

The Arts Are Still Alive And Kicking...



Roni Siman Tov
dancer and
choreographer

Translation:
Ruth Goodman

He would talk about the atmosphere of the period of his work, the steps and the movement of the body, all that in accordance with the general idea and the corresponding music.

As a 15-year old boy, I was already dancing in the Givat Shmuel Dance Troupe, under the artistic direction of **Shalom Amar** z"l. Shalom, although he was colleague, had a lot to say about **Yonatan Karmon** as a choreographer and director of the Olympia Club in Paris and praised his work and his creations.

One day, at the beginning of the 80s, there was a newspaper ad: "Lehakat Karmon in Petach Tikva seeks post army dancers with dance experience". Throughout that time, the name of the much admired, **Yonatan Karmon** echoed in my ears and I decided to go to the auditions...just to watch. I was just curious to see who **Yonatan Karmon** was.

On the day of the audition, I came to Heichal Shalom in the city of Petach Tikva. There were about 300 dancers already waiting in the lobby, and for a moment, I thought there may be a show or a movie and that I was in the wrong place. I asked: "Is the audition here"? They answered me: "Yes". A few minutes later, the crowd divided into two, like the Red Sea. From the back, three people came into the middle of the two groups. Among the three, a beautiful man stood out, with a lush forelock and stage presence and I immediately realized, although I had never met him, that the man standing before me was the renowned artist, **Yonatan Karmon**. Next to him were **Odeda Kruvi** and **Tuvia Tischler**, his assistants.

We entered the hall and everyone sat down in chairs to receive an explanation. When I came wearing jeans, I sat up just to observe...Yonatan explained that he only needed one hundred dancers and therefore it was necessary to pass the audition in order to be accepted for a position.

During the auditions, there were only ten dancers on the stage at a time. Odeda and Tuvia demonstrated a "dance phrase" and the auditionees had to perform it...At some part of the audition, Yonatan would stop it and say "you, you, and you" wait

here; to the rest, thank you". And so on in cycles over and over again.

I observed the auditions and I felt that I wanted to be there too. I thought to myself: If they can do it, so can I. Roni, take a chance...I was brave, I went onto the stage and to my delight, I passed the audition and was included among those who were signed up.

Finally, there were only one hundred dancers left. The joy did not last long. Yonatan sat us down on the stage and said: "Now I only need seventy dancers". For a moment, I turned pale...we were all still in question and had to fight for our place.

"Please, go to the corner, one at a time, perform turns diagonally to the second corner" called Yonatan. During my turn, I stood in the corner and performed all the turns, properly spotting in focus with my head, feet apart, arms to the sides of the body...to the sounds of the march played by the accordionist, **Roni Aviram**, "He'amini Yom Yavo", the well-known song by the famous singer, **Yaffa Yarkoni**.



Yonatan Karmon with Roni Siman Tov

Roni Siman Tov

I was quite confident about the turning technique I acquired from **Yedidia Amram**, choreographer and dancer in the Israel Ballet. During the turns, I was aware of Yonatan's interest and subsequent gaze. I realized that I had indeed passed the audition. At the end of the audition, we were given the location and time of the rehearsals and we left feeling proud and "see you soon".

I went home with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I felt great joy that I was accepted to the glorious Karmon troupe, and on the other hand, I was embarrassed that I was actually only 15 years old and not a graduate of the army as required!

At the beginning of the first rehearsal I approached Yonatan and asked to speak with him at the end of the rehearsal. With a look of humiliation, I told him the story of my audition and apologized for not telling the truth. Yonatan, with a necklace with a ring in his mouth, listened carefully, thought a little, and finally said: "I want you to dance in my troupe, but don't come to rehearsals with jeans! I'll send you to **Lydia Pincus**; she will sew a pair of dance pants for you". I was happy to the heavens and a huge weight was lifted from my heart. I will never forget when I came to Lydia, the seamstress, and asked for pants "like Tuvia's" ...not tight ballet pants. She smiled and immediately took my measurements: "How much does it cost"? and she said: "Don't worry, Yonatan will bring them to you".

Already at the second rehearsal, Yonatan brought me a bag with two pairs of pants. I asked him about the payment and he said: "It's a gift from me. Just take it seriously". In the same breath he continued and asked: "Do you know **Sammy Schwartzman**"? "Of course", I answered, he is the beloved headmaster of our school in Givat Shmuel".

Yonatan told me: "When the situation in Romania and in Israel was difficult, Sammy – my uncle, supported me financially and he also financed my dance studies. I will never forget this"! Sammy was Yonatan's guest of honor at every performance. He always sat in the center of the first row. Very emotional!

I danced with **Yonatan Karmon** for three years, in Petach Tikva and afterwards, also in Jerusalem. I learned a lot from him about the secrets of choreography and the art of the stage. While working

with the troupe, he used to go into detail about what he wanted to create. He would talk about the atmosphere of the period of his work, the steps and the movement of the body, all that in accordance with the general idea and the corresponding music. He would simply put the dancers into his creation and the ecstasy of the dance, and in this way, they sort of became "partners" ...

The concept was clear: when the dancer understands what he is "doing" on the stage, it brings out one hundred percent of the energy and talent. I, myself, often call the process "neurological engraving" and therefore, to this day, I remember the dances that Karmon created and am emotional every time I am reminded of them or watch them performed on stage.

The professional aspect was always uppermost and when the dancers complained about the amount of their wages, Yonatan would say that "a professional dancer is measured by the level of his performance and not if he gets paid".

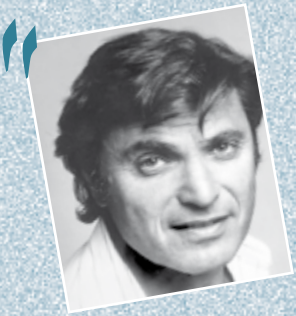
Throughout the time that I danced with Karmon, he gave many examples from other artists he worked with and was even influenced by their way of working. Yonatan used to say: "Don't be embarrassed to go and get help from great musicians or artists. They always 'raise you up'".

Yonatan Karmon's thought process and the way he created motivated me to create for myself. Thus, even as a soldier, I began to create folk dances, which I introduced to **Yoav Ashriel**, a special personality in his own right, and immediately upon my being discharged from the army, I began to lead performing troupes independently and became a choreographer.

Already during the first years of the establishment of the Karmiel Dance Festival, under the artistic direction of Yonatan, I was fortunate to participate with my groups in the performances on the main stage.

There is no doubt that it was a great, proud experience to belong to the "Karmonistim – the Karmon dance family" and to feel that the Arts are alive and kicking. Yonatan's image will always be our inspiration and a model for us to aspire to.

May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life. ✎



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