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[Bridge: Choreographic Dialogues 2009 Brings L.A. to Israel](#)

Posted on 19 August 2009 by Deborah Friedes Galili



Sheetal Gandhi's workshop group. Photo by Tully Chen.

Sheetal Gandhi watched attentively as three pairs of her students transformed the material she had taught into duets. The dancers chatted with each other in Hebrew, occasionally asking their teacher questions in English. Yet there were other unfamiliar sounds peppering their speech: *bols*, syllables from an Indian drum and dance language. The dancers' lilting chants created a mesmerizing rhythmic pulse for their kathak-influenced movement.

Meanwhile, in another studio at the Suzanne Dellal Center, Jackie Lopez – aka Miss Funk – was introducing her students to wack’n, one genre of hip-hop. Starting off slowly, she layered arm gestures onto a full-bodied rocking action, sped up the movement, and played even more with the coordination. After reviewing a popping phrase and moving onto a house combination, she turned to the dancers. “I don’t want professional house dancers,” she told them. “I just want you to feel something new.”

Trying something new is the driving force behind Bridge: Choreographic Dialogues, a unique summer workshop which creates links between the Israeli and American dance scenes. Claudio Kogon, deputy director of the Suzanne Dellal Center, elaborated, “The point of this program is to bring people who have a unique background, to bring choreographers that could offer people here in Israel something different.” While the Israeli dancers who participated in this workshop had years of experience in contemporary dance, most of them had little contact with either Sheetal’s kathak-flavored fusion of dance or Jackie’s rich hip-hop vocabulary. They came, as Jackie hoped, to feel something new.



Jackie Lopez’s workshop group. Photo by Tully Chen.

Initiated by Miki Yerushalmi and directed by Barak Marshall, Bridge: Choreographic Dialogues is an Education Exchange Project of the Los Angeles/Tel Aviv Partnership. The project has received support from organizations in both communities, most notably the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, UCLA’s Center for Intercultural Performance, and the Suzanne Dellal Center. To bridge the gap between choreographers living thousands of miles apart – and to bridge the gap between their respective cultures – this program has been held both in Los Angeles and in Tel Aviv.

This is the third year that Tel Aviv has hosted Bridge: Choreographic Dialogues, and both Sheetal and Jackie traveled from L.A. to teach and create short works on Israeli dancers from August 2-14. Barak, who is also based in L.A. for part of the year, flew in to teach a week-long repertory workshop with excerpts from *Monger* and material from *Rooster*, which will be premiered this fall in Tel Aviv. The program also featured a choreography workshop with renowned New York-based choreographer Shen Wei. Jay Auguen’s ballet classes and Noemi Perlov’s contemporary classes rounded out the intensive’s schedule.



Sheetal Gandhi. Photo by Tully Chen.

For Sheetal, who recently received her MFA from UCLA’s World Arts and Cultures department, the workshop has been an opportunity to explore how she can teach her unique style of movement. Sheetal calls herself an “intercultural, interdisciplinary artist and choreographer,” and indeed, her work is influenced by diverse forms including kathak, jazz, modern dance, and West African dance. Her creative choreography blends the complex rhythms, strikingly percussive feet, and fluid, almost calligraphic arm and hand motions of kathak with more contemporary turns, jumps, floorwork, and choreographic motifs.



Sheetal Gandhi's workshop group. Photo by Tully Chen.

Speaking about kathak dance, which she has studied in India in Kumudini Lakhia's Kadamb School and in L.A. with Anjani Ambegaokar, Sheetal remarks, "I use kathak as a way to teach the things that I do – which is the gestural language, focus, presence, rhythm, timing, musicality, and footwork. So I would never claim to teach a pure kathak class, but I use it as a springboard." Sheetal was excited to share her knowledge of kathak dance with the students in her Bridge: Choreographic Dialogues workshop class. "I love to pass it on," she says. "It's a form that otherwise people wouldn't have any exposure to."



Jackie Lopez. Photo by Tully Chen.

Likewise, Jackie was eager to educate Israeli contemporary dancers about what was for them an unfamiliar dance style. Jackie is steeped in the hip-hop culture of L.A., where she has won several house battles, and she has worked with the groundbreaking hip-hop artist Rennie Harris. "I just love it so much, and it's my job to pass it on so this hip-hop culture never dies," she explains.

While studying for her bachelor's degree in UCLA's World Arts and Culture, Jackie went deeper into her research of hip-hop dance. Her approach to teaching reflects what she learned, from the history of hip-hop's origins to the array of subgenres within hip-hop dance. During the workshop, Jackie's students found video clips of different hip-hop legends online, and she says proudly, "They come back [to the studio], and they look better, because they understand it . . . now they're able to connect to it in their own way, and it comes more naturally."



Jackie Lopez's workshop group. Photo by Tully Chen.

At the final showing for the entire workshop last Friday, both Sheetal and Jackie's students demonstrated not only their understanding of this new material but also their enjoyment. Delighted smiles often crept onto Sheetal's students faces as their fluid arms traced patterns through the air. When Jackie's class took the stage, they exuded enthusiasm for the energetic, fast-paced movement.

Both the teachers and the students alike are looking forward to continuing these dialogues with each other and with these genres of dancing. Jackie said that several of the dancers in her workshop will be taking hip-hop classes this year, and she herself hopes to return to Israel in the future. "All I crave is to maybe come back and keep making it grow," Jackie reveals. "I can tell the students now after this, I hope you guys start practicing so if I come back next year, I'll see stronger dancers."

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3 Comments For This Post

1. [Judy Mitoma](#) Says:

[August 19th, 2009 at 2:39 pm](#)

Sounds like a great convergence of artists and personalities, cultures and genres. Knowing that there is such great creativity and talent in the field of dance in Israel, it encouraging to see how you open your doors to young artists like Jackie and Sheetal-

2. [Deborah Friedes](#) Says:

[August 29th, 2009 at 5:59 pm](#)

Hi Judy,

Thanks for commenting! Yes, the dancers here were very receptive to Sheetal and Jackie, and it was also great for me to see this exchange between artists and cultures!

3. [Nehara Kalev](#) Says:

[September 1st, 2009 at 5:52 pm](#)

Thank you for letting us into the process by posting this web page. I hope this exchange of dialogues continues for many years to come.
Nehara Kalev

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