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# 30 Years and a Pandemic Later, Roni Koresh Still Has Hope

## by Darcy Grabenstein

*TikVAH*, celebrating the Koresh Dance Company's 30th anniversary, is the perfect name for a work of art created during the pandemic. Taken from Petah Tikvah, the city in Israel where founder and artistic director Ronen (Roni) Koresh was born, *TikVAH* means "opening for hope" in Hebrew. Due to COVID-19, Koresh said during an audience Q&A, the meaning of hope "took on a whole new level of understanding."

Those waiting inside the Suzanne Roberts Theatre for *TikVAH* to begin were greeted by a trio of films also produced in the past year by Koresh, including *The Elephant Is in the Room*, his visceral response to hate crimes. Another pre-program surprise was a commanding performance by members of the Koresh Youth Ensemble, ages 13-18.

Koresh told the audience that isolation, fear and loneliness are words he uses to describe the experience of the pandemic as portrayed in *TikVAH.* I would add angst, frustration, and grief to the list.

Watching the dancers onstage, I was reliving the lockdown: the choreography, at times gut-wrenching to watch, with dancers' lifeless bodies falling to the floor. The costumes, like my own coronavirus "uniform," drab and loose-fitting. The lighting, similar to how I saw my own quarantined world, is surreal. The music, including sounds reminiscent of a beating heart and ticking clock; and the evocative spoken poetry of Karl Mullen, with repetition of "light at the end of the tunnel" reminding me of the Groundhog Day-like existence of the pandemic.

Known for his collaborations in the dance community, Koresh had invited Yin Yue, artistic director of YY Dance Company, and Raphael Xavier, Philadelphia-based choreographer and alumnus of Rennie Harris Puremovement, to contribute to *TikVAH's* artistic process. They held a series of workshops with the dancers, encouraging them to look at movement from different perspectives.

Melissa Rector, who has been with the company since its inception, captivated me in *Sideways*. The choreography illuminates how our lives were turned sideways during lockdown. Rector has a love-hate relationship with her dance partner, a wooden chair. I can relate; on more than one occasion during Zoom classes my dance partner was a broom. Reminding me of how many of us tried to put a new spin on the day-in, day-out sameness of the pandemic, Rector turns the chair this way and that. In the end, both the chair and Rector are on their sides spooning, a testament to the loneliness of lockdown.

In another piece, the dancers again use chairs, but this time I was disappointed. Here, the chairs are merely props, not partners.

The second half of the show was the light at the end of the tunnel for me, offering much-needed comic relief. Titled "first thirty," these selections were chosen from the company's *first* 30 years. From the plaid-skirted schoolgirls to the clowning, stumbling-down-drunks (although not very PC by today's standards) complete with burp and hiccups, I was thoroughly entertained.

The evening was sprinkled with informal conversations between Koresh and the audience. Earlier, speaking of the pandemic-influenced pieces we were about to see, he shared: "This was never intended to be shown. It was for us."

*TikVAH* was as much about celebrating live dance performance as it was about celebrating Koresh Dance Company's 30th anniversary.

*TikVAH,* Koresh Dance Company, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, Oct. 21–24

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