

## Carolyn Dorfman Dance Premieres Ambitious ‘Waves’

By: ROBERT JOHNSON | March 18, 2015



Sometimes an article of clothing is more than just a fashion accessory, or a wrap to keep you warm. In two dances by Carolyn Dorfman, coats and jackets have a symbolic value that exceeds their usefulness in inclement weather. The choreographer’s newly rebranded company, [Carolyn Dorfman Dance](#), performed at the [New Jersey Performing Arts Center](#)’s Victoria Theater on Friday as part of the recurring Jersey Moves! Festival of Dance. Before the premiere of Dorfman’s “Waves,” a playful composition that prompted exchanges with both the onstage musicians and the gala audience, Dorfman revisited two of her favorite pieces.

In “Under My Skin,” the characters reveal their restless state of mind by peeling off their jackets and wrestling them back on. It seems unlikely that these two — Katlyn Waldo and Louie Marin — will be able to stop fussing long enough to get to know each other. But eventually they do, and then his jacket proves large enough to shelter both of them.

The camelhair coat that Waldo dons at the start of “Mayne Mentshn,” along with a crumpled fedora, is more portentous. Dorfman could have assigned this solo to a male dancer, but Waldo is a stand-in for the choreographer herself, a loving daughter who imaginatively climbs into her father’s skin. Raising her

hands to heaven, or falling into the groove of Greg Wall’s Klezmer score, Waldo is also Dorfman’s connection to the life of European Jewry before the Holocaust. We see these ancestors at the dinner table flipping through the pages of an imaginary book, turning to one another with inquiring gestures or overcome with exhaustion. Wall’s music is like a heartbeat; and its lilting rhythm binds these individuals together.

The music for “Waves” is quite different. It represents a departure and a challenge — but Dorfman is eager to meet her musical collaborators on level ground. They’re an unconventional team that includes Jesse Reagen Mann on cello and vocals; Daphna Mor playing the recorder; and a beat-boxer, Pete List. Perhaps the music and dancing aren’t as tightly synchronized as Waldo and her shadow, which is cast on the backdrop. But the shadow hints at Dorfman’s aspirations. Curving smoothly or suddenly shivering, Waldo’s movements echo the cello’s sounds.

The encounter between Brandon Jones and the beat boxer is more of a dialog, with the dancer skittering and suddenly dropping, or punching the air in response to List’s cartoonish effects. The recorder is a wind instrument, and so Dorfman has her dancers huff, puff and blow one another away. In the ingenious ensemble sections, the dancers press against one another to form snaky lines that roll over (like waves) and regroup. The final image of this piece shows the dancers sliding toward us, like a wave’s last gasp — the surf that rushes up the beach.

But not before the public gets to dance! For some the highlight of this piece will be the choir section where “team leaders” emerge to coach the audience in simple movement phrases, which are then woven together. “Waves” is a community that leaves no one behind.