

Lesley Telford brings unique choreographic voices to the Chutzpah Festival

by [Janet Smith](#) on February 8th, 2013 at 4:31 PM

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Lesley Telford and Itzik Galili

A Chutzpah Festival presentation. At the Norman and Annette Rothstein Theatre on Thursday, February 7. Continues on February 9 and 10

Vancouver-born dancer [Lesley Telford](#) returned to town for the Chutzpah Festival's opening night, bringing along some crack Euro dance talent with her.

Telford left this city years ago to dance with the cutting-edge likes of Nederlands Dans Theater and Madrid's Compañía Nacional de Danza. She's come back with a strange new choreographic work and some of her former colleagues: Iratxe Ansa and Clyde Emmanuel Archer (from Compañía), and Miguel Oliveira (from NDT).

The show opens with Telford's own *Brittle Failure*, a work that begins, as the audience trickles into the theatre, with the sight of no less than 1,000 little white houses neatly arranged into a square on the stage floor. In the ensuing piece, the dancers variously balance the houses on their arms, thighs, and

heads; tip-toe carefully through them; and sweep them up across the floor, the large broom becoming a sort of colossal tsunami.

It says something that despite the strong presence of the striking scenography, it's the pure dance sections that draw your attention most during *Brittle Failure*. Through various fraught couplings, Telford is getting at the fragility of relationships and the way they can break under pressure. At one point Ansa seems to have Oliveira on strings, sending him zig-zagging on his back across the floor; at another, he pumps the electric Ansa's arms like the rods on locomotive wheels. Oliveira sometimes holds and swings his head like his flapping elbows might consume it. The vocabulary finds a wonderfully wonky flow at times, with arms frantically digging and stirring to a score of strings that range from moaning and discordant to staccato and choppy. And yet the experimental work could be tightened up—spoken bits about a house where one dancer grew up and the scientific meaning of the term *brittle failure* seem tangential and literal compared to the dance. But there is no doubt Telford has a clear, fluid, and utterly unique voice when it comes to movement.

She also happens to have an incredible voice as a dancer. For her second part of the evening, Telford takes the stage with the equally expressive Oliveira in choreographic dynamo Itzik Galili's *When You See God... Tell Him*. This is a work born out of a highly intelligent brain but danced straight from the heart, a wild mishmash of looped spoken text, the Kronos Quartet's manic strings, and a duet where the dancers (who are supposed to come from two different cultures) never quite seem to connect. Galili abstracts familiar gesture to the point of absurdity: off the top, Telford, who can be as purposely gawky as she can be graceful, bends over to offer Oliveira her ass again and again to no avail; he turns away and eventually jumps right over her to escape. Telford and Oliveira perfectly capture the witty mood of the piece—and in her case, the performance serves as a reminder that often Vancouver's best export is its dancers.

Well, at least some of them stay. Midway through the program, Vancouver's own 605 Collective made a brief guest appearance in this lengthy program with a trio of interlinked short pieces, and it's clear these kids have been eating their Wheaties. The group has found a polished flow that takes its work to a new level, with bodies huddling and convulsing to bass beats and then fracturing into light-as-helium jumps, warped breaks, and stylized spins. There's virtuosity to the urban-influenced dance here, but it's filtered through cool, zombielike posturing that gives the whole abstract piece a dreamy, *Walking Dead*-does-dance-club vibe.

In fact, this is work that could stand up easily over in Europe. But for our own selfish sake, here's hoping the 605 folks aren't planning to take a cue from Telford and leave town anytime soon.