

THE DAILY GAZETTE

Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company

to Commemorate Jewish Legacy

by LAUREN STOKES, EDITOR EMERITUS | January 28, 2009



Suzanne Winter '10 is bringing the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company to campus this weekend with the help of a Cooper Grant. The Legacy Project, as the dance program is called, is a celebration of the Jewish Diaspora through dance, and is coming to Swarthmore in the same week as World Holocaust Remembrance day on January 27th.

Carolyn Dorfman is a child of Holocaust survivors, and Winter explained that she was attracted by the “intense connection [Dorfman] feels to her personal heritage in the art that she creates... the New York Times described it as ‘the dance equivalent of a cherished book of family photographs,’ and her work draws on themes of family, survival, togetherness, and community.”

The Carolyn Dorfman company is based in New Jersey, which is where Winter discovered her work, but “Sharon Friedler and Sally Hess [of the Dance Department] have also both met her in Poland... she does a lot of work in traditionally Jewish areas and a lot of international work.”

The performance will be in LPAC at 8 PM on Friday evening, and will last 90 minutes and feature four different dances. “Odisea” is about “the first Jews to come to the Americas, specifically Brazil,” explained Winter, “but if you didn’t know that, it also is applicable to anyone being displaced from their homeland.”

Winter was also attracted by the mix of “concrete, story-telling dances” and “very abstract dances.” One particularly exciting dance features a large metal wheel. “That’s the image on the posters... it could be a very threatening metal thing, out to get everyone, but when the dancers work together, the wheel stays upright and nobody gets hurt.”

That said, “[Dorfman] said that in watching her daughters grow up, she realized they would not understand their culture if all they heard about was death, so there are also more joyful dances.” One is the “Kletzmer Sketch,” about a Jewish family that comes to America, and another is called “Cat’s Cradle,” which represents the story of how Dorfman’s family survived.

“[Dorfman’s] mother and her aunts were in a concentration camp and were not killed because they could knit... they could knit sweaters for the Nazis.” Winter continued, “In that dance, three women start out with balls of yarn, and then the strings come out to start to connect people all across the stage... it’s a really cool metaphor for how dependent everybody is on everybody else.”

In addition to the Friday evening performance, Dorfman will also be giving a lecture in the Scheuer Room on Thursday about “creating art as a child of survivors” and a master class at 4:30 on Thursday. Winter encouraged anyone to attend the master class. “They usually take place before the performance... you get a connection with the performers and the material which carries through into the performance, so it’s great for people who want to understand what’s going on on a fundamental level.”

The company has eleven dancers, and although “[Dorfman] herself is an incredible dancer,” she will not be dancing in the performance, although she will in the master class, another perk of attendance.