

'I go to extremes': Israeli choreographer Sharon Eyal on what inspires her

Dark, foreboding and full of conflict, her new show at Sadler's Wells is hotly anticipated



A scene from 'Love Chapter 2' © André Le Corre

Audiences planning to visit Sadler's Wells to see Sharon Eyal's *Love Chapter 2*, the follow-up to the Israeli choreographer's acclaimed *OCD Love* from 2016, are forewarned in her own description of the new work, which opens next month. "A sense of disaster, death of all hope and of ending, crawl like an illness via the dancers' bodies," reads the grim summation. "This creation is a reason to cry."

Those who saw the first part of the double bill by Eyal's L-E-V (Hebrew for "heart") Dance Company will not be surprised. *OCD Love* was a captivating, visceral exploration of the relationship between the deepest of human feelings, and the tics and tribulations of obsessive compulsive disorder. "It's about love that always misses, or lovers who keep missing each other," Eyal said of that work, and the dense, techno beats of Ori Lichtik's electronic dance music score added to the sense of delirium.

The performance was not quite like any other seen at Sadler's Wells, and L-E-V's return to London has been keenly awaited. Reviews talked of the piece's tribalism, robotic energy, wild sensuality and urban eroticism. Now the company, which includes her personal and professional partner, Gai Behar, are set to deliver, according to pre-publicity, a still "darker take on loneliness, despair and the search for connection" in the new piece.

When I ask her about that description, she has second thoughts. "I don't know if it is darker," she tells me over the telephone from Tel Aviv. "For sure it is heavier. But even if it is heavy, when you go to one extreme of emotion, you also go to the other extreme. So it is heavier, and lighter."

” Like her clamorous work, Eyal’s conversation is riven with conflict and contradiction. Alistair Spalding, artistic director and chief executive of Sadler’s Wells, says she has the rare ability both to compel and disorientate audiences. “You don’t quite know where you are, and you are not quite sure what you are meant to be feeling.” He describes Eyal’s work as tackling “a very specific area of investigation. And it is very intense.” Eyal, talking in short staccato bursts, says that Love Chapter 2 is more of a continuation than a follow-up to her earlier work. “I wanted to continue it forever. I took some of those moments, and travelled in different directions with them. It was almost like, ‘What if I take this door rather than the other door?’ and seeing where that went.



” Sharon Eyal, co-founder of L-E-V Dance Company © Gigi Giannella

I ask what she means when she describes the piece as occurring “after the actual illness, after all had been lost already”; did it signify a kind of eventual redemption? “I don’t remember [saying] that. But it is beautiful. Maybe it is about the body healing itself.”

Narrative clarity is not a prominent feature of Eyal’s work; neither, despite its exploratory nature, is the urge to redraw the boundaries of dance. “I don’t feel I’m doing any kind of modern dance, I am not trying to change the art form. I am doing classical work. And I don’t feel I am pushing myself towards places. It is something which is pushing me. It comes from inside. I go to extremes.” The extreme physicality of her work portrays the strength of human emotion. “I feel it and I do it. It is authentic.”

Eyal, born in Jerusalem in 1971, was classically trained as a young child, and joined the Batsheva Dance Company, co-founded by Martha Graham in 1964, at the beginning of the 1990s, soon after the appointment of Ohad Naharin as artistic director. He pioneered the use of the “Gaga” style of dance language, which places an emphasis on improvisatory movements, and whose manifesto champions the making of “body builders with soft spines”.

Eyal still bases her own company’s work on Gaga training. “It is amazing, the best way to find the potential of a dancer to go to extremes, finding their weakness, and strength,” she says. “It is building and killing at the same time.” I am not trying to change the art form. I am doing classical work [but I] go to extremes.

I ask if L-E-V’s work was influenced by the Tel Aviv nightlife scene, in which both Behar and Lichtik were involved, as a producer and DJ respectively. “Yes, it is one element,” she replies. “But there are so many other influences: the weather, art, my kids, the sky . . .” But the tribal element in her pieces was surely obviously connected to the stifling crowds of the clubbing scene? “For me it is natural. It is tribal, because dancing is tribal.” Some dancing was personal and meditative, I say. “Yes, but there are moments [in our work] which are very pure and quiet. It has everything in it.”

Eyal's return to London has a special resonance: earlier this year, she was appointed an associate artist at Sadler's Wells, one of three Israelis (along with Hofesh Shechter and Jasmin Vardimon) out of the 18 associates. Spalding quotes Shechter's explanation for the country's thriving scene: "He says that every day at school, they do Hebrew, they do maths, and then they dance together."

I ask Eyal if the highly charged atmosphere of her homeland contributes to her dance-making, but she underplays it. "It is an amazing and special place. But there are a lot of places that inspire me. Each place has its magic. Its own space, mentality, culture." Can she name any? "No. There are too many places, too many moments."

What was it, finally, that drove her choreography? She returns to the inspiration behind the naming of her company. "I believe that when you dance from inside your heart, you can touch people. Maybe not a lot of people, and maybe not in the same way. But we are all looking for the same things. We want to love, and we want to be loved. We want to make connections."

It was ironic, I say, that her work talked so intensely of miscommunication and disconnection. "Yes, I understand. I agree," she replies. A pause. "We are all full of conflict

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2018. All rights reserved.