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Badke(remix) - laGeste & Stereo48 **The Body as a Site of Resistance**

While Palestinian voices resound globally—through protests, social media, and cultural acts—*Badke(remix)* returns to another, older medium of resistance: the rhythm of the feet. In this remake of *Badke* (2013), Amir Sabra and Ata Khatab, together with ten dancers, breathe new life into the dabke.

The room remains dark and silent for a long time. Only the sound of shuffling steps breaks the darkness, as if feet are bracing themselves. Then suddenly a *zaghroua* sounds: the high, trembling cry that in Arab tradition often marks joy, excitement or the beginning of a celebration. Normally heard amid cheers and music, carried by women's voices in collective euphoria, here it sounds alone. In the dark. The tension crawls under my skin.

The lights slowly rise. Ten dancers stand hand in hand in a row, ready to be carried along. The collective consists of Abdallah Damra, Bresa Ayub, Dima Zahran, Hamza Damra, Marah Haj, Mohammed Al Tayeh, Rebecca Kaoud, Rima Baransi, Samer Raya, and Shahd Jabarin. One of them, the *raas*, the head of the line, takes the lead and pulls the group through the space like a powerful locomotive. Still, there is no music, no singing, but the energy is palpable. With stomping feet, rhythmic shuffles, and short vocal outbursts—*hagrat*, or shouts of encouragement like *aywa* and *yalla*—the dabke is summoned to life.

That becomes clear when one of the dancers, Shahd Jabarin, breaks away from the collective and moves to the foreground, leaving behind the traditional dabke structure to explore a broader palette of movement languages. This motif of isolation and individualization repeats throughout the performance, as the soloist continues to touch on various dance styles, from contemporary to breakdance and popping, pushing the boundaries of the genre. *Badke(remix)* thus presents itself not as a traditional dabke, but as a hybrid remix where multiple dance forms blend within a modern theatrical context.

The contrast in *Badke(remix)* extends beyond the choreography; the lighting and sound design also play a crucial dramaturgical role. The lights repeatedly cut out abruptly and flash back on, creating an atmosphere of instability and underlying tension. Parallel to this, the music of Nasser Al-Fares—an influential figure in the contemporary Levantine music scene, known for his virtuoso, rhythmically layered dabke arrangements—undergoes a radical transformation. Whereas his music usually embodies the collective joy and rhythmic cadence of social gatherings, here it deliberately breaks with tradition. Rousing, festive pulses are harshly interrupted by the raw sound of barking dogs and sonic textures that evoke menace, danger, and the unpredictability of life under occupation and violence. In this way, music becomes another vehicle of tension, making tangible the fragile balance between celebration and existential fear.



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The sense of threat intensifies when the music fades and a soundscape emerges that evokes the sensation of hearing underwater. Simultaneously, the choreography slows to a near-hypnotic slow motion, as the dancers transform their movements into silent, disjointed gestures. This gestural language - a startled glance, hands instinctively raised above the head as if sensing the threat of a weapon, then slowly lowering - evokes a sense of vulnerability. These symbolic gestures function as recurring motifs within the performance, strategically placed at emotional climaxes. Through these 'gestural interrupts', the performative flow is broken, giving way to moments of intense confrontation with violence, power, and oppression.

The dabke transcends its original role as a festive folk dance and now functions in the Palestinian context as a powerful symbol of cultural resilience and survival. In the midst of genocide in Gaza and beyond, this dance becomes a physical expression of hopeful mourning and collective trauma. The ritual connects dancers to a deeply rooted identity and offers a strategy to resist threat and displacement. Where once the dance celebrated marriage, now it carries an urgent message: we dance because we still exist. Dabke thus becomes a performative affirmation of Palestinian existence. It is a dance that not only celebrates but also remembers and resists—a powerful form of protest. Across the world, people perform dabke during demonstrations, using movement to articulate defiance and pride. On social media, images circulate of children and youth dancing in the midst of devastated areas—symbolic acts of resistance and affirmation of identity. Dabke has thus become essential cultural heritage and a performative act of survival and dignity.

Though visually minimal, every element of the performance reflects a thoughtfully constructed scenography—like the large water dispenser beside an iconic checkered plastic shopping bag: a mundane object that here carries layered symbolism and evokes a rich tapestry of stories. The ten dancers move with a raw and unrelenting physicality, yet always in tune with the collective. They engage in a choreographic dialogue where challenge and support alternate effortlessly, creating a constant dynamic of energy and tension. This ensemble does not merely perform a dance form—they carry a living cultural memory, a pulse that unmistakably preserves the ritual's essence.



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With *Badke(remix)*, the creators succeed in opening up an age-old tradition and placing it within a contemporary theatrical frame, without losing its historical urgency and symbolic weight. It is a physical reminder of what dance can be: survival in motion, a collective heartbeat that refuses to stop. For in the end, the dabke has evolved into a ritual of existence—a body that, against all odds, continues to stomp on the ground it is at risk of losing. In a time when Palestinian existence is continually threatened by ethnic cleansing, the stomping, jumping, and sweating on stage becomes a bodily response to cultural erasure.

The performance ends in the same slowed, silent movement language that recurs throughout the piece. Only now, within that same cadence, a bow is added. We respond with a prolonged standing ovation, as if we too become part of the collective that refuses to bow to the attempt at cultural erasure.