

# THE DAILEY GAZETTE

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## DORFMAN, KAHAN COLLABORATION BEARS EMOTIONALLY CHARGED FRUIT

Choreographer, musician weave Holocaust tales  
By Wendy Liberatore

TIVOLI — Choreographer Carolyn Dorfman has found an artistic soul mate in folk singer/songwriter Bente Kahan. Together, they are creating works that are charged — emotionally and intellectually. And it's impossible not to be indifferent to their subject, the Holocaust.

Their first collaboration, "Cat's Cradle," was shown over the weekend at Kaatsbaan International Center for Dance. Performed by Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company, the work distills the horrors of Theresienstadt, the Czech ghetto that was held up by the Nazis as a model camp. There, the prisoners were expected to perform operas and cabarets for visiting dignitaries. And at the end of the day, the Nazis could say, "see, everyone is being treated well."

Of course, it was a cruel ruse. The more than 100,000 people sent to Theresienstadt either died of hunger or disease or were sent to Auschwitz for extermination. Only a few survived.

Kahan's songs, which were written by the Jews and gypsies in the ghetto, were double-edged. Some were meant to entertain, others spoke of the mundane. Yet they were all masks for their desperation.

Kahan's rich, tender renderings mingled fear with hope, despair with a communal caring.

With those songs as the foundation, Dorfman, whose parents were survivors of the Holocaust, made plain Kahan's undercurrent of sadness with unflinching tableaux — a woman caught in a snare, bodies collapsing after chores and cheery vaudevillian skits that ended by dropping dead.

### KNITTING YARNS

The vignettes are knit together with spools of yarn. Three women, Mica Bernas, Jacqueline Dumas and Sarah Wagner, prayerfully wind up their wool into balls, as if wrapping up their lives. They toss them to each other, as in play, but in the end the balls are stuffed in their mouths. They then throw them in the air, letting go of hope. And then they hug and sway in a silent resignation to their fate.

In another scene, strands of yarn are stretched from one end of stage to the other, creating boundaries from which the dancers try to duck. Kyla Barkin is entrapped in what looks like a massive cat's cradle. Men surround her and bind her arms and legs tightly. Surrendered, she is carried off.

In the end, the three women once again neatly wrap up their spools. A cart of piled bodies is pushed away as Kahan sings a nursery rhyme. It is a startling image that seared the mind's eye.

"Cat's Cradle" is a compelling tour de force. It's a reminder that war and the injustice it inflicts are beyond tragic. It also leaves one to lament and question if the human race will ever end the madness.

Kahan took center stage for two musical interludes. With just her guitar and a spotlight, she stood and sang other songs from her "Voice of Theresienstadt" album. The lyrics, especially the ones that spoke of hungry and fevered children, were so moving that everyone, including Kahan, teared up.

Some of these songs will be reserved for Dorfman and Kahan's next collaboration, "Echoes." Let's hope it comes to a nearby theater.