

► Israeli theater group
rides wave of storytelling in
maritime drama

SEA TO BELIEVE

By Jiang Yuxia

The two stories Israeli director

Ruth Kanner tells in *At Sea* are simple yet familiar at their core in the humanity they exude. The first centers on a young couple discovering their first love on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, while the other follows the plight of a man who drowns after being pushed by his friends to swim in the Mediterranean Sea.

With her creative theater storytelling techniques and tense physical movements, the director succeeds in framing the compelling stories written in literary texts as primal human struggles of love and death in a powerful 90-minute drama performed by the Ruth Kanner Theatre Group.

Embracing the art of storytelling, a practice

Kanner has been devoted to since the early 1980s, she presents an explicit interpretation of the texts written by late Israeli writer S. Yizhar, whose namesake novel the play is based upon.

The subtle texts, which largely are reflections of the human soul, set against the idyllic backdrop of

Israel's coast, remain true to their literary form and avoid being dramatically embellished.

Actors make up more than half the number of characters in the play, meaning the cast takes turns to narrate the stories rather than acting them all out. Physical movements accompany narration sporadically throughout the production.

"Drama, most of the time, has one point of view, but a story can be told by different storytellers. When you deal with storytelling, you always deal with different points of view," said Kanner of the play, which will appear at the Third Nanluoguoxiang Theater Festival in addition to a having three-show run at Beijing's Penghao Theater from today through to Saturday.

Storytelling can open audiences' minds, she added, saying it is a "strong way of keeping in touch with your roots, both culturally and personally."

"If each person sees a story from a totally different perspective, each person sees a different 'truth' and can develop greater tolerance for others," she said.

Chinese drama director Zhang Ziyi, who viewed the troupe's rehearsal last year in Tel Aviv, stressed that the essence of the story matters "far more than how it's told."

"When [Kanner] tells the stories of inner conflicts among characters, she is not focusing on dramatic elements. Instead, she uses other methods including narration or physical movements, thus bringing out conflicts hidden in the stories or by the narrators," Zhang said.

Since Kanner's namesake troupe formed in 1998, her efforts in adapting literary texts about traditional Jewish culture to the stage have offered her opportunities to explore theatrical limits, making her group one of the most popular troupes in Tel Aviv.

"I've seen a lot of pretending on stage. To me, it's bull****. The rule in our theater is to never imitate. When you ask yourself actively how should I represent this image on stage, you have to ask questions about the essentials," Kanner explained.

What *At Sea* lacks in drama, it makes up for with graphic visual imagery on stage. To deliver stories in a raw, engaging manner, actors bring their personal feelings and experiences into the performance.

The primary principle of adopting the storytelling technique, noted the director, is to stay true to the plot.

The sea, the central theme within both stories, is actually depicted as a metaphor. Violent struggles to avoid drowning are actually struggles with social pressures, aptly represented by other actors on stage.

"The theatrical interpretation is about people and the way a person in life struggles against others," Kanner explained of the play, which will be shown in English and Hebrew with Chinese subtitles.

When: 7:30 pm, June 28-29/2:30 pm, June 30

Where: 35 Dongmianhua Hutong, Jiaodaokou Nandajie, Dongcheng district

Admission: 40-80 yuan

Contact: 6400-6472

At Sea is based on the namesake book by master of Hebrew prose S. Yizhar. Photo: Courtesy of the Ruth Kanner Theatre Group

What's on

"Artists of the Year" @ Today Art Museum

A group exhibition featuring four artists including photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia, painter Ye Yongqing, sculptor Xiang Jing and multimedia artist Liu Wei at Today Art Museum highlights their artworks that helped them clinch this year's Martell Artists of the Year awards.

Among the most anticipated works are the photographs by American diCorcia, who specializes in portraits, and Liu, whose sculpture of a city made of dog chew toys titled *Love it! Bite it!* will be on display. The art works by the other two artists are also on display



Liu Wei with his sculpture Love it! Bite it! Photo: Courtesy of Today Art Museum

at the space.

When: Until July 9

Where: Today Art Museum, 2/F, No. 2 Exhibition Hall, 32 Baiziwang

Road, Chaoyang district

Admission: Free

Contact: 5876-0600/www.todayart-museum.com

"Thinking Thangka" @ Shengshi Sky Museum

This new exhibition at the 798 Art Zone showcases well-known thangka paintings by Tibetan artists. Each painting is the result of months of hard work and meticulous brush strokes.

When: Until July 10

Where: Shengshi Sky Museum, 798 Art Zone, 4 Jiuxianqiao Road, Chaoyang district

Admission: Free

Contact: 5130-5588

"Mo Di 2012" @ Line Gallery

The exhibition at Line Gallery showcases artist Mo Di's latest

paintings. The artist said it is always difficult for her to face her own paintings, every one of which symbolizes progress in her artistic journey through life. Her paintings never fail to remind viewers about different life philosophies, which are portrayed on the canvas.

When: Until June 30

Where: Line Gallery, 798 Art Zone, 4 Jiuxianqiao Road

Admission: Free

Contact: 5978-9916

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