

Rina Schenfeld: Dancing all the way to the bank

By HELEN KAYE

Dancer/choreographer Rina Schenfeld's granddaughter had her first birthday recently, so when someone wished her "congratulations," she thought it was for that.

But the congratulations were for her. Schenfeld has won the Education Minister's Life Achievement Award for dance. She'll receive a check for NIS 50,000, on Wednesday at the Suzanne Dellal Center in Tel Aviv from Education and Sports Minister Zevulun Hammer.

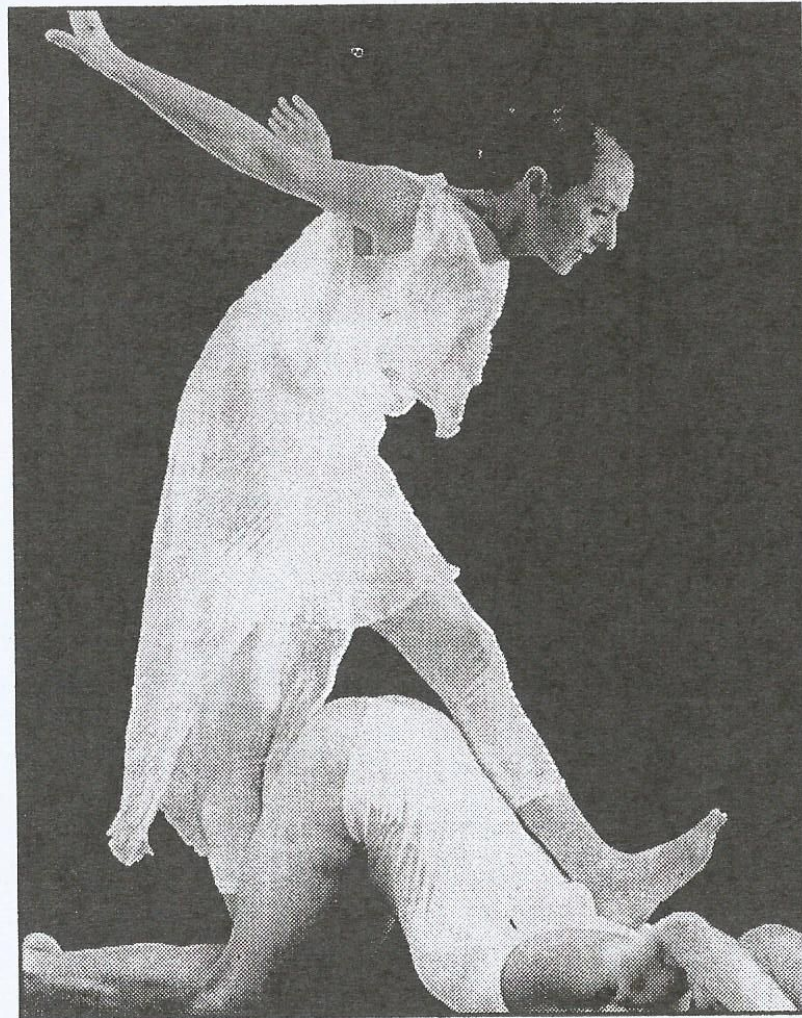
"This is the largest prize I've ever received. After so many years of working close to the bone on tiny budgets....," says Schenfeld tailing off, almost heady with the possibilities.

The award is supposed to be for her, she points out, not for the company. Although "I may give myself a bit of a treat, I'll keep most of it to help pay for future projects."

These include a book, a movie and, after 30 years, "I'm still committed to realizing one major work a year."

Unnamed as yet, the new work is due for a January 1998 premiere. She doesn't want to speak of the subject matter but, she laughs, "there'll be more than one man in it."

It's not that she doesn't like men, it's that women, in all the



Schenfeld's preoccupation with women is seen in 'Shamayim.'

interstices of their lives, interest her more. Her first evening of dance in 1963 had a solo entitled *Faces of a Woman*. That curiosity

has continued in dances such as *Threads* (1978) and in works like *Woman in Dance* (1994), *Shamayim* (1995), and this year, the lyrical *Dream*, which she did with Canadian dancer Margie Gillis, and *An Angel Comes at Night*, set to her own poems.

Born and raised in Israel, Schenfeld was dancing with the late great Martha Graham when, in 1964, Batsheva de Rothschild recruited her to become one of the stars of the newly formed Batsheva Dance Company.

She stayed with Batsheva for 14 years, becoming its artistic director before launching out on her own. Her many prizes include David's Lyre in 1978, 1981 and 1983. In 1994 she received Na'amat's "Oscar" for her outstanding contribution to dance and the arts.

However, Schenfeld has never received the kind of funding her accomplishments merit. Her total subsidy today is NIS 260,000 divided equally between the Arts and Culture Administration and (over the last decade) the Tel Aviv Municipality.

She still has the school she began 30 years ago and is once again working with a company, this time with nine members. But her international and local reputation are founded mainly on her solo work and on the dance language she has created.

A Rina Schenfeld dance will

typically use objects – pots, sticks, huge pieces of fabric, poles, perspex or styrofoam rectangles, even bathtubs. Her work, one critic said, "deals with form, line, and volume in a given space." It is influenced by the Bauhaus style of the '20s whose practitioners objectified dance, looking for the "mechanical" principles that underlie movement.

But her dances are always much more than mechanistic. She informs her audiences with emotion, passion and a mystery that allows their imagination to range.

In dance, "enthusiasm and inspiration are important," she says, "but the ability to discriminate, to differentiate between the genuine and the fake, between good and bad are also essential."

She is a slight, gentle-hearted woman of "56 or 57, believe me I don't remember," with a radiant smile, a Victorian luxuriance of brown tresses, and classic bone structure.

She still performs, and makes no attempt to hide the little tummy or the wrinkles. Why should she? They are part of who and what she is. "I'll continue to perform until I stop enjoying it or feel I have no more to give."

"It's like Martha said," she concludes, quoting Graham, "I didn't choose dance. It chose me. It pushes and pushes me and I can't do without it."