

A JOURNEY BETWEEN LIGHT AND SHADOWS

By Gabi Eldor

Rina Schenfeld's performance, which is playing again these days, is called "A Lyrical Journey to the Light in Seven Parts: Fall, Light, Hair, Place, Flight, With the Wind, Rest." Those are the names in the program. In fact, it is an acquaintance journey with Schenfeld towards herself as a woman and an artist, in which light serves as the main axis, from the twilight of dawn through intense and distorted lighting arrangements.

Schenfeld conducts a journey through periods, between youth and old age and terror, towards a great rest, which is both death and the light of grace that emanates from an unknown source, like in the evangelical paintings of the great painters. From Leonardo and Fra Angelico to the more modern images such as those of Rothko.

Together with Moshe Shternfeld - who also served as a kind of stage manager and editor and designed a stage which is all motion and magic - and with the lighting technician Phillis Ross, Schenfeld created a wonderful world of light and shadow, in which every event is both a picture that becomes engraved in memory and an unending transition from one many-layered statement to another.

The music of John Cage, from 1948, recalls distant notes, bell-like, oriental style. When Schenfeld leaves the stage, the whistle of the wind sounds from the open plains, and the scenery moves slowly, changing worlds, raising a gold floor cover and turning it into sky, in which a hole gapes.

Schenfeld not only seeks the light and its meanings. She also takes a journey through the history of dance as she knows it through her body. It is an evening of absolute enchantment from beginning to end. Even though Schenfeld repeats some of her known dictionary in terms of movements, there is a new quality, mature and surprising in her grappling with her art.

At the start of the dance Schenfeld comes on stage wearing an airy dress, covered in thin layers of fabric, like the clothes of the Sylphs. She moves softly in a world whose basis is classical ballet - round and soft arms, tiptoeing quickly and silently, while holding dry petals and casting them into the wind.

It is a highly romantic image, and towards its end the dancer kneels on the floor as her arms quickly go through the essence of classical dance: that same airy fluttering of arms, which turns into the twitch of a dying swan, the same distorted wing, the same end. But that is just a hint, a landmark, because immediately the arm twists into the world of Martha Graham, with all its intensely expressive and dramatic grips.

Then Schenfeld ascends to move again quickly at the edge of the stage, around a lighted square of fabric, moving from the brightness of the light and the dry flowers. That is just a longing, a touch of what once was, and Schenfeld again shows her absolute command of every inch of her body. She takes off the romantic dress and leaves.

In the next chapter Schenfeld moves in a body suit, sunglasses and long gloves, under a lamp hanging through a hole in the ceiling cover. It is a cruel light, without shade, blinding. Is that the light of the stage? Is that the light under which a woman over a certain age shouldn't stand? Is that the light trying to expose the truth, but that has something jarring, distorted about it?

The strong light always reveals just a part, and as such, under the guise of truth, it covers more than it exposes. The dancer holds the lamp and it begins to swing, leaving the dancer, at regular intervals, in darkness. It is a sort of chase and Schenfeld, in an almost grotesque gaiety, moves in jazz-like rhythmic movements, with covered eyes, with covered untouched hands.

Later she will dance on a table, in a bright spotlight, her face covered by her long hair. She turns into a creature, she casts a huge shadow. The shadow dances. For the first time Schenfeld exposes the fears, the terrors. She dares not to be beautiful, she gives birth to the shadows of witches. The number ends when her face finally peeks from the hair with a scream, with a crooked smile, like a scary, jeering mask.

And all the time the attempts to run, to fly recur. Even on a lighted table, where she moves like a moth attracted to the light in order to burn, her legs move fast in running movements, she tries to float. Each part ends with a kind of despair, just to be reborn again in the next chapter.

Towards the end, the golden sky moves towards Schenfeld who again dons the "dancer" dress. In a wonderfully beautiful ending the curtain falls with Schenfeld laying on the floor, like someone expecting the sky to come crashing down on them but who accepts her fate.

But she reappears again out of an opening that looks like a grave, as if she has come back to life. A wonderful character, ageless, a day or a thousand years old, rolling, moving her feet and hands as in a strange prayer of a living being, banging on her chest like a heartbeat. She repeats the opening movements like a ritual. The light, for some reason, doesn't go off. It shines, is reflected, golden. It is a statement of praise by a great artist.