We started the Batsheva Dance Company so many years ago and it has a fruitful continuation today.

KIJ: You've really created your own language within Dance. What types of messages do you try to convey through your choreography? What inspires you?

RS: It's very spiritual - trying to talk about the human being - about his life. Through dance I can do it the best. Dance helped me discover about myself and I put myself into the dance - it's a circle. When I started dancing I was a Prima Ballerina and I had the privilege of working with the greatest choreographer in the world, Martha Graham. The blood of Martha Graham is running through my blood and her voice is heard through my body, in my heart and through my dancing. But, eventually I rebelled against her technique in order to find a new language. I felt I'm not the same as Martha Graham so I went to create something new. I detached myself from Martha's style and technique. When I left Batsheva I did geometrical things. I worked with sticks, cubes, threads. Since I left Batsheva I really went through four periods of dance. The first was geometrical. The second was objects in nature. The third was light and shadows and the fourth was a mix of everything including geometrical objects and things found in nature. I started to improvise. Until the age of 40-something I had never improvised! I worked in a very different way from Martha, but even after many years of working like this I've discovered I do continue Martha Graham's art and I'm very proud of it.

KIJ: You just turned 73 years old a couple weeks ago. At 73 you are performing and teaching with such zeal! Tell me what it's like to dance at your age.

RS: In Japan you see many masters at this age. Art does not only belong to the young. I feel young.