

**Matti Goldschmidt**

Israeli Folk Dancing in Switzerland

On the Development of Israeli Folk Dance in Switzerland, City by City

We are happy to continue our article series, "All Around the World", about the diverse places where Israeli folk dances are danced. The next country is Switzerland. As part of Central Europe, Switzerland is one of the smaller countries and, at 41,285 km² (15,943 m²), it is only about one-tenth the size of California. With a population of around 9 million, it ranks 20th among the 56 countries and territories in Europe. The official languages are German, French, and Italian and, to some extent, Romansh. In 2024, close to 20,000 Jews now live in Switzerland, with Zurich as the largest community, followed by Geneva and Basel.

The original Swiss Confederation, with the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, came into being with the Oath of Rütli in 1391. Over the centuries, the confederation grew and shrank in members and size. Switzerland has existed in its current form since 1848 and is divided into 26 cantons, with the canton of Jura being the last to be established in 1979.

Although Jews were probably already resident centuries earlier in what is now Switzerland, the first document about the presence of a Jewish population dates back to 1213 (in Basel), followed by other documents such as Lucerne (1252) and St. Gallen (1268). As everywhere else in Europe, Jews required special residence rights. Jewish settlements came to an abrupt end in the middle of the 14th century, when practically all Jewish communities disappeared. Jews were blamed for the spread of the Black Death, whereupon they were summarily burned. Only in individual cases, they were lucky enough to have been expelled. From the 16th century onwards, Aargau was the only canton in which Jews had residential rights for the next 250 years (in the communities of Lengnau and Oberendingen). Between 1862 and 1874, all Jews in Switzerland were finally granted full civil rights and freedom of settlement throughout Switzerland, except for the canton of Aargau, which did not follow suit until 1879. In 1892, ritual (Jewish) slaughter was banned nationwide. For reasons of neutrality, Switzerland became a member of the United Nations only in 2002.

In addition to the two current centers for Israeli folk dance, namely Zurich and Bern, other cities where Israeli folk dance circles are found are included. On the other hand, we have not mentioned the many international folklore dance circles, all of which have not only older but also more modern Israeli folk dances in their repertoire. Apart from Zurich, in particular, and to a limited extent Basel and Geneva, the majority of participating dancers in Switzerland are non-Jews. These are people who have become interested in the country of Israel through Israeli folk dancing.

Zurich

Rikudei Am with Ronit Bollag

Spring 1983: Inside an envelope in **Ronit Bollag's** mailbox is a blue piece of paper with the heading, "Israeli Folk Dance Association" (IFDA) advertising a summer dance camp in Hatfield (England). Her interest was piqued and during a short conversation with IFDA's chairman, **Maurice Stone**, she was soon convinced that this camp was precisely what she had always been looking for. Rikudei Am – her childhood dream! Ronit was born in Israel and arrived in Switzerland with her Swiss parents at the age of 11. This is when she discovered Israeli folk dancing led by the local youth movement.

At the time Ronit received the invitation, she was a mother of two toddlers and needed to find a way to attend this Rikudei Am camp, albeit without children. The "way" was eventually found (thanks to a cooperative husband) and so, for the first time, she ended up in the world of Rikudei Am. Naturally, everything was new to her, i.e., the extent of the camp, the process, its organization, and surprisingly, the fact that Israeli dances are danced all over the world – not just in Israel.

These five days at the camp turned out to be extremely strenuous, both for her brain and body. Almost thirty new dances were taught, some with simple step sequences and some with more difficult ones – at the end, everything was difficult for Ronit! Like everyone else, she slept only a little, laughed a lot, and made new friends. Her language skills helped her out a lot and after five days, she returned home overwhelmed, with countless new impressions and the memory of not more than half (!) a dance in her head.

Back home, she quickly discovered that Rikudei Am sessions seemed not to exist in Switzerland. She contacted the youth association, Hashomer Hatzair, where Rikudim were a regular integral part of the programming. It took some persuading until two madrichot (youth leaders) finally agreed to teach her and a couple of other enthusiasts a basic dance repertoire. With the help of the youth department of the local Jewish Community (Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich), she organized the first chug (dance session), which attracted more than fifty participants. This was on January 29th, 1984.

Not much later, the young Hashomer Hatzair madrichot completed their school term and left Zurich and the newly established chug. From then on Ronit continued, not only to organize, but also to take part in further dance camps and weekend workshops. And so, she also began teaching dances on three levels: one hour for beginners, one hour for intermediate and two hours for advanced dancers. Back then, in the older days, to

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Machol Zürich 40th anniversary celebration. Photo: Machol Zürich



Workshop in Zürich, 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt



Zürich 2011 with Marcello Marianoff. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

learn the dances, you had to be on-site, take part in weekends and camps, buy videos and dance descriptions and, of course, the music material. Music that was not available at workshops could be ordered and bought from **Yaron Meishar** at "Rokdim".

When Ronit started teaching, she still had to use cassettes, followed by the "big revolution" of mini discs and CDs. Only in the early 2000s did the computer bring salvation. Today, it is hard to imagine how extensive the preparatory work for a chug was, from cueing the cassettes to lugging heavy equipment and to arranging an entire dance evening.

Ronit's dance classes soon attracted numerous people and early on, she began organizing dance weekends. The late **Yonatan Gabay z"l** was the first guest teacher, followed for many years by **Zion Ohayon**, who also taught at the Zurich Hashomer Hatzair. **Benny Assouline**, **Meir Shem Tov**, **Oren Ashkenazi**, **Dudu Barzilay** and **Eyal Eliyahu** deserve to be mentioned as well along with **Haim Vaknin** with his dance troupes. Since 2009, **Marcelo Marianoff** from Argentina has come almost every year, once together with **Yaron Elfassy** and once with **Ofer Alfasi**. "Machol Zürich", as the chug became called, had a special premiere in 2017 when the Israeli singer **Kobi Aflalo** was invited to a concert in Zurich and visited a dance workshop on Motz'ei Shabbat (Saturday evening). This was the first time they danced to live music – which everyone considered to have been a great experience. Over the years, they also welcomed other choreographers including **Bonny Piha**, **Yoram Sasson**, **Shlomo Maman**, **Moshe Telem** and **Yankele Levy z"l**.

According to Ronit, as she looked back over her forty years of dance activity, the highlight was definitely the 20th anniversary celebration in 2004, to which Haim Vaknin and the young, very talented dancers of the performance troupe Machol Hashalom/Machol Midbari, were invited. To start the festivities, the troupe presented a brilliant, lively show in the Jewish Community Center which absolutely thrilled the four hundred spectators. The young Israelis then remained in Switzerland for almost a week, to perform in Jewish retirement homes and in the streets of Zurich and also to enjoy Switzerland as tourists. In the following years, further generations of the troupe visited Zurich again, offering great dance shows and dancing within the chug. As of a few years ago, Machol Midbari no longer exists; but "no doubt, it left great memories and lasting friendships".

"Machol Zürich" also celebrated its 30th and 35th anniversaries with special workshops, to which it was able to welcome not only dance leaders, but also dear dance friends from all over Europe, Israel and even South America. Now, in its 40th year, planning went ahead

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to celebrate this anniversary in appropriate style and it took place September 6-8, 2024, with guest teachers **Shlomo Maman**, **Marcelo Marianoff** and **Danielle Shkop**.

The structure of the Zurich chug has changed over the years. While **Ben Edri** teaches both the beginner 1 and beginner 2 groups, Ronit teaches the intermediate and advanced levels together with Orna Gilgen-Kariv. What has not changed, however, is the great interest in Rikudei Am. Today, "Machol Zürich" consists of around 100 regular participants and Ronit was pleased to mention that some of them have been loyal since the very first day. In Zurich, as in most chugim in Europe, most of the dancers are women, but everyone enjoys dancing together and celebrating Jewish and Israeli holidays and traditions. The chugim take place on Tuesday evenings in the Jewish Community Center. Over the years, they have grown into a homogeneous group and are proud that newcomers and guests always tell them how warmly they are welcomed by the regular dancers.

In the meantime, additional chugim have emerged in Switzerland (see additional cities with chugim below) and there is a good cooperation with all other Swiss Israeli folk dance leaders. The demand for Rikudei Am is high and Ronit and Orna are often invited to teach Israeli folk dances in groups of international dancing and also at the annual Zurich Tanzt Festival.

Doubtlessly, Ronit can be proud to have "started the ball rolling" for Rikudei Am in Switzerland (albeit together with **Oded Harari** in Bern and **Marcia Leventhal** in Basel), while at the same time, she is grateful to her fellow dancers, co-leaders, helpers and supporters for their loyalty and commitment. As Ronit does not stop stressing: "Rikudei Am connects and enchants and offers a great opportunity to keep a healthy mind in a healthy body". On a personal level, she found many valuable friendships through dancing which she considers to be an important part of her social environment at home in Zurich and worldwide.

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Workshop in Zürich, 2011. Photos: Matti Goldschmidt

Dancing with Orna

Orna Gilgen-Kariv was born in Kibbutz Ramat David and moved, with her Swiss husband, to Switzerland almost 40 years ago. All of her three children and two grandchildren live around Zurich. In 2007, she started to dance on a regular basis in Switzerland in Ronit Bollag's class held at the local Jewish Community Center. Initially, it was just to revive the repertoire that had been forgotten over the years. Through some diligent practice and exercise, she rose to become an Israeli folk dance instructor supporting Ronit, not only in the latter's classes. She leads three classes of her own at a small and beautiful community center on the western shore of Lake Zurich, which is attended by about thirty-five women



Celebrating Purim at Machol Zürich. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive

between the ages of fifty and eighty – Jewish and non-Jewish people – who share their love for Israeli folk dances, songs, singers and performing artists.

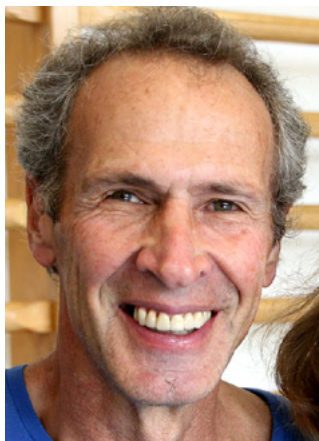
Orna started her first class in 2016 with only two women, who were joined during the following six months by two more women and one man. This class takes place on Mondays between 5:30 and 8:00 pm. Her second dance class started in the summer of 2021, in the shadow of the general Corona restrictions, with mainly Jewish and Israeli women. Some of them had never danced previously. Having reached the age of retirement, the participants of that class are full of enthusiasm and with a strong desire to overcome considerable difficulties such as natural physical limitations. Social activity, in combination with a “healthy mind in a healthy body”, is certainly only one of the reasons for them to participate in Israeli folk dancing. This class takes place on Mondays in the morning between 10:00 and 11:30 am.

Her third and most challenging class started in autumn 2023. It includes elderly participants and also women with physical disabilities. The great joy that all the participants of this class express gives Orna great satisfaction and happiness. This class takes place on Tuesdays in the morning between 10:00 and 11:30 am. Orna feels proud to have the privilege and opportunity to spread some Israeli culture to her Jewish and non-Jewish participants, and to anyone who wishes to participate.

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Bern

With Oded Harari



Oded Harari

Oded Harari (originally from Kibbutz Yehiam) received his professional ballet dance training in London and was active in the Kibbutz Dance Company, the Batsheva Dance Company (Tel Aviv) and the “Swiss Chamber Ballet” in Basel, among others. In the early 1980s, he, together with his wife, Pierrette, began to organize regular folk dance courses in Bern on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Just a few years later, in 1987, he founded the performance group “Nevatim” intending to introduce Israeli folk dance culture to the Swiss public, especially to non-dancers. From about 1990, he decided to invite Israeli dance masters and choreographers to Bern,

To this day, former members of the group meet every two weeks in a Christian community hall, not just to dance, but also for purely social reasons.

including **Moshe Telem** and **Shmulik Gov-Ari**. Just before the turn of the millennium, the regular courses were taken over by his daughter **Michal**, and then taken over by **Oren Ashkenazi** and his wife **Lena** around a dozen years later.

To this day, former members of the group meet every two weeks in a Christian community hall, not just to dance, but also for purely social reasons. The group is now led by **Christine Arni**. Older dances are reviewed and newer dances from the dance weekends and workshops offered elsewhere are taught.

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Nevatim group with Oded Harari (lower row, right), performing in Bern. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive



Workshop with Michal Harari (center) and Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi (right), Bern 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

With Lena & Oren Ashkenazi

Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi began dancing as a small child in the mid-1980s in one of the ballet classes that Oded Harari gave at the time in Bern, the capital of Switzerland with 147,000 inhabitants. His lessons usually ended with around fifteen minutes of Israeli folk dancing. For Lena, this was a first encounter with "Rikudei Am". In the 1990s, together with Oded's daughters, **Michal** and **Nicole Harari**, she took part in the workshops organized by Oded with Israeli dance masters. She particularly remembers a workshop with **Shmulik Gov-Ari** in 1990. At the time, she was eight years old, and with great pride, she was allowed to dance Gov-Ari's "Kol Nederai" in the inner circle. Ever since then, Oded has remained a great role model for her.

In 1998, she founded a "dance session for young people" together with Michal Harari, an idea that **Hila Mukdasi** in Jerusalem, among others, implemented around two decades



*Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi
Photos: Matti Goldschmidt, 2017*



Oren Ashkenazi



Workshop in Bern 2017 with (from left to right) Oren Ashkenazi, Yehuda Rahmani, Gadi Bitton and Matti Goldschmidt.
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive



Hila Mukdasi and Lena-Maria Stettler-Ashkenazi (left), Bern 2011. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

later. (See Rokdim-Nirkoda no. 108: <https://bit.ly/4dvkMAN>) This group consisted mainly of schoolmates and friends and it still meets today, even if the term “young” is no longer quite accurate twenty or thirty years later. Of course, young participants from Lena's Waldorf school in Ittigen, a community near Bern with almost 12,000 inhabitants, are still encouraged to take part in these meetings.

In 2004, Lena and two friends attended the 27th Machol Europa, which was held in Coventry, England. In addition to **Moshe Telem and Shmulik Gov-Ari, Yaron Carmel, Oren Ashkenazi, Yaron Elfassy** and **Alberto Zirlinger** were also present as dance teachers. As a result, from 2005 onwards, Lena joined Michal Harari and together they took over the courses that Oded had started about a quarter of a century earlier.

Even during her five-year stay in Israel, from 2008 onwards, Lena continued to co-run the courses from afar as best as she could. In 2013, she returned to Bern with her husband, Oren Ashkenazi, and together they founded the group “Machol Neshama”, under whose name a good number of different choreographers came to Switzerland as guest teachers. Meanwhile, Michal had to put her organizational dance-related activities on hold due to her work-related stays abroad. Shmulik Gov-Ari has been invited to the group's twentieth anniversary event in late autumn 2024, which has since been renamed, “Machol Oryana”, after Lena and Oren's deceased daughter. At such events, Oded and Pierrette, his wife, are always invited as guests of honor. It is a good occasion to put on the horas that Oded particularly still loves from his kibbutz days.

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Basel

Basel (population 173,000) is a border city on the Rhine River, situated in northwestern Switzerland at the bend in the river where France, Germany and Switzerland converge. Too often, Basel is bypassed by many visitors to Switzerland, who instead head to Zurich for its metropolitan flair or to the majestic Alps. It holds a special place in modern Jewish history as the venue of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, convened by **Theodor Herzl**, where among other events, Hatikvah was adopted as the Zionists' national anthem and the desire to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine was proclaimed. There is no documentation if the participants indeed danced at the end of the Congress. However, it is a fact that the Jews of Basel have danced up to the present day.

The garden Rikudei Am course became so popular that parents also wanted to try dancing.

It is one of the peculiarities of Switzerland that cantons (territorial subdivisions) might divide, as happened in Basel in 1833. Since then, Basel consists of two so-called half-cantons.

Dancing in Basel's Jewish Community, the Israelitische Gemeinde (IGB), started with a children's dance group that eventually moved from the countryside of Baselland to Basel-Stadt. In the late 1980s, **Jardena Puder**, a young community madricha (teacher/dance leader), started an Israeli dance group for children. Young **Mira** and **Elana Leventhal** joined Jardena's course, and, totally enthralled, they began dancing at home. Their dad, Stephen, found old cassette recordings of Israeli dance music from his university days. Their mom, **Marcia Leventhal**, originally from Portland, Oregon (U.S.A.), who also danced at university, had the idea of holding a children's course in their garden. Mira and Elana asked some school friends to join them and soon there was a large group that came regularly to dance after school. The garden Rikudei Am course became so popular that parents also wanted to try dancing. In the spirit of the intercultural focus of the Protestant church of a small village in Baselland, a room was offered for Israeli folk dancing. Word spread and soon the dance group in Aesch was firmly established.

Having heard about the dancing in the countryside, Mrs. **F. Silbiger**, a teacher in the Hebrew school in Basel, invited Marcia, who had moved to Switzerland in 1986, to teach simple dances for the children's Hanukah party. The chazzan's (cantor's) wife, **Mirjam Hellmann**, also a teacher in the Hebrew school, then asked Marcia if it would be possible to start a group for women in the synagogue. Initially, a group consisting of five women was formed. **Rabbi Levinger**, the Basel IGB Rabbi, excited by this success, found a larger hall for the dancing and on a Tuesday evening in 1992, the first official steps in "Basel Tanzt" (literally: Basel Is Dancing) were danced. Tuesday evenings became the official Israeli dancing evenings with alternating weeks between the women's group in the IGB in Basel-Stadt and the village group in Baselland.



*Susan Worthington.
Photo: Private collection*

In time, Marcia's three children, **Elana**, **Mira** and **Gabriel**, also began dancing with the village group. They brought many of their friends, so that the village group became a wonderful mixture of both students and adults. **Ruth Meier-Haldemann**, who would later take over the leadership of the group, together with **Susan Worthington**, and Ruth's husband **Remo**, first started dancing in the village dance group. Three official children's classes, one in Baselland as well as a girls course and a boys course in the Jewish community in Basel, followed the start of the two adult classes. A few years later, two additional senior dance groups were started. There was one in Baselland and one in the IGB of Basel. And so, the "Basel Tanzt" Israeli dancing program was complete with two adult/teenager classes, two classes for seniors and three children's classes.



*Mira Leventhal (right) teaching a children's group in Basel.
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

The name, "Basel Tanzt" (בזל טנצט), is taken from a special dance festival that takes place in Basel. However, because the name is also in Yiddish and therefore spelled with Hebrew letters, the original organizers of the group felt that this would be a perfect name for the dance group. Over the years, hundreds of T-shirts sporting the "Basel Tanzt" logo (in Hebrew letters) were proudly worn by dancers all over the world.

New dances and music were needed. In Israel, Marcia met with **Yaron Meishar** who supplied most of the available dance material. Together with her three children and many of the new dancers, she went on to participate in weekend courses organized by **Oded Harari** in Bern and **Ronit Bollag** in Zurich, along with guest choreographers and teachers from Israel. In 1992, Marcia first attended Maurice Stone's Machol Europa in England. This offered her the chance to talk with participants from around the world, many of them dance instructors in their own right, as well as to meet some of the core Israeli leaders of Rikudei Am. This is how **Moshe Telem** became the main mentor of the "Basel Tanzt" group.



*The Emunah children's dance group in Basel.
Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

According to Marcia, wonderful children's dances were created by **Shmulik Gov-Ari**, **Levi Bar Gil** and **Shlomo Maman**, which formed the core program for the children's groups. Fortunately, these dances were suitable not only for the children. They were also danced and loved by the senior groups and used as an introduction to Israeli folk dancing for groups of beginners in the Basel region. Over the years, several dance instructors from Israel were invited. To name just a few: **Moshe Telem**, **Shlomo Maman**, **Zion Ohaiyon**, and **Yankele Levy z'l**, who danced in the center of the "Basel Tanzt" circle. During these special sessions, the members of all the Basel groups, including children and seniors, came together to dance. In 2000, to celebrate Marcia's 50th

birthday, dancers in and around Switzerland were invited to a weekend in Baselland with **Dudu Barzilay**.

Marcia was assisted in teaching the main groups by her daughters Elana and then Mira, who also taught a pre-teen group. When Elana and Mira left for university, **Jardena Lang**, who had been in the original Basel children's dance group, took over as the assistant for the "Basel Tanzt" group. In looking back on the groups, an early goal was to have just enough dancers to close a circle, meaning a minimum of five dancers. Over time, during an evening when they had a guest choreographer and all "Basel Tanzt" groups came to Basel, the circle expanded to at least 50 dancers.

Ruth Meier-Haldemann and Susan Worthington took over the leadership of "Basel Tanzt" in 2007 and have continued to lead the group to this day. Both joined the "Basel Tanzt" group in 2004. Susan, originally from Liverpool, England, lived for several



*Dancing in Basel with Yankele Levy z'l.
Photo: The Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive*

years each in the U.S.A., Germany and Israel. She moved to Switzerland in 1991. When she began dancing in Basel, she “appreciated Marcia’s patience while she struggled to grasp the choreography of the more basic dances”. Her desire to improve as quickly as possible led her to sign up for various dance workshops, not only in Bern, Geneva and Zurich, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and England. She was highly impressed by the variety of the dance steps and music of the dances as well as the energy and commitment of the dancers.

The repertoires in the sessions may vary from place to place but there are always plenty of familiar dances and it is good for her to see some new and different ones as well.

These days, the “Basel Tanzt” group is small but it has a dedicated core of regulars who did not let even Covid stop them – apart from when there was a complete lockdown.

The repertoire consists of only circle dances. Currently, the level is beginners to intermediate. Naturally, the group is inclusive. All are welcome and prior dancing experience is not necessary.

The room that is regularly used for the dance sessions has a floor designed for movement and dancing, so the surface is gentle on the feet!

The cost per session is CHF 20 (= US \$22 or NIS 85). “Basel Tanzt” dances on Wednesday evenings from 19:30-21:00 (7:30-9:00 pm) at the HWS Schule, Eulerstrasse 55, 4051 Basel. When coming, please check the screen at the main entrance because the dance sessions do not always take place in the same room. Look for “R. Meier”.

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Ruth Meier-Haldemann ruth.meier@intergga.ch

Geneva

Every week, a dance group meets in Geneva, which aims to “bring together Jewish young people and adults from Geneva.” The association preferred not to publish any details about its dance courses, so it was not even possible to find out which day of the week the group meets. According to the current dance leader **Ayelet Joanes**, generally speaking, outsiders could join the group but preferably for a single session only. Otherwise, it is subject to special approval from the local Geneva Maccabi Jewish sports organization.

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Olten

For over thirty years now, a dance group originally founded by **Oded Harari** has been active in a church community in Olten (canton Solothurn) under the direction of **Ursula Rutschi**. A group of people of mixed ages meets every two weeks on Thursdays. The intention is to bring together not only experienced dancers, but also those with no previous experience to let them experience “the special temperament of Israeli folk dance”.

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The repertoires in the sessions may vary from place to place but there are always plenty of familiar dances and it is good for her to see some new and different ones as well.

Schaffhausen

Reto Rutishauser, from the city of Schaffhausen (population 36,000, the capital of the canton with the same name), came across Israeli dancing more or less by chance at a birthday party in March 2004. As a result, a small group formed spontaneously and met once a month. Just one year later, they attended a dance weekend in Zurich and, in the same year, a workshop with **Matti Goldschmidt** in Thayngen (also in the canton of Schaffhausen). Above all, it was the retired teacher, **Verena Stamm**, who introduced Israeli folk dance in this canton with her annually organized workshops. The 2005-2009 workshops were led by Matti Goldschmidt. In 2010-2011, two further workshops with Matti Goldschmidt took place in Herblingen (canton Schaffhausen) under the direction of Rutishauser. In recent years, meetings have been held at irregular intervals under the direction of Rutishauser on a Saturday afternoon from 3:30 to 5:30 pm in a free church according to a fixed six-month program. The participation fee per person is five francs (= US \$5.50 or NIS 21). The group consists of up to fifteen women of different ages; so far, "men never have shown up", as Rutishauser jokingly remarked. Their repertoire consists of almost one hundred dances. During the time of Covid-19, Rutishauser kept the session up to date online.

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Reto Rutishauser leading a line of dancers in Schaffhausen 2010. Photo: Matti Goldschmidt

Solothurn

Jutta Maass has been leading a group in the city of Solothurn (population 17,000, the capital of the canton with the same name) for almost two decades with around a dozen participants, half of whom are women and half men. She also runs a second dance session in Biel/Bienne (canton Bern with French and German as the two official languages), also with about a dozen participants, including two men. The groups each meet fortnightly [every two weeks] (always on Sundays) in a free church; the participation fee per person

is five Swiss francs (= US \$5.50 or NIS 21). For the Solothurn sessions, the proceeds are donated to Holocaust survivors in the Ukraine and for the Biel sessions, to the Methodist Church. Preference is given to older dances and dances up to the year 2000. Couple dances are danced only occasionally at the Solothurn session.

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Dancing in Schaffhausen with Matti Goldschmidt (left), 2010. Photo: The Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive

Weinfelden

It all began around the year 2000, when **Daniel, Birgit Seidenberg's** husband at the time, [who was originally Christian despite having Jewish parents,] formed a new Jewish community with other Messianic Jews in the German-speaking part of Switzerland for Bible study. Soon after he formed the community, only Jewish holidays and festivals were celebrated, which – quite naturally – also included singing and dancing. These festivals mainly took place at a location called Sonnenberg in Hefenhofen (Canton Thurgau). In order for the group to improve their dance skills, the Israeli-born qualified dance and movement therapist, **Ben Edri** (Zurich), was invited to Weinfelden (population: 12,000; canton Thurgau) twice to three times a year. Matti Goldschmidt also spent a weekend teaching Israeli folk dance in 2006. Ben Edri was regarded as “very strict, if not over precise”, but the girls learned the dances well and they delighted the visitors at the holiday festivities.

Daniel Seidenberg's religious and philosophical orientation went into new directions that soon led to the disintegration of the dance group. At that point it consisted only of Birgit Seidenberg as the dance instructor and several of her daughters (out of eleven children) as well as the daughters of family friends. The remaining dance enthusiasts finally joined **Nathalie Neuenschwander** and **Daniela Grob-Brook's** Winterthur dance group around 2012, when Birgit's group ceased to exist.

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Winterthur

After **Nathalie Neuenschwander** (then still from Islikon, Canton Thurgau) attended a workshop with Matti Goldschmidt in Schaffhausen, she decided to set up a permanent dance group with another dance enthusiast, **Daniela Grob-Brook**. In 2007, they invited Matti Goldschmidt for the first time to Winterthur (population: 112,000; canton Zurich) to come and teach basic dances. This was followed by eleven more visits through 2019. Over the last several years, dance instructor **Oded Harari** (Bern) was brought in to expand their dance repertoire.

The group of up to twenty dancers (almost all of them women) met every fortnight for around two to three hours. However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, the group came to a standstill in 2020. Neuenschwander had already left the organization team a couple of years earlier for further professional training and was replaced by **Käthli Höfling** (Wiesendangen, Canton Zurich). At the end of the lockdown, the group met less and less frequently, with Grob-Brook and **Ronit Bollag** (Zurich) mainly teaching in the last few months. With only a few workshops a year and without a fixed core of dancers for regular meetings, the dance group could no longer be maintained and is no longer active. The few people, who are still active today and who will not give up dancing, travel 24 kilometers or so to Zurich.

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Winterthur dance group in 2019. Photo: Israelisches Tanzhaus Archive

Herisau

For just a few years, a dance circle was established in Herisau (population 16,000, the capital of the canton of Appenzell Außerrhoden), initially led by **Eva Sgier** and then by **Daniela Lei**. The basic material was introduced through several workshops with Matti Goldschmidt in 2008-2010. The group is no longer active. 