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Photo by: NAAMA NOAH

Feathered friends

By ORI J. LENKINSKI
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Sharon Vazana takes a flight of fancy with her latest piece, 'High.'

If we were birds, instead of standing casually with one elbow on the bar, grinning over at his pursuit, a male on the prowl would fluff up his feathers and sing his fanciest songs. If we were birds, the female would hang back, barely interested if at all, as the male rolled out his best moves. If we were birds, our lust or longing for companionship would be expressed in colorful, shape-changing bursts of ecstasy.

Birds had never much interested choreographer Sharon Vazana – until recently. Avian mating rituals largely inspired her newest work *High*, which will premiere this Saturday night at Warehouse 2 in Jaffa.

High was originally commissioned as part of the Katamon Dance Group's initiative *From Jaffa to Agrippas*, a site-specific dance festival in the Mahaneh Yehuda market in Jerusalem. Following the Jerusalem performances, Vazana and dancers returned to the studio to revise the work.

"I looked at the market," explains Vazana outside the studio where she rehearses in central Tel Aviv.

"During the day it's a market, but at night it turns into something completely different. There is a whole scene that happens there in the evening. I wanted to establish a collaboration between dance and that nightlife. I started to think about what nightlife is for me. What do we look for when we go out? Do we want to be seen, to be loved, to get attention?"

Around the same time as Vazana was asking these questions, she came across a BBC documentary about paradise birds.

"There are 12 or 13 species of them living in the rain forest. When they court one another, the male bird goes through a complete metamorphosis," she says.

At this point, Vazana stands up to demonstrate the jumping movements of one particular bird when in pursuit of a female. "He turns from a bird into a rectangle of turquoise feather. He doesn't even look like a bird anymore," she says.

Vazana immediately recognized a parallel between the elaborate courting rituals of birds and of humans.

High begins with a solo danced by the beguiling Tamar Sonn. The traces of avian habits are visible on Sonn's body as she deftly forges her way through the space. Part bird and part nymph, Sonn takes on the role of the pursuer, wooing, intimidating and luring her mate. Some minutes later, Sonn is joined by Ron Matalon, whose long frame encompasses and complements that of Sonn's. Here, Sagi Zoref's bass-heavy beats kick in, transporting the dancers from the rain forest to a sweaty nightclub. A power struggle ensues in which the line between bodies blurs and stretches. As the piece comes to a close, Matalon hoists Sonn into the air and carries her off into the darkness.

With *High*, Vazana once again affirms her reputation as a powerful female artist. One is struck by the "male"

With High, Vazana once again affirms her perspective as a powerful female artist. Sonn is clearly the male bird and Matalon her conquest.

“I didn’t consciously make the decision to reverse the gender roles,” says Vazana. “I see a connection between this work and the first solo I made in Israel, Red Fields, where the woman is also putting on the show. In High, Tamar is seducing; she is showing herself. It’s a very challenging role for her because it is very different from who she is in real life. For me, also, this piece represents something that is very far from who I am in my daily life. But I think that is what we search for when we go out at night, to slough off our boring daily routines and lift ourselves up off the ground. We want to be carried away.”

High will share the stage with Vazana’s duet Transparent Borders and an excerpt from Yasmien Godder’s Hall, which will be performed by students of the Maslul Professional Dance Program.

‘High’ will premiere on Saturday at 9 p.m. at Warehouse 2. For more information, visit www.choreographer.org.il.



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