

Rina Schenfeld and Pina Bausch
Meeting Through Movement



Rina Schenfeld's one-woman dance piece *Notes to Pina*, which premiered in Tel Aviv in 2014, is an homage to her Juilliard friend and classmate Pina Bausch. (Photo by Inbal Cohen Hamo) [More Photos »](#)

By **HILARY TANABE**
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Rina Schenfeld ('61, dance) and Pina Bausch ('61, dance) met at a Juilliard audition and became friends. They danced together, and both their first names and their looks were similar enough that teachers sometimes confused them. There were differences, of course, not least the fact that Rina was from Israel and Pina from Germany. After leaving Juilliard, each ended up in her own country, choreographing. Bausch, whom Schenfeld describes as a genius who “changed the world of dance completely,” would become head of the Wuppertal Opera Ballet, later renamed the Tanztheater Wuppertal, from 1973 until 2009, when she died at 68. Schenfeld was for many years the lead dancer and choreographer at Batsheva Dance Company (1964-78). Over the years, their paths crossed many times. In a recent interview with The Journal, Schenfeld, speaking by phone from Tel Aviv, described how, a few years ago, she was

inspired to create a solo piece called Notes to Pina, which was based on poet Hadassa Tal's book of the same title. In it, Schenfeld, who has been making dances out of objects, shadows, and light for many years, dances with sand, sculptures, and projections of Bausch and Bausch's film, Complaint of an Empress (1990). Part homage, part letter, the piece premiered in June in Tel Aviv.

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I started by improvising to Hadassa Tal's voice and to the meaning of the voice and how it influenced my body. It was very inspiring—I wanted to move to the words and to the sound of her voice, and it was kind of like music. And later on, I started to mix other materials, like Pina's film, the world of myself, my art, and all the dances I did. I tried to make my inner and artistic worlds and Pina's artistic and inner worlds meet.

You've talked about Pina's voice in the letters and memories you have of her. How do you access these voices and planes of memory through dance? Is there a sense of visiting past and imagined experiences through movement?

Yes, the meeting of all those worlds—in dissonance or in harmony or in confusion—is a wonderful meeting. Those worlds and the contrast and balance between them fascinate me and evoke many movements in my body and on stage because the stage for me is an inner world. When the curtain opens, you see the inner world of myself, of Pina, of the culture, of the poems. And all those worlds mingle and contrast and devolve. It's like life.

You've mentioned confusion and devolving—do you welcome that confusion?

Yes. I especially like that Pina wants to talk about her intimate life. Let's not forget, the main subject might be, "Dance, dance, dance, otherwise we get lost." I like very much the sentence where she says, "You dance until your body is not moving anymore, but a scream."

In *The Jerusalem Post*, you said of Pina, "I am taking her with me through this dance."

There's a section where I dance and her figure is projected on my body. I say "Remember me, remember me," and I touch the projection and I show that it's me. So, yes, she is there. This is the way I succeeded to carry her within my body and to go on dancing. She said in a letter [to me], "And please let us go on dancing together."

Melancholia is very present in this piece.

I dance with Pina. I mourn. It is a requiem in a way, but I also feel eternity, I feel hope. It talks about how dance is life and life is dance. That's the way I feel, but I didn't sit down and write analysis. I went down to the studio and danced, danced, danced.

There's a sense of deconstructing and reconstructing in your work...

Yes, because our world is like this. I don't know if it's the same today, but in my day and Pina's day at Juilliard, we did A, B, A: subject and development, subject and variation. I don't mean that I don't look for structure, but I destroy to make it different. I don't want to think too much. I want to dance instinctively, subconsciously. That's why I close my eyes, to really concentrate on different things; not on something that we are used to, or we are educated to do. I am looking for freedom somehow. This way you have freedom. You can pick up sand and do a dance. You can pick up a shoe and do something. It's free. We don't sit down and write on a piece of paper.

Speaking of freedom, you've said that Bausch told you she had family in Israel and that you took that to mean she had Jewish roots. Does *Notes* give some voice to those roots? Does the political history of Israel and Germany come into play in it?

I think, in her art, there is this blame against society, against how things can happen. I think that's the way most of her pieces are, although there is much humor. I start my evening with a section in the forest and there are numbers on the trees and children are being taken someplace and they are crying. So for me, it's definitely about the Holocaust. I put it only at the beginning, though. I'm not dealing with it because the dance doesn't deal with death. She didn't know she was Jewish [until the end of her life]. But I think, yes, there is something there. Things that we don't really know come in a dream.

If the piece is not about death, perhaps it's about a sense of life from death?

Dance is the answer for everything. On the days that I don't dance, I feel terrible. On the days that I do move and dance, I feel different. I'm another person.

Do you feel as though dancing is something you have to do? That it's part of who you are?

Definitely. In the beginning I didn't know I would be a dancer, but I knew that I wanted to express something positive about the beauty of the world. And in Pina there is something a little bit down[cast]. The meeting between us brings something different, something new.