

Ruth Kanner presents...

Helen Kave
11/02/2006 12:43

'*A Local Tale*,' a collection of some of the author/director's plays, forms 'a map of our society.'

When she thought about it, and the more she thought about it, auteur director Ruth Kanner realized that "Looking back on all the plays I'd done, I discovered that for eight years we've been exploring this attribute, this thing called 'Israelishness' and this place; and while each play is independent, together they form a map of our society." Until November 11, some of these plays, collectively called *A Local Tale*, will be at Varda Studio in the Suzanne Dellal Center, together with two illustrated encounters and an exhibition. The plays, all based on stories or novels by the late S. Yizhar - and Kanner is a dyed-in-the-wool Yizhar fan - are *Amos*, *Discovering Elijah*, and *At Sea*. The encounters are *Dionysus* at Dizengoff Center with Tamar Berger and **Story Turns Theater** with Kanner and the Ruth Kanner Theater Group, which performs all the plays. The exhibition by Sivan Weinstein is called "Desk," which traces the design process for *Dionysus*. *Amos*, which won Best Production at the 1999 Acre Festival, is the story of a fieldmouse trapped in a drain pipe. Kanner won Acre again in 2001 with *Discovering Elijah*, the story of a soldier who goes missing during the shattering first days of the brutal 1973 **Yom Kippur War**. *At Sea* is two stories; one is of a drowning and the other of boy-meets-girl first love on the shores of the Kinneret. *Dionysus*, a work Kanner did with a graduating class at **Tel Aviv University**, is based on a story by Berger that traces the history of what is now the city's premier shopping mall. Before the mall, the area was a ramshackle neighborhood called Nordia whose residents were European refugees of the 1930s and '40s. They'd leased their plots from the wealthy Hinawi family of Jaffa and, as the story seems to relate, their several claims were more or less buried with the land as the center rose. In *Story Turns Theater*, Kanner explains the way she works. Both encounters offer staged scenes from the plays as illustration, including some from a story by Orli Castel **Blum** called "The Woman Who Chose Looking for Food." A Kanner production rivets, unsettles, probes. What you see is a totality. The message is in the asking, in the questions that the text, the action, the set and the music animate. So *Dionysus* is about exploitation of the powerless and erasure of the past, "and this is the connection to **Israel**," Kanner explains, "the Zionist idea that there is no past to build on." *Elijah* is about the idiocy and the terror of war, about the threats of annihilation and the loss of humanity. Both *Amos* and the first story of *At Sea* look at survival, but "where *Sea* speaks about the actual worth of life when you're on the verge of losing it," says Kanner, "*Amos* is more a revelation of how things might have been." The second story in *At Sea* speaks to the innocence of first love, a story "that's not easy to tell in today's reality," Kanner actress Tali Kark had said when the play came out in January, adding "Maybe we've lost even the ability for innocence." Kanner, who has a master's degree in directing from Tel Aviv University (**TAU**), has always gone her own way, doing her own work even during the two years she studied in **New York**.

Since 1990, the year she became a senior lecturer in the theater faculty at TAU, Kanner has been developing her own theatrical language in which the verbal, the visual and the auditory have equal weight. What drives her work is the how and why of human behavior, which she interprets through what she calls "the inner workings of movement and the analysis of speech acts." The latter are not what a word says or means but what action it evokes. When it comes to movement, Kanner believes that "There's an animal in all of us. We still have and use traces of animal behavior." She has done research in a discipline called ethology that studies animal behavior. What fascinates her is "not just their behavior but the movement, the gestures, the expressions, down to the tiny nuances that I call the secret manifestations of human behavior." She cites an example of group aggression in *Discovering Elijah* "that is perfectly described in Conrad Lorenz's book *On Aggression*, except that his description talks about a group of chimpanzees." In Kanner's work, process is all and it is ongoing, even after opening night. This goes far toward explaining why a Kanner play always seems right for its time and is frequently invited abroad. *Amos* went to **Tokyo** in 2002, and *Elijah* to **Manhattan** last year. This is perhaps one of the reasons that Kanner and her work keep getting prizes. Apart from the Acre accolades, Kanner won the Landau Prize in 2003 and will be awarded the Rosenblum Prize later this month. The best prize, perhaps, is what Kark, who's been in the company since 1999 has said about working with Kanner: "With every piece we do there are more questions. Each work is a new language with new questions, and it's always a challenge, never ordinary. It's exciting and fascinating and the kind of work I want to do." *Amos: Tonight and tomorrow at 9:30 p.m. At Sea: November 6&7 at 9 p.m. Discovering Elijah: November 9 at 9:30 p.m, 10 & 11 at 9:30 p.m. Dionysus at Dizengoff Center: November 5 at 9 p.m, 7 at 6 p.m; 10 at 12:30 p.m. Story Turns Theater: Today at 12:30 p.m; tomorrow at 7:30 p.m.*