



ADF Gets In the Groove with *Decadance*

by Kate Dobbs Ariail

June 25, 2009, Durham, NC: Ohad Naharin uses the word “connection” a lot, and the theater was alive with the feel of it when the Israeli choreographer accepted the [American Dance Festival's](#) highest honor, the Samuel H. Scripps ADF Award for Lifetime Achievement, with its \$50,000 prize. Following the ceremony came a kind of ecstasy of connectivity, in the form of [Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet's](#) performance of Naharin's *Decadance 2007* in the Durham Performing Arts Center on the first evening of a three-night run. This “reconstruction” connects sections from ten of Naharin's dances made over a span of twenty years into a new work that is both fresh exploration and recapitulation of his abiding interests. It is also a gorgeous exposition of Gaga, Naharin's deliriously free movement language.

Naharin is the prolific artistic director of Tel Aviv's [Batsheva Dance Company](#), and he has given himself plenty of rich material to rework in this ongoing *Decadance* project. This version set on the young New York Cedar Lake company retains many of the same dance sections as the version presented at [ADF 2004](#) by Batsheva but also some different material. If anything, the dancing is even better. Perhaps that was due on opening night to the presence of Naharin, with his intense rock-star vitality, as well as to the freshness of the connection between Naharin and the Cedar Lake Ballet, but the dancing was even looser and wittier on the second night — electric with the sense of possibilities hinted at by designer Rakefet Levy's array of imaginative costumes.

The choreographer unabashedly broadcasts his glory in life and his own life-force in dances flowing with imagery and rocking on rhythm. They often burst into explosive surprises of gesture or motion, which then immediately seem completely natural and necessary — a hallmark of successful art. A voracious eclecticism defines the musical score, which includes both Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater* and the theme from *Hawaii 5-O* among many other contrasting melodies. Naharin's sculptural use of stage space, and wonderful lighting, the pale clear gold of sourwood honey (by Avi Yona Bueno), reinforce the viewer's perception of this world as palpating with life.

But Naharin is not shy about throwing in big dark shadows. Following the happy dance in which the company brings audience members onto the stage for a romp through the mambo and cha-cha-cha comes a scathing cautionary dance by five women to a recorded reading of a contemptuous Charles Bukowski poem. “Ignore all possible concepts... Ignore Beethoven....” The women, dressed alike in rigid navy blue dresses, sharp with knife pleats, build a prison of proscriptions, adding block after block to the movement sequence as Bukowski adds to his lines. “A car, a house, a belly full of beans... just Make It, Babe. Just Make It.”

This dance, with the poem, etches like acid into the zinc plate of your understanding, hatching in the blacks that make the bright forms pop on memory's impression of the work. When the full company returns, again to ripple the stage with wave after wave of untrammled life — not anarchic, but not constrained — you feel well reminded to connect the dance of your own life to the soundtrack of your own choosing.

The performance repeats June 27. See our [calendar](#) for details.