

Hillel Kogan & Drôles de Dames
present



WE LOVE ARABS

Text & choreography
Hillel Kogan

Dancers
Adi Boutsros
and **Hillel Kogan**

Lighting: **Amir Castro**
Music: **Kazem Alsafer, W.A. Mozart**
Artistic Advisors: **Inbal Yaacobi**
and **Rotem Tashach**



WE LOVE ARABS

is the comical story of a Jewish choreographer who needs an Arab dancer to create a show that carries a message of coexistence and peace. An (successful) endeavour that demolishes the wall of prejudice, and an examination of everyday behaviour that is executed with humour and subtlety. This show is as rare as it is necessary: intelligent, well thought-out, funny and laconic.

Nevertheless essential are his funny and concise view of political and his artistic research.

THE SHOW

We Love Arabs opens on the silhouette of a lone man swathed in light and shade. It is Hillel Kogan himself. He is standing on one foot in a meditative posture, staring at nothing. As the light intensifies, the atmosphere of his chiaroscuro meditation dissolves and Kogan begins to roam the stage, preoccupied by an activity that we soon grasp as being dance. We do not know if he is portraying a teacher addressing an imaginary class, a lecturer talking about the aesthetics of dance, or a dancer who, lost in the forest of the dogmas and jargon of his art, lets his subconscious run free whilst trying out choreographic movements as though looking for the right words: *"find a way to connect your body to the space around it, and let the space find a way to connect itself to you [...] sometimes I press against the space, sometimes space presses against me. Sometimes it shows resistance; sometimes I sense the space is positive; sometimes it is negative... The negative spaces are not mine. I sense that those spaces belong to an Arab..."*.

In the place of an apparently controversial declaration, these words establish the metaphorical foundation upon which the show is constructed.

Kogan thus needs an Arab dancer to re-establish his spatial harmony and to remedy the negativity that he thinks he experienced. He invites his student and friend Adi Boutrous to join him on stage and dance with him.

As the corrosively funny parody of choreographic clichés and ethnic stereotypes unfolds, Kogan, in the role of self-glorified creator, finds himself trapped by the same misled ideas that he is trying to combat.

"They might think that you're the Jew and I'm the Arab", he says, annoyed, to the partner he's hiring...

Boutrous : *What have you written on my forehead?*

Hillel : *Well you see, it's so people don't get confuse. You see, you've given me a star of David, so I've given you an Islamic cross. This way they know.*

Boutrous : *Oh ok. But err... I'm a Christian.*

Hillel : *What?*



Hillel Kogan

Kogan is tirelessly engaged as a universal artist: dancer, actor, creator, dramatist. Between 2005 and 2016, on the invitation of Ohan Naharin, he directed the rehearsals of the Batsheva Dance Company. He also assists Naharin in Israël and worldwide in the direction of The Batsheva Ensemble.. He is teaching "Gaga", a language of the movement developed by Ohad Naharin through years and who is applied in practical and current daily by the members of the Batsheva Dance Company.

In 2009 he won the prestigious Israeli prize « Teva » in the dancer category.

In 2010 he won the Yair Shapira for his work in the domain of Israeli dance, as choreographer, dancer, and teacher.

In 2013 He was awarded the title of « Distinguished Creator » by the Circle of Israeli Dance Critics for his work *"We Love Arabs"*.

In 2015 Hillel was named artistic director of the Israeli Dance Festival « Curtain Up ».

"Pretzle" (1999). Best Young Choreographer Award. Toured Israel and Portugal.

"Tormenta, Beringela e Harmonia" (1999) created for the National Ballet of Portugal.

"Welcome To Heaven" (2003) created at the Almada dance festival, Portugal.

"The Afternoon of Adolf" (2006). Hommage to *"L'après-midi d'un Faune"* by Nijinsky.

"After the Bolero" (2007). Creation at the Curtain Up Festival, Tel Aviv.

"Everything" (2008). Creation at the Curtain Up Festival, Tel Aviv.

"Rite of spring" (2011). Creation at « Tmuna Theater » Tel Aviv.

"Obscene Gesture" (2012). Creation at the Curtain Up Festival, Tel Aviv.

"We Love Arabs" (2013). Première: 2013 Intimadance Festival , Tmuna Theatre, Tel Aviv.

Hillel Kogan is a prolific and militant artist of innumerable talents. For him, dance is a philosophy which teaches unforgettable lessons about humour and world view. This play is the result of an independent, militant, and beneficially provocative journey.

BIOGRAPHIES

Adi Boutrous

Born in 1989 in Beer-Sheva, Israel. Boutrous graduated in 2012 from the Tel Aviv "Masloul" Dance Academy, where he studied modern and contemporary dance.

After his studies he worked as a dancer with Israeli choreographers such as Iris Erez, Dana Ruttenberg, Shlomi Twizer, Edmond Rousseau, Bosmat Nussan amongst others.

He created his own choreographic performances for diverse events in the Israeli independent dance scene. In 2013 he won the first prize for young choreographers "Shades in Dance" in Tel Aviv.

He began to collaborate with Hillel Kogan as a dancer, in February 2013.



We Love Arabs

stretching the limbs of satire

Mission impossible

The next day, sitting on the other side of our café table, the Israeli choreographer Hillel Kogan, known for being the assistant of the renowned Ohad Naharin and a central figure of the Batsheva Dance Company of Tel-Aviv, smiles warmly when we confess that we were sucker-punched: *"Yes, we find it fun to counter expectations. The title of course plays on a cliché, it's ironic."* It is therefore perfectly suited to this parodic farce, a gem of self-deprecation that tackles, with a heavy wink, the hackneyed springs of political art, of colonial paternalism, but also the funniest attitudes of the choreographic scene (lexical folklore, poetic verve, etc). For *We Love Arabs* is a sort of docu-trickster. It is a masterpiece that depicts the process of creating a rotten show.

We follow, on the stage, the rehearsals of the worst kitsch-militant choreography that an artist can imagine about the coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. A bit like as if Bruno Vandelli (the jury member of the late Popstars) had awkwardly transposed the history of this endless conflict for M6. In the role of the Israeli choreographer - a sort of direct descendant of Bouvard and Pecuchet - Hillel Kogan himself. Or rather a maliciously grotesque version of himself, who states that he is *"left wing, right"*, that he reads *"Ha'aaretz, all the lefty newspapers"* and explains to the audience he wants to create a work about "identity" and "common space", to be performed over three days in the desert, with tents installed for the spectators. And so he must hire an Arab dancer to play the role of the Arab - which, we learn in the play, is an almost impossible mission. *"That, that's true", says the "real" Hillel Kogan at the café. Adi Boutrous is the only Israeli Arab dancer I know. Look, in fifty years of history at the Batsheva, there has not been a single one ..."*

Relation infantilisante

As for Adi Boutrous, he explains, smiling: *"And it also amused us to play with the fact that I do not fit the "typical" Arab image. I'm quite white, I have light coloured eyes, I'm not called Mohammed, I am a Christian, my girlfriend is Jewish... and all that upsets the plans and prejudices of the character played by Hillel on stage, who does not want the audience to get them mixed up."* Extract. Hillel has asked Adi to do an improvisation and praises his performance: *"Good ! Good ! That freaked me out, I was transported, I was right there with you in your village. Where is your village, Adi ? - Tel-Aviv..."*

And it is a magnificent comedic mechanism to see, during an hour, the "fake" Hillel Kogan revelling in the evocation of "sharing", of "coexistence, choreographically speaking," of "the authenticity of movement," and reproduce without even noticing, all the quirks of imperialism, by imposing on his dancer a blandly infantilizing hierarchical relationship, never letting him speak and forcing him to change his gestures. Hence we admire this hilarious Narcissus as he revels in his genius, delighting in his findings of garish symbols and over-the-top romantic emphasis. *"So now I would like to talk of responsibility. And for this, I would like to use hummus as a choreographic texture, which has a circular motion, fluid, liquid... A texture that can enable the liquidity of identities..."* says the choreographer on stage, after having suggested to Adi they do a knife and fork duet (Hillel gets the fork, obviously). One begins to hope for the worst, and will not be disappointed when Hillel crosses, hand in hand with Adi, the "river" (the barrier between stage and room), then dips the pita bread in hummus and dabs it on audience member's tongues to seal the sacred union with "otherness".

A Heroic-comical Role

It's inevitable, there were some mistakes, since its creation in 2013 (but shown for the first time in France, at the Manufacture of Avignon, in the Off Festival). Both artists confirm they have heard "political" reservations of some spectators obviously very conscious of victimization and not so sensitive to satire, lamenting that on stage, the role of the Arab does not resist, does not rebel, only says three sentences. *"This is of course the opposite of what Adi is in real life,"* says Hillel. *"But on set, Adi behaves like a good student, aware however of the craziness of his employer."* And at the same time, it is very faithful to the condition of Israel's Arab minority, who are not given a platform," retorts Adi. The whole point of this piece, a thousand times more effective than the reshaped politically correct speeches that are spewed out in theatres, relies therefore on an irony of rare finesse with which the (true) Hillel Kogan was able to play.

Israeli audiences have been accustomed for many years to interpreting Hillel Kogan's choreographies vigilantly. This forty year old son of Russian immigrants, an avid reader of the writings of Edward Said on Orientalism, has previously brought attention to himself as a choreographer with his *Rite of Spring*, in particular. A rewriting of the historic ballet with five-and-dime stereotypes: *"In my plays, I like talking about dance as a sociological milieu, and to place myself both in a naive and a distanced relationship with clichés,"* says this pedagogue dancer who now wants to slow down with Batsheva in order to consecrate more time to his own projects. To construct this heroic-comical role, the choreographer is part of a caricature of himself, but also different "masters" he has encountered during his performing career. Quebec's Marie Chouinard (present at the same time in the In Festival), for example, or, the inescapable Ohad Naharin, the very feline director of the Batsheva Dance Company - who of course recognized himself in the play when the

saw it in Tel Aviv... *"But Ohad likes to laugh at himself. When on stage, I say to Adi: "Do not show me what dancer you are, show me the animal you are, OK?" that is pure Ohad Naharin... But it's an inside joke."*

Réflexes racistes

The great quality of the play - the only good farce that we now know about the choreographic profession - is that the speech is credible enough, and the choreography sufficiently polished, to allow us to constantly lose ourselves between first, second and umpteenth degree. Far from the tyrannical characters that pop culture has given to choreographers, the role of Kogan shines by its ambiguities. Who can say that the author makes fun of his rhetoric when he explains with ingrating bliss that *"space has fun with you, Adi"*? Because, yes, the real Hillel admits, *"It's quite the kind of sentence that I can say seriously during a class to explain the quality of a movement. Even if I like to find it ridiculous."*

A polemical tract against the self-satisfied lyrical flights of political art, indictment against the most latent racist reflexes, *We Love Arabs* is hence also a quirky auto fiction, a conspirational undertaking. *"This is a play born of the sentiment of shame, of guilt, that I can feel as a Jew, left wing, too lazy, too selfish to militate as I should, no doubt. I wanted to poke fun at that."* So we hope to see this exciting choreographer tour France, a choreographer we will risk qualifying, because of his artistry with irony, as the Flaubert of dance. At the risk of it being our turn to wallow in clichés. But after all, do we always want to avoid them?

MOUVEMENT - Cathy Blisson

"Two radical and radically different forms – deconstructs the mechanisms and subconsciousness of the Israeli-Arab conflict with a humour as lapidary as it is subtle. Playing with the words and the gestures that betray the hidden face of speech, Adeline Rosenstein and Hillel Kogan deliver two critical standpoints with faultless accuracy. He reveals in his manner the persistence of assumptions that permeate our thinking systems. Be they paved with good intentions."

CULTURE BOX - Sophie Jouve

"*We Love Arabs*, is the well-deserved buzz of Avignon's 'Off'. It's one of those shows you will not forget."

LA PROVENCE

"A courageous show; exhilarating and corrosive, which must have raised some hackles in Israel. Our opinion: Excellent !"

LE MONDE - Rosita Boisseau

"Faced with Adi Boutrous who is perfect as the almost mute but highly shrewd character, the pedagogue and choreographer discovered in Israel waves a new fun-dance-political banner which is well on its way for touring."

LE POINT

"« *I'm afraid of the Arab. But it's an artistic fear.* » The Israeli choreographer Hillel Kogan is bitingly ironic and toys with clichés in his new creation that has made a buzz in Avignon."

MARIANNE

"When it comes to perfection, *We Love Arabs* also deserves an ovation. This work will remain as one of the high points of the 'Off' section of 2016."

RUE DU THÉÂTRE - Cécile Strouk

"*We Love Arabs* - Art as a bridge.

It's simple, touching. It makes one dream of a better world. Where art, used as a bridge, would be the source of this improvement."

SCÈNE WEB - Stéphane Capron

"An act of love against hate.

Using humour as a weapon of positive construction, this show is invigorating in its generosity. It states simple things; it carries a humanist and political message. This beacon of hope of a show is a salutary shock."

TÉLÉRAMA - Fabienne Pascaud

"Over the course of a subtle hour, we see an artist cleverly mock himself and attempt to approach the Other despite his subconscious shackles, despite his ignorance. It's generous and barbed in a dark place, beyond borders that the two dancers slowly succeed in demolishing, eliminating all possible walls between their communities."

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2016

NOVEMBER 16 th & 17 th	THEATER IM PFALZBAU	LUDWISHAFFEN (All.)
NOVEMBER 18 th & 19 th	Le Monfort théâtre	PARIS (75)
NOVEMBER 23 th	KULTURZENTRUM TEMPEL	KARLSRUHE (All.)


2017

JANUARY 13 th & 14 th	LA FILATURE - SCÈNE NATIONALE	MULHOUSE (68)
JANUARY 19 th , 20 th & 21 th	TEATRO DI RIFREDI	FIRENZE (It.)
JANUARY 26 th & 27 th	THÉÂTRE ALIBI	BASTIA (2B)
JANUARY 28 th & 29 th	THÉÂTRE SÉNART - SCÈNE NATIONALE	LIEUSAIN (77)
MARCH 8 th & 9 th	THÉÂTRE SÉVELIN 36	LAUSANNE (Ch)
APRIL 6 th	CHÂTEAUVALLON - SCÈNE NATIONALE	OLLIOULES (83)
SEPTEMBER	Théâtre du Rond-Point	PARIS (75)

DdD

info@dddames.eu
+33 (0)1 53 61 16 76
38, rue Dunois - 75013 Paris

www.dddames.eu

 [dddames.eu](https://www.facebook.com/dddames.eu)

Louisa Temal, Christine Huet, Laurence Fabre,
Daphné de Reyer et Noëlle Géranton-Barthélémy

