

# Israeli Folk Dancing Worldwide

## Stories of Dancers and Dance Instructors

By Matti Goldschmidt

[The Article](#)

# רוקדים

מגזין לריקודי עם ומחול

## NIRKODA



עמותת ארגון המדריכים  
והיוצרים לריקודי עם



Vol 107 | December 2021

VIP Members



- Natalia Hakenberg
- Natalie Assa
- Melu Laniado
- Agnieszka Kanas
- Kiki Kováčiková
- Elena Moczko
- Nathalie Ivasov
- M. Halsman Serwaczak
- Melanie Fröhlich
- Alexandra Pantis
- Heta Heinonen
- Dominyka Chackelevic
- Iliš Pinto
- Rebeka Grosová
- Polina Sotnikova
- Olja Spektorova
- Noriane Lerouge



## Dear Readers,

An expanded issue of "Rokdim-Nirkoda" magazine is before you. Lots to read and many more articles are on the way...

We, the editors, give the utmost importance to the written word, to preserve the history and development of folk dance, of this culture and of the people who shape it.

For a long time, we have been providing a platform and a place for interviews with the founding generation, those who are still with us, so that their voices, opinions and memories can be heard and will remain for future generations. It is very important for us to continue to interview the generation of giants, to hear and document their memories as well as to listen to their insights regarding folk dance.

The ability to search for articles by topic, author, issue, year of publication, etc. ignites our imagination and we look forward to the day when all the issues we have produced, with hundreds of articles, will be uploaded in their entirety to the "Rokdim-Nirkoda" website, where we invest enormous resources. Your support, both verbal and financial is very important to us. This is not taken for granted; any support is most welcome. <http://magazines.rokdim.co.il/fund.php?lang=en>

You – the subscribers are the driving force behind us. And each of you is very important to us.

### In this issue:

- **Matti Goldschmidt** (from Munich, Germany), in the opening article of the magazine, talks to and interviews [17 young women](#) from various countries, about their path to folk dance and the great significance of these dances in their lives. It is a long, encouraging and optimistic article. This is our young and promising generation. It is a pleasure to read.
- **David Ben Asher** spoke with and interviewed [Moshiko Yitzhak Halevy](#), who explains his extensive inspiring beliefs, the insights he has gained from the perspective of his advanced age and his long journey in Israeli dance.
- At this year's Ashdodance Festival, held in August, there was a panel discussion on "Israeli Folk Dances – Where are they headed?" With great talent, [Dr. Ronit Ronen Tamir](#) moderated the conversation and opened a window to the thoughts that accompany us all in the context of this culture. **Naftali Chayat** was there and shares his impressions.
- **Michael Mero** spoke with [Zvi Hillman](#) (Tacho), who belongs to the second generation of Israeli folk dance founders. He is among the many people who have left their mark on Israeli dance and we continue to give them a platform so that we can hear and read about their memories and thoughts – a souvenir for future generations.
- **Yehuda Ben Harush**, a dancer and lover of [Balkan folklore](#), provides a comprehensive review of the history of international folk dance and its development in Israel and around the world and about the situation today. There is a special focus on Balkan dance.
- **Dance of the Month** – "Shir Rechov", by [Liran Zecharia Amir](#), is our focus this time. The dance won second place at the Karmiel Festival. It is an innovative "hora" with a mixed musical meter which makes it noteworthy.
- [Alex's Experiences](#) – this time with photographs from his more than 20 years of experiences at **Rafi Ziv's** harkadot.

Enjoy your reading,

**Yaron Meishar, Ruth Goodman, Danny Uziel** – Editors



Yaron Meishar



Ruth Goodman



Danny Uziel



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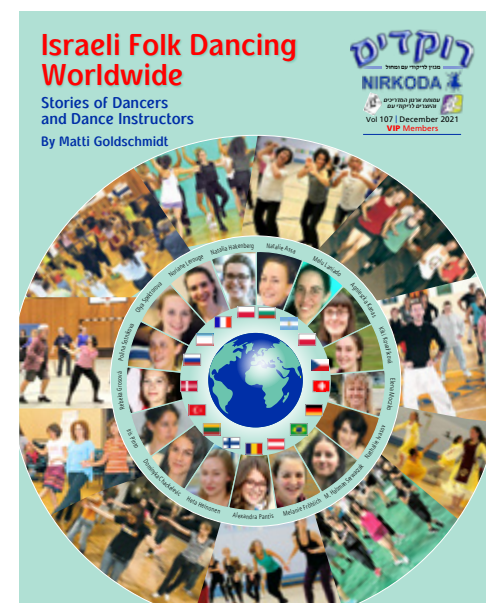
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Matti Goldschmidt

Most of the photographs by Matti Goldschmidt

"...they without doubt belong to the worldwide network of Israeli folk dance – a situation the founders of Israeli folk dance, some eighty years ago, most probably never expected."

# Young Dancers from Around the World

## The Story of the Girls of the “Younger Generation” in Israeli Folk Dance

I vividly remember a random meeting with **Moshiko Halevy** and **Moshe Telem** in Tzemach at Lake Kinneret in the early 1980s. Prior to Karmiel, this had been the place where the most concentrated Israeli folk dance events took place, those lasting over several days or so. The two were sitting somewhere on a lawn and I joined them for a casual chat. Towards the end of our conversation, they suggested that I come as a participant to a summer Israeli folk dance camp in England, where they were both part of the team of instructors. I could not hide my astonishment: Are they serious? First of all, I had never heard of any Israeli folk dance event outside of Israel worth mentioning. And secondly, why should I, living and dancing four or five times a week, travel abroad in order to participate in Israeli (!) folk dance? This idea seemed so strange to me, that I immediately told them that this will never happen. Just consider the costs of the flight from Israel and the fee for the camp. (Does anyone remember the additional exit tax of US \$300 that we had to pay around this time for leaving the country?) Everything else would have been cheaper staying here in Israel – and definitely more genuine.

In short, the average Israeli folk dancer has no clue, or at least was clueless back then that Israeli folk dance is more than just alive outside of Israel. The only exception was perhaps their knowledge of Israeli folk dance in the United States – after all, a good dozen Israeli choreographers had established themselves there, mostly in New York and Southern California, including, (in alphabetical order), **Shlomo Bachar**, **Dani Dassa**, **Moshe Eskayo**, **Danny Uziel**, and **Israel Yakovee**. At the beginning, and for a number of years, their claim to be “Israeli” was not recognized by everyone in the land of their origin. Nevertheless, the Jewish population of the United States was large enough to engage and promote independently Israeli Jewish and/or Israeli cultural events.

Admittedly, at least in Europe, Israeli folk dance existed in the 1980s at best in the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, albeit still on a relatively simplistic level, less so in Germany or Italy, apart from some almost insignificant clusters in other countries. However, this had gradually changed around 1990. Especially with the fall of the Iron Curtain, Israeli folk dance began hesitantly, but slowly to spread. Nowadays, one will find Israeli folk dancing in many more countries like Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, albeit certainly not the magnitude of the better-known folk dance sessions in Israel or even in the United States. Some folk dance circles may have regular participation of only five dancers; others consist of five times as many and thus have formed a group of approximatedly twenty five participants, which was already considered to be big. Often, the knowledge and dance skills of those can easily be compared with the most advanced folk dancers in Israel; here and there, to the disbelief of Israeli dancers who seem to claim a kind of a monopoly on “their” dances and that they simply must be better than those coming from abroad.

As in Israel, many of these dance enthusiasts abroad struggle to integrate young dancers into their groups, among others, and to possibly take over the activities of those who founded or revived existing dance circles, once the latter feels too old to continue. However, brushing the dust off a little bit,

**Matti Goldschmidt**

there seems to be a new generation of younger dancers in many countries who are willing to follow in the footsteps of the previous older generation. I found more than a dozen young dancers from over a dozen countries who were ready to tell me about how they found their own way into Israeli folk dance. None of these dance-related resumes is the same, but yet, in the end, they are somehow similar. And it is certainly noteworthy that not all of those interviewed are Jewish. Nevertheless, they without doubt belong to the worldwide network of Israeli folk dance – a situation the founders of Israeli folk dance, some eighty years ago, most probably never expected.

On the contrary, today in many European countries it is precisely the non-Jewish dancers who keep Israeli folk dance alive. Take Munich for example, the city where I live: With around 10,000 Jews, it has the largest Jewish community in Germany (Berlin is only in second place), according to member statistics, always keeping in mind that most Israelis and many thousands of immigrants from the Soviet Union with permanent residence in Germany are not registered with the Jewish Community Centers. And still, ninety percent or more of those who come regularly to the local JCC’s folk dance session on Monday night are non-Jewish. Without those people, Israeli folk dance would simply not exist, not only in Germany, but also in quite a few other countries due to the lack of regular dance sessions. Full of positive energy, with plenty of diligence and an unbeatable sense of mission, all those people mentioned here can be considered responsible for being part of the development of Israeli folk dance into an international phenomenon. And there are certainly many dozens more who were not included. One thing all those interviewed have in common: An above-average sendungsbewusstsein (= a sense of mission) to expand the magnitude, diversity and beauty of Israeli folk dance abroad, whether they are Jewish or, as in our case, mostly non-Jewish.

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Matti Goldschmidt



"It was highly important to her to do her own teaching and also include the dance material she liked without being outvoted by others."

## Natalie Assa, Bulgaria

was born in 1995 in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. In 1997 the family moved to Israel, but returned to Bulgaria about five years later. This relatively short time, however, was sufficient so that Natalie's Hebrew is still fluent to this day. The year 2004 marks her first contact with Israeli folk dance when, at the age of nine, she started to dance in summer camps organized by the Jewish Community of Sofia. When she was 16, she became a member of the performing group of the local JCC; this was much more intensive in terms of work and repertoire and which, as she said, "inspired" her a lot. In 2011, as a kind of reward, she joined a few other group members to drive by car from Sofia to a weekend session in Novi Sad (Serbia), led by **Dina Dajč**, and since then, in addition to the performing group, she has also regularly attended the weekly local dance sessions in Sofia.

All this was not enough for her; she then started to practice at home learning new dances on her own. In 2014, at the age of 18, Natalie moved to Vienna to study Economics. From the very beginning, she wanted to establish her own dance group. It was highly important to her to do her own teaching and also include the dance material she liked without being outvoted by others. The Viennese Jewish sports club "Hakoach" (Hebrew for "the strength / power"), founded in 1909 and Austrian national football champions in 1925, gave her the permission and the necessary infrastructure to establish her first regular dance session with fifteen to thirty people in attendance. Soon the rent for the hall became too expensive and she moved to a new venue, the "Jüdisches Institut" (= Jewish Institute), after its manager, **Julie Handman**, asked her to take over a vacant position. Now, she not only led a dance class for adults, but also for children in a Jewish kindergarten. In addition, she started teaching Hebrew to Jewish children. Nathalie's basic idea was and is to bring, through the Hebrew language as well as songs, mostly sung in Hebrew, and their dances, some "Israelism" and thus new shades of color into a few Jewish diaspora communities.

She actually planned to create a performing group and hoped for the support of the Viennese JCC. However, because of Corona limitations, her plans had to be put aside for the time being. Like in many other European countries, all in-person activities ceased for close to one and a half years. In the beginning, dancing, and particularly Israeli folk dancing, was just a pleasant pastime, until it became an integral part of Natalie's life as it is today. As soon as the pandemic started (February 2019), the situation became difficult dealing with such a volatile and constantly changing dance community as in Vienna. Natalie began to organize regular zoom meetings and several open-air dance meetings which were attended by up to 25 or even 30 dancers; by central European standards, this was quite an achievement. In October 2020, however, after having finished her studies, Natalie moved to Barcelona, Spain, where she found employment. Unfortunately, even after one full year, she still has not located the right infrastructure there to join, or even better, to establish an Israeli folk dance circle.



*Machol Europa in Coventry (England) 2017*

Matti Goldschmidt



"The course also emphasized the inclusion of the so-called pioneer dances of IFD, letting the graduates leave with a balanced knowledge of older and newer dances."

## Melu Laniado, Argentina

Was born in Buenos Aires in 1995. From the time she was in her cradle, dance was part of her life in that her father, **Raúl Laniado**, and his two brothers had already been active in Israeli folk dance years before she was born. Thus, she started to dance, almost naturally, by the age of three in a group for children within the framework of the local JCC, playing dance-oriented games and even performing in small stage events. And, needless to say, she accompanied her father, the Israeli folk dance teacher, to his sessions and tried to copy the steps from others. Roughly ten years later she joined the dance group of Maccabi Buenos Aires, one of several Jewish organizations in the city such as "Hebraica" and "Ort Argentina", among others.

After having turned fifteen, she became the youngest member of a two-year Israeli folk dance course for teachers under the sponsorship of "Seminario Rabinico". It was her father, Raúl, who took care to have her admitted to this course, since normally participants have to be at least sixteen years old. During the weekly three hour course sessions, they learned a huge number of dances. In addition, the curriculum also included how to manage group dynamics and general psychology. The course also emphasized the inclusion of the so-called Israeli folk dance pioneer dances, enabling the graduates to leave with a balanced knowledge of older and newer dances. There are a dozen or more dance groups in Buenos Aires; the smaller ones with about fifteen dancers and the larger ones with thirty or more. A few times during the year they all meet together and then become a group of far more than a hundred.

At the age of seventeen, actually before graduating from that course, she already started to teach her own group, normally on Sundays, which she led until spring 2021, when through "Masa" (= journey), she went to Israel for a half-year program, created for young Jewish adults age 18-30. In 2019, for the first time, she visited a camp outside of Argentina, namely Machol Europa. The difference between camps in Europe and South America must be enormous. At Argentinian camps, the atmosphere is way more energetic. People will scream and sweat a lot, actually using the camps more as a sports happening than as a cultural event. Her current studies of Event Organization at the "Fundación de Altos Estudios en Ciencias Comerciales" (= Foundation of Higher Studies in Commercial Sciences) in Buenos Aires will certainly help her to organize more Israeli folk dance events back home. Personally, Melu seems to live for Israeli folk dance, to spread the message of Zionism through dancing.



*Melu Laniado at Machol Hungaria 2018 in Szarvas*

In April 2021, after Melu completed her studies, she moved to Tel Aviv where she works as a kindergarten teacher. Now, being in Israel, the land of unlimited Israeli folk dance opportunities, she dances at least four times a week, not only in Tel Aviv, but travelling as far as to the south (Ashdod) as well as up to the North (Haifa).



Matti Goldschmidt



## Agnieszka Kanas, Poland

Agnieszka was born in 1990 in Gdańsk (Danzig) and actually never had any thoughts about dancing during the first two decades of her life. In 2010, however, a friend of hers, **Jolanta Kalisz**, suggested that she join her to attend a (Roman Catholic) religious prayer group that tries to find a connection to God through dancing, adapted to Catholic rites – by the way, a very similar approach is used by the Hassidic movement. Therefore they chose mostly slower rhythms and dances, those with words were derived from the Bible. When Jolanta decided to take a break in 2012, the group dissolved. Two years later, Agnieszka met another woman, **Dorota Nałęcz**, who in 2003 had already founded another prayer group, which they later called "T'filati" (= my prayer). Agnieszka was happy to find a new possibility to dance. The group consisted of mostly five, sometimes seven or eight dancers and the repertoire of dances was relatively limited.

In 2015 **Beata Krzywda**, coming from Krakow, joined the scene and called her new group "Simcha" (= joy), which existed until 2017. This was the first time that a regular weekly dance course was established in Gdansk, that was not connected to prayer through dancing, but rather concentrated on the clear purpose of Israeli folk dance itself. This included a separate class for beginners, followed by one for those who are more advanced. Meanwhile, Agnieszka learned how to become updated with more contemporary Israeli folk dances through camps like "Polin Rokedet", organized by the **Hakenberg** family, and several workshops organized in Warsaw by a group called "Snunit", led by **Monika Leszczyńska**.

When Beata had to leave Gdansk, by coincidence, **Natalia Hakenberg** had moved to the city and founded a new group called Roztańczony Gdańsk (= Gdańsk dances), which she led until 2019. Meanwhile, the above mentioned Dorota returned to dance, which gave her and Agnieszka, who studied management marketing in the maritime industry, the opportunity to take over this group. In other words, Agnieszka, who started without any dance experience entering the Israeli folk dance scene through prayer, became, in less than ten years, a group leader of two dance groups: "T'filati" with the focus on combining prayer and dance and "Gdansk Dances" as purely an Israeli folk dance circle. Together with Dorota, she participated in the last Course for Israeli Folk Dance Instructors (Ulpan) directed by **Yael Yaakobi** with **Yaron Carmel** providing instruction on teaching methodology. The aim of the course is to learn about Israeli folk dance "from the first founders until today", "the history of Israeli folk dance as well as its development over the years", dance techniques on how to create stage choreographies and even how to create your own Israeli folk dance. In August 2021, she passed the tests with 96 in theory, 95 in dancing and 90 in teaching. The dance she had to teach was **Rivka Sturman's** "Shibolei Paz", definitely not one of the easiest dances to begin with as an Israeli folk dance teacher.

Not only were Agnieszka's friends surprised about the personal development she experienced through dancing the folklore of another country, with another religion and a strange-sounding language. Looking back, she herself never expected that dancing would have enriched her life to this magnitude.

"She started without any dance experience entering the Israeli folk dance scene through prayer..."



Kobi Michaeli at Machol Polonia 2009

Matti Goldschmidt



"The music, the getting together, the joy and fun. This was not only limited to folk dancing, she eventually also found interest in Judaism and Israel..."

## Kiki Kovaříková, Czech Republic

Kiki was born in 2003 in the city of Brno (Brünn). She led a regular normal and innocent life until the age of 13, when her older sister by two years, **Kaja Kovaříková**, surprised Kiki by asking her to attend a weekend folk dance camp in the same town. Excuse me: Folk Dancing? Kiki was certainly much more into disco or something more modern sounding, but in the end, Kája convinced her and the two indeed went. Two guest teachers from Israel were invited for this event called "Machol Brno", namely **Boaz Cohen** and **Gidi Eiko**, both from Jerusalem. As she remembers, her first major difficulties were in differentiating between her left and right foot, more than actually remembering the simple dance sequences she learned in a beginners course she took, the first one she ever attended in Israeli folk dance. As it turned out, it was "love at first sight": The music, the getting together, the joy and fun. This was not only limited to folk dancing; she eventually also found interest in Judaism and Israel. Together with Kája, Kiki soon joined the local regular weekly Monday Israeli folk dance course, led by **Pavla Dvořáková**. In addition, she started to study Hebrew in a course offered by the local Jewish Community Center. And in 2017, when she was barely 14, her grandfather took her for a weeklong trip to Israel. Since then, she has never missed an opportunity to visit as many Israeli folk dance camps in Czechia as possible, such as the one in Prague led by **Ondrej Novak**.



*Machol Czechia 2018 in Kralupy nad Vltavou with Kiki Kovaříková*

Generally, she is a bit disappointed that she does not know a few more of the older dances, even more so, the pioneer dances from the very beginning of Israeli folk dance, as she pointed out. So how can she deliver a fair judgement in comparing the new with the old? Her



*Machol Czechia 2018 in Kralupy nad Vltavou with Kiki Kovaříková*

criticism basically is that at practically all of the camps in Central Europe, for the most part, only the latest choreographies are taught. Younger dancers like herself will thus never be able to properly learn the classics. After graduating from high school in late spring 2021 she would like to study something connected with agriculture, while her sister Kaja is already busy with Jewish Studies at the Palacky University in Olomouc (Olmütz), a distance of just about an hour by car from their hometown.

\* Compare my article: "July 2018: 20 Years of Machol Czechia", in: Rokdim-Nirkoda (2019), no. 101, 32-35.



Matti Goldschmidt

## Elena Moczko, Switzerland



Elena was born in 2002 in the small Upper Bavarian township of Bad Tölz and in 2008, moved to Switzerland (Cantone Zug) with her sister and parents. She soon attended a ballet school for several years, followed by aerobic and jazz dance. Her mother, Christiane, a pharmacist, had already started with Israeli circle dances during her studies in Tübingen (Southern Germany) and later on, in Munich at the JCC's weekly courses, led by **Matti Goldschmidt**. When Elena was about twelve years old, her mother suggested that she attend a weekend session in Olten (Cantone Solothurn), led by **Oded Harari**, who was born in Kibbutz Yehiam (עֵיָהִי), east of Nahariya, and had moved to Berne in 1973. Since Elena was the only young dancer at this event and did not have a clue what to do; she mostly sat around during the workshop and was not really impressed about what the grown-ups did, to say the least.

She gave herself a second chance, however, as her mother again invited her, now together with her older sister by two years, Anja, to just another workshop, this time in Winterthur (Cantone Zürich), and again led by **Oded Harari**. This too did not really convince her. In spite of this, more out of certain boredom, while on summer holiday somewhere in Croatia, her sister, **Anja Moczko**, decided to teach her **Rafi Ziv's** dance, "Mimi". The music was just perfect in Elena's eyes (and ears, of course) and from then on she became her own driving force for more. In 2016 her mother booked a place for herself and the two daughters at "Hora Or", a dance camp in Lille (France) led by **Benny Assouline**. Back at home, she continued dancing in Zürich, on a more regular basis, at the Jewish Community Center's weekend sessions of **Ronit Bollag** and at an annual dance weekend camp near Berne led by **Oren Ashkenazi**.

She personally prefers the newer dances, which in her eyes are more complex and sportive, and thus more challenging. On the other hand, she is aware that she is still missing a lot of popular dances of the 80's and 90's, especially at camps during the evening open sessions. She also complains about the fact, that at camps, too often the invited dance instructors prefer to teach their own dances which are hardly danced in other sessions. During the Corona crisis, she has kept herself updated through YOUTUBE video clips. After a year, as an exchange student in Bretagne (France), Elena graduated from high school in late spring 2021.

Her final paper of 52 pages was about Israeli folk dance and the meaning behind it. Within the framework of this thesis, she not only choreographed on her own two dances with clearly Israeli folk dance-related step combinations; she also described her experiences of teaching several simple Israeli folk dances to a group of 12-13-year old girls, consisting of more than twenty dancers. In the end, each of the young students had to fill in a short questionnaire about what each of them thought or felt about this new experience; something they had never seen or heard about before. The vast majority was positively surprised by how entertaining folk dance can be. It certainly changed their ideas in general about folk dancing.

Elena's goal for the near future is to study Social Work and hopes to be able to also include here some of her beloved Israeli folk dances.

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**"...she is aware that she is still missing a lot of popular dances of the 80's and 90's, especially at camps during the evening open sessions."**

Matti Goldschmidt

## Nathalie Ivasov, Germany

Nathalie was born in 1994 in Odessa (Ukraine) and until the age of 8 attended a Jewish school, which also included classes in Hebrew. In 2002 the family moved to Germany, first to a small township in Saxonia named Borsdorf, and a year later, to Leipzig. This is precisely the city where some of the acknowledged founders of Israeli folk dance, namely **Gurit Kadman** and **Rivka Sturman**, came from. Nathalie's grandfather was eager to have his granddaughter educated in Jewish culture, so she joined a painting course as well as a singing course at the local JCC. After a few months, this vocal group had its first public performance, by coincidence, together with a performing dance group, "Gvanim". When she saw the group dancing, Nathalie at once became thrilled and through her grandfather, asked to join this group. Needless to say, the group, with all of its members older than 20, rejected her.

Four years later, in 2007, when Nathalie was 12 years old, she gave it another try. This time the group leader, **Galina Kapitanova**, accepted her. Even though "Gvanim" used Israeli music for its performances, this was by far not yet Israeli folk dance. In 2012, a good part of the group, with about 12 (female) dancers, decided to take part in a workshop, led by **Matti Goldschmidt**. This was the time Nathalie had her first real contact with Israeli folk dance and it has never stopped. Since then, she has regularly attended the various camps organized by "Israelisches Tanzhaus" based in Munich, such as "Machol Germania" in Pappenheim (with guest teachers including, in alphabetical order, **Ofer Alfasi, Sagi Azran, Dror Davidi, Hila Mukdasi, Eithan Mizrachi, Tamir Scherzer, El'ad Shtammer**), the weekend workshops with Israeli choreographers (such as **Michael Barzelai, Dudu Barzilai, Itzik Ben Dahan, Yaron Ben-Simhon, Yaron Carmel, Shmulik Gov-Ari, Avi Peretz, Tamir Shalev, Rafi Ziv**, and others), and the annual camps for beginners, "Hora Sheleg" over Silvester (New Year).

She visited Israel for the first time in March 2016, through the "Taglit" – aka Birthright-Israel program. Even though folk dance is not [sic!] part of Taglit's schedule, the organizers asked her to do some teaching on one evening. Nathalie's choice of dances were: "Tzadik K'Tamar", "Od Lo Ahavti Dai", and "Hora Hadera". After all, Nathalie had to deal with a totally inexperienced group. In 2019 and 2020 she also completed an Israeli folk dance course led by **Tirza Hodes**, together with either **Lucy Maman** or **Marina Evel** organized by "Zentralwohlfahrtstelle der Juden in Deutschland (ZWST)" in Frankfurt/Main (= Central Welfare Office of the Jews in Germany). Meanwhile, Nathalie changed her citizenship from Ukrainian to German and thus



*Nathalie Ivasov and Matti Goldschmidt dancing at Machol Germania 2016 in Pappenheim (Germany).*



Matti Goldschmidt

"Even though folk dance is not [sic!] part of Taglit's schedule, the organizers asked her one evening to do some teaching. Nathalie's choice was 'Tzadik ke-Thamar', 'Od lo Ahhavthi Dai', and 'Hora Hadera'."

also her name from Natalya Ivasova to Nathalie Ivasov. She left "Gvanim" in June 2020 in order to form her own performing group, "Same'ach" (= happy or "freylach" in Yiddish) with about ten members. Nathalie was not content with the methodology of leading a performing group as was the case with "Gvanim". In her opinion, "Gvanim's" approach was closer to technique and sports and less to dance and especially Israeli folk dance itself. Having become a certified kindergarten teacher (as was, by the way, Rivka Sturman), Nathalie can thus put her own ideas into practice not only in her own performing group, but also in a newly founded children's group called "Shemesh" (= sun), which consists of about four members, a humble beginning. The local JCC, recognizing Nathalie's ambition, energy, and talent, has already sent her several times to different public schools, thus, as an ambassador of Israeli folk dance, bringing local non-Jewish school kids closer to dance and Jewish-Israeli culture.

Personally, she prefers the classic Israeli folk dances, since they have, in her opinion, a more folkloristic touch. She heavily criticizes the huge number of modern Israeli dances. No one in the world is able to remember a few hundred new dances per year. Especially, since a high percentage of those are quickly forgotten after only a few months – and too often, never to be danced again. Nathalie's aspirations, already as an eight-year-old, have so far been successful, in that today she dedicates almost her entire life to Israeli folk dance. This is in addition to the time she needs for her education, which right now, is understandably still her first priority.

### Marina Victoria Halsman Serwaczak, Brazil

Marina was born in 2005 in São Paulo, Brazil. Most of her ancestors actually came from Poland. She has danced since her early childhood and cannot even remember a period in her life without dancing. Her first dance steps in the classes she attended belonged to the category of contemporary sacred dancing, which she soon left at the age of four in order to join the local JCC's dance group for 4 to 8-year old children called, "Parparim Ktanim" (= little butterflies). As the largest Jewish community in Brazil, with 80,000 people, the JCC of São Paulo has not only one or two dance groups, like most of the European Jewish communities, but a dozen or even more. Over the years, Marina climbed the rungs of the dance group ladder: "Parparim Gdolim" (= big butterflies), followed by "Kalanit" (= anemone) and eventually "Lehakat Shalom" (= peace troupe).

By the age of 13 years, she was asked by the management to assist in teaching, as they recognized Marina's dance talents. Currently, she leads this group together with **Carolina Mosseri**. She also teaches an adult group, mainly in the age range of 30-70, albeit with a few teenagers participating. Her teaching repertoire does not only include the "latest hits" from Israel such as "Resisim" by **Michael Barzelai** and **Yuval Tabashi**, but also **Bentzi Tiram's** "Ha'Har Hayarok", for example, which she recently taught. So far, she has never left Brazil, but she likes to travel and especially to join the relatively large number of local dance events, for, "Festival Carmel", in her hometown. In 2016 she was asked to join the organizational team for this event. In 2019 she attended a camp called "Machol Brazil", led by **Lucas Schwetz**.

Not just another camp and definitely special to Marina is "Festival Hava Netze Bemachol", which began in 1970 and just celebrated its 50th anniversary in Rio de Janeiro, Nowadays, it is led by **André Luiz Grinspan Schor** and **Sergio Rosenboim**. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic they did not give up and in 2020, created the first internet "Festival.com" including a beautiful tribute



"As the largest Jewish community in Brazil of around 80.000 the JCC of São Paulo has not only one or two dance groups like most of the European Jewish communities, but a dozen or even more."

to the well-known choreographer, **Luiz Filipe Barbosa**, who passed away that year. For the festival, the organizers invited everyone to submit a dance choreography: Out of twenty-four entries, eight were chosen to be presented for the final at the event itself. Among those final entries was Marina's choreography (together with **Bruna Steinberg**) titled, "Oseh Li Tov" to a song by **Agam Buchbut**, that ranked seventh, a first and fantastic success for the two young ladies. In early 2021, as an additional teacher, she joined HARKALIVE, a popular and worldwide watched online platform developed by **Ilai Szpiezak** (London) with various online zoom sessions.

In regard to the huge number of Israeli folk dances, she is aware that one has to consciously move with the times. Societies are subject to permanent change and in Marina's opinion, so too, is Israeli folk dance. Nevertheless, this development can only be appreciated with a sound knowledge of classic and older dances.

### Melanie Fröhlich, Austria



Melanie was born in 1994 in Vienna and as far as she can remember, she danced before she was even able to walk. During her time in kindergarten, she took ballet classes for several years – like so many other girls her age. She was lucky enough to have a grandmother, **Monika Macht**, who loves to dance, and in taking care of her grandchild, Monika simply took Melanie, from the age of three, to all kinds of Israeli folk dance events. The first one Melanie really remembers was a dance camp in Labaroche (Elsass, France) near the German border in the year 2000. This must have been so impressive because to this day, she remembers the names of the invited teachers: **Bonny Piha, Yoram Sasson, Haim Vaknin**, and **Rafi Ziv**. Back then, she basically learned most of the dances she knows by watching from the side while simply trying to follow other more experienced dancers.

Soon Melanie joined her grandmother in organizing the dance classes of the latter on Monday nights and Saturday afternoons in Vienna's "II. Bezirk" or 2nd district, which until WWII was known as the "Jewish district" of Austria's capital. Should grandma here and there have been prevented from coming, Melanie gladly took over leading the sessions. In 2016, at a dance competition at Machol Hungaria, organized by **Gyorgy (Ubul) Forgacs**, she won second prize. For years, both Melanie and her grandma, attended many of the dance weekends in Munich, organized by "Israelisches Tanzhaus", which included choreographers such as **Michael Barzelai, Dudu Barzilay, Meir Shem Tov, Avi Levy**, and many others. Over the last fifteen years, both also organized their own weekend workshops in Vienna with **Sefi Aviv, Eran Bitton, Gadi Bitton**, and several others.

She is also a member of the local performing group, "Hava Nagila", organized as a registered charity, which performs on various Jewish holidays and was even on stage at the European Maccabi Games Vienna 2011 (with a stage choreography by **Matti Goldschmidt**). Most of Melanie's spare time is connected to Israeli folk dance. Since there is not one single man available in Vienna, at least not for Israeli folk dance, partner dances are unquestionably not her favorites. Thus, she has enough space to concentrate exclusively on circle and block (or line) dances. She definitely prefers the newer dances with a more Mediterranean touch and more complex step sequences.

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"She especially likes the feeling of being part of a united dance community as it happens with IFD, which she experienced over the last years..."

## Alexandra Pantis, Romania

Alexandra was born in Oradea (Großwardein), Western Romania, in 1999. She started to dance in kindergarten, mainly to Latino rhythms. When she was eleven years old, her mother, recognizing her dance abilities and motivation, suggested that she join a traditionally dressed Romanian dance group, a folk ensemble called "Florile Bihorului" of which she was a member for eight years. In 2016 she joined yet another traditionally dressed dance group called "Die Regenbogen Tanzgruppe" (= rainbow dance troupe) which concentrates on German motifs, thus the German name of the group.

In fact, connections to Israeli folk dance came only by coincidence. In 2016, after an English class, **Ana Cecilia Bucevschi**, one of her classmates, started to speak, more in passing, about the local JCC's dance group "Or Neurim", led by **Futo Ildiko** (choreography) and **Alexandrina Chelu** (management). Alexandra became curious, and after her first Romanian group dissolved and later having joined a second one, namely the "Ansamblul Folcloric "Vetre Bihorene", she was determined to try something new with a third performing troupe.

The time with "Or Neurim" is split into two sections: One half is used for performances, mostly presented within the framework of Jewish or Israeli holidays, while the other half is reserved for practicing Israeli folk dances. She finds modern Israeli folk dances more challenging, compared to the simpler structure of most of the pioneer dances; even though, as she admits, she hardly knows any of them. She especially likes the feeling of being part of a united dance community, such as in that of Israeli folk dance, which she experienced during the past years when attending, for instance, the 5-day camp, "Machol Hungaria" in Szarvas, a relatively short drive of approximately two hours by car from her hometown. Compared to Israeli folk dance, for instance, there is nothing like "Romanian dances" per se, as Alexandra points out, since they may highly differ in character from area to area. And certainly, there is no such thing as a single Romanian hora. She adds that contrary to all assertions, no Romanian would recognize the Israeli hora as anything Romanian. This is probably to the big disappointment of many Israelis.

Alexandra studies Mathematics and Informatics (computer sciences). She is in her final semester with both majors and would like to pursue a master's degree so that she can become a mathematics teacher. Parallel to her studies, she is about to complete a two-year course in traditional Romanian dance at the "Francisc Hubic" Art School, consisting of two meetings a week for about two to three hours each. This certainly would create a basis for her also becoming a teacher in the field of dance and, especially Israeli folk dance. She was surprised to hear that couple dances are extremely popular in Israel. She personally prefers staying with circle dances only; the lack of dancing men, not only in Romania, but also in many other countries in Europe, leaves too many women too often sitting around and bored as soon couple dances are played.



Oren Ashkenazi at Machol Romania in Predael-Schanzpass 2011

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## Heta Heinonen, Finland

Heta was born in 1999 in Vaasa, a university town approximately 440 km (274 miles) north of Helsinki, with roughly 60,000 inhabitants. (25% of them are Swedish speaking.) By the age of six, she joined a ballet class for children, accompanied by the usual dance performances for the parents at Christmas and in the spring. A couple of years later, her dance classes also included hip-hop and modern dance. Her first contact with Israeli folk dance occurred in 2007, when she joined her mother, Elisa, for a weekend seminar in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, led by **Yaron Meishar**.

Here is the place to add that **Elisa Heinonen** started with Israeli folk dance more than twenty years earlier, first with **Wim van ser Kooji**, who is originally from the Netherlands, but moved to Finland in the early 1970's. In the years that followed, she also danced Israeli folk dance with **Leena Jäppilä** and **Alpo Pajunen**, the father of **Jouni Pajunen** who nowadays is teaching Israeli folk dance in Finland. So it seemed only natural that Heta followed in her mother's footsteps. Heta feels that dance is an integral part of her body. It's in her blood. She felt, that (after having practiced other styles) this new style of dance, namely circle dances, made her feel good. All in all, she never had a real opportunity to join regular, that is weekly dance sessions, but liked to move from camp to camp including Machol Czechia in 2011, Machol Europa and Machol Baltica in 2013, and Machol Hungaria three times. She would never sit around at a camp, simply trying to copy the step sequences of dances from others that were not taught during a camp. And admittedly, there are quite a lot of these that are done at the evening sessions.

During the years 2016-2018, Heta was asked by a church group in a town called Seinäjoki, a one-hour drive south-east of Vaasa (80 km), to teach dances for beginners. Basically, she has no real preference for old or new or, for instance, dances to oriental music. She likes the challenge, "the quicker, the more fun", as she disarmingly relates. Definitely a big plus, in her opinion, is the feeling of dancing together with dozens of people from other countries, at least at Israeli folk dance camps, and the fact that she would be able to join as many dances sessions as possible around the world with the knowledge of dances she meanwhile absorbed, not to forget her talent for picking up step sequences quickly. Heta currently studies Energy Technology in Espoo, the second-largest city in Finland, and keeps herself in shape dancewise through ballet classes.

"Definitely a big plus in her opinion is the feeling of dancing together with dozens of people from other countries, at least at IFD dance camps..."



Heta Heinonen at Machol Hungaria in Szarvas, 2018



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## Dominyka Chackelevic, Lithuania

Dominyka was born in 2002 in Vilnius (Wilna). From her earliest childhood, she has seen herself as a professional dancer, having started with ballet by the age of six. She certainly did not waste her time spending her free time after school for some pleasurable recreation: The youngsters already danced for two hours five times a week. The courses included rehearsals for public performances and later on, even the participation in several competitions in countries like Latvia or Russia. Israeli folk dance appeared relatively late in Dominyka's life. Probably the reason was that her mother **Rita Chackelevic** used to play Israeli music exclusively during car rides, that is, mostly music for which a certain dance sequence was choreographed. At first, she did not want to believe that a different sequence of steps was needed for each tune.

In other words, Dominyka grew up with the right music in her ears and in the end she had her first real contact with Israeli folk dances at the age of 12, when her mother took her to a camp in Milan (Italy), namely "Stage Yofi Aviv", organized by **Roberto Bagnoli** and **Yehuda Rahmani** and with the instructors, **Dudu Barzilay** and **Avi Levy**. As an already skilled dancer, she had no problems following the workshops for advanced Israeli folk dancers. Just a few years later, she joined the weekly classes of her mother and also taught Israeli line dances in the Jewish summer camps of the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). Absolute highlights for her were the family holidays in Israel where she and her mother followed as many public beach dance sessions as possible – such as on Saturdays at Gordon Beach in Tel Aviv.



*Machol Baltica in Wilnius (Lithuania), 2018*

In fall 2018 her mother, together with **Elena Gorelik**, organized in Vilnius the 3-day camp "LeRikud" with Dominyka greatly supporting them from behind the scenes. At the moment, she studies dance at Middlesex University in London, which naturally not only includes dancing itself, but also subjects such as anatomy and dance history. Within the framework of these studies, one of her papers was about Israeli folk dance, titled "The History and Creation of Israeli

Folk Dance and Its Relation to Dance Therapy". Being that she knows about several different regular Israeli folk dance classes in London, she is eager for the Corona-related restrictions to be lifted for dance sessions in England to return to normal operation.

When she was young (well, at least younger than the 19 she is right now), she definitely preferred Israeli folk dances to modern music. Over the years, however, she became aware that the construction of a house does not start with the second floor. Especially the music of the early dances draws her attention and, after all, Dominyka is convinced that the Israeli folk dances of today would look different without the foundation laid by the zero generation of Israeli folk dance. Last but not least, to quote from Dominyka's paper: "It is Israeli dance which infuses emotions and goals into my daily life. When I dance, I forget everything, I feel freedom."

**"It is Israeli dance which infuses emotions and goals into my daily life. When I dance, I forget everything, I feel freedom."**



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## Iris Pinto, Turkey

Iris was born in 1997 in Istanbul. Parallel to entering first grade, she also started with her first dance steps by joining a children's ballet school, but decided to drop out after less than two years, because she felt too shy to express herself through her body and simply felt too uncomfortable to continue. Instead, she joined a Saturday and Sunday program at the Jewish Community Center, thus meeting other kids and learning more about Jewish life.

These new programs were mainly introduced by her grandfather who had studied a few years in Israel, and who also brought with him the idea of folk dancing to a community of around 20,000, by far the largest in Turkey. Her father already used to do some Israeli folk dancing, keeping with the classics of Israeli folk dance, and especially preparing conventional dance performances for the celebration of Jewish holidays. This group, which still performs today, is called "Shemesh Karmiel" and was definitely for the "old people", that is, those over 30. It was led by **Verda Darsa** with lots of support by **Shlomo Maman**.

On the other hand, Iris meanwhile had joined by the age of around twelve, the folk dance group for the young ones, with **Valeri Bahar** being one of the leading instructors. At different times, this dance class attracted between fifteen to twenty people, and since 2010, the JCC sends a small delegation every year to **Maurice Stone's** "Machol Europa". Iris' turn was in 2014 and she was amazed at the quantity of the dances danced in the evening sessions: The roughly one hundred dances she knew from home were hardly played. As a result, she could hardly dance at the evening sessions, even though at home she was considered to be one of the more advanced dancers, based on the number of dances she knew.

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**"Iris enjoys the challenge of learning new dances, but misses the Israeli debkas, which were so popular in the 1970s and 80s."**

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In 2015, turning just about 18, she moved to Chicago to study Psychology and Cognitive Science at Northwestern University. It took her a whole year to adjust to the environment without any dancing, and on a visit home in 2016, she attended her second camp, namely, Machol Hungaria, led by **Gyorgy "Ubul" Forgacs**. Back in the United States, **Phil Moss** highly recommended that she should try his own camp, "Machol Merkaz". This seemed to have been a certain turning point for her. Since then she regularly visited,

not only the weekly classes of Phil Moss, but until her return to Istanbul in fall 2020, also those of **Bruria Cohen**. Iris even attended an additional camp, namely the one in Boston called "Yad BeYad", led by a team of three: **Ronnie Efrat, Yehuda Vishny** and **Rina Wagman**. Her own efforts, together with a fellow student, to introduce Israeli folk dance directly on the campus and financially supported by Hillel, the largest Jewish campus organization in the world, had to be discontinued after almost two years, due to the lack of regular participation.

The only way to stay connected during Corona times is through online sessions, in particular **Ilai Szpiezak's** "Harkalive", broadcast from London. In order not to forget the



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steps and to stay in practice, Iris thus dances in her home on her own. She loves the variety of the music and step sequences in Israeli folk dance, and the diversity of the types of dances. Certainly, she would have preferred the community feeling and being able to get together.

On the other hand, she recognizes that these online sessions have something that got lost in the old and regular dance events: Firstly, for instance, dance titles are announced. How can someone without proper knowledge of Hebrew ever remember the dance titles when they are never spoken out loud. Secondly, there mostly is a break between the dances, which gives time to breathe. And thirdly, at least in Ilai's classes, often the name of the choreographer or a little anecdote about the specific dance is added. She is aware that contrary to her own development in dancing, it is difficult to inspire young kids to engage in Israeli folk dance. Iris enjoys the challenge of learning new dances, but misses the Israeli debkas, which were so popular in the 1970s and 80s.



### Rebeka Grosová, Denmark

Rebeka was born in 2000 in Liberec (Reichenberg, Czech Republic) and moved with her family in 2014 to Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. She started to dance ballet and theatrical dance at the age of six. Her first steps in Israeli folk dance began four years later for a period of about three years, since her mother, **Andrea Grosová**, was already involved with this genre. However, one of the reasons for her to move to Denmark in her teens was the idea, after having received a scholarship from a private school, to concentrate more on jazz dance and musicals to become a professional dancer.

Rebeka's return to Israeli folk dance took place in 2019, when the whole family decided to attend Machol Czechia. This inspired her so much, that she also joined Machol Europa as well as Machol Hungaria the same year. One thing she especially liked in England was the tighter and disciplined program, which also included practicing for a dance performance. Meanwhile, she studies modern dance at the "Sceneindgangen Versatile Dance Education" in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, Denmark does not seem to be the place for establishing a regular Israeli folk dance session, as she sadly mentioned. On the other hand, she would try to dance as much Israeli folk dance as possible, as soon as time and money allow it. And certainly, as a professional dancer, she favors more modern dances with a bit of a challenge. Nevertheless, in order to preserve Jewish history, the pioneer dances are equally important for her to know.

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**"And certainly, as a professional dancer, she favors more modern dances with a bit of a challenge. Nevertheless, in order to preserve Jewish history, the pioneer dances are equally important for her to know."**

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## Polina Sotnikova, Russia

Polina was born in 2000 in Perm (Russia) and danced from her early childhood, which included modern and classical dance. Being a member of a dance competition team called "Konfieti" (= sweets), she had the chance to travel to countries like Finland, Germany, Montenegro, and Sweden. While she studied Spanish and English at the university, her aunt, **Olga Vatletsova**, recommended that she should try Israeli folk dancing and actually sent her in 2019 to Machol Europa in Coventry (England); Polina would surely like it. Olga herself had attended this camp in England several times, the first time being in 1994.



*Polina Sotnikova at Machol Europa in Gloucestershire (England), 2019*

"... she certainly wanted to continue and planned to found and organize back home an IFD dance circle in her home town..."

For Polina, this was the first time ever for her to get in touch with Israeli folk dance. The experience to learn over two dozen dances within only four days overwhelmed her emotionally, needless to add that as an experienced dancer, she had no real problems following the teaching and remembering all the dances. With this basic knowledge, she certainly wanted to continue and planned to found and organize an Israeli folk dance circle back in her hometown, since this kind of dancing was unknown there. Sadly, because of Corona restrictions, this idea had to be delayed for the time being.

## Olya Spektorova, Crimean Republic

Olya was born in Simferopol in 1991, the capital of the Krim peninsula, then part of Ukraine, and since 2014, ceded to the Russian Federation. Like many children her age, she started to take some dance classes at the age of three for four years, mainly in the "social dance" field. This was followed by a huge break for her in the field of dancing until she finished high school when, at the age of 17, she joined a performing dance troupe. Five years later she decided to enter a "Masa" program. Masa is funded by the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency (sochnut), with fifty percent by each. Thus she moved to Tel Aviv for half a year, enhancing her resume with international work experience in structural engineering. Even though back home she had prepared herself for this program with two years of studying Hebrew, her knowledge of the language was not really good enough for proper conversations. So she was lucky that the mother tongue of her instructors was – nowadays not a real coincidence – Russian.

After having returned to her hometown with a new kind of Jewish sense of mission, she joined the Jewish community's "Hillel" group, consisting of people age 16-26. They met once a week, normally on Shabbat. Their program also included dancing, albeit here to Eastern European Jewish ethnic dance motifs and music. As Olya pointed out, the Jewish community had kind of a basic repertoire of eight to ten pioneer circle dances, which never had the term "Israeli folk dances" attached to them – it was simply considered to be Jewish. Upon an invitation of Maurice Stone in 2017, the leader of the Hillel group decided to send Olya to England to join the 40th "Machol Europa". This was actually the first time ever she got in touch with Israeli





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folk dance. Olya simply never had heard about this before.

After this two-week experience in Coventry, England, she succeeded to introduce a few of the dances she had learned there in a Hillel class that was then led by **Aleksandra Gorelik**. With the outbreak of the pandemic, however, Aleksandra had left the group and everything died down. Olya loves Israeli folk dance because it connects her not only to Israel as a country, but also to the Hebrew language that she would love to speak much better, and mostly because Israeli folk dance simply creates a kind of togetherness she had not experienced before. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of younger people in the much too small Jewish community of Simferopol who would make the establishment of a new dance circle possible – a dance circle she would be more than happy to lead.



*Drum course at Machol Europa 2017 in Coventry (England) with Olya Spektorova*

**"Olya loves Israeli folk dance because it connects her not only to Israel as a country, but also to the Hebrew language that she would love to speak much better, and mostly because Israeli folk dance simply creates a kind of togetherness she had not experienced before."**

**Noriane Lerouge, France**

Noriane was born in Laval (Britanny) near Rennes in 1998, a small town with a population of roughly 50,000 in the northwest of France. She believes that she started to dance Israeli folk dance by the age of around three months, since her father is the dance instructor and choreographer **Frederic Lerouge**, who met Noriane's mother, **Solveig**, where else than, of course, at an Israeli folk dance camp. Solveig again grew up in a hamlet called Roqueredond (near Montpellier) in the south of France, together with the family of **Vincent Parodi**. By the age of three, Noriane began ballet classes, followed by contemporary and modern dance. As a teen, she joined her father as his partner for salsa, tango and rock sessions.

At home, folk music was mostly played, which certainly shaped her and her younger sister Maïvonn's musical subconsciousness forever. At dance camps, Noriane was always a little star. At an early age, camp participants took her by the hand to join the circle – and made her try to follow, at least the directions, as much as possible. The first Israeli folk dance camp in which she she actively and determinedly participated was at the age of 10 in Aubigny, led by **Benny Asouline**, when she began to make notes, like writing down dance names in Hebrew and French or even step sequences. Noriane still owns this notebook. The camp in Aubigny was followed by several dozens of other dance camps over the years. By the age of



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"A huge part of her social life is based on or the result of being involved with Israeli folk dance: "I simply would not be myself without those dances", she said."



17, after having received her baccalauréat (= high school diploma), she moved to Nantes, where she joined a regular Israeli folk dance class led by **Odile Hervy**. Soon after, Noriane also did some teaching in support of Odile. As she admitted, the choice of the dances she taught was highly influenced by the music she found appealing.

In the framework of her studies, namely Comparative Literature (English and French) she moved, for one year, to Edmonton, the capital of Alberta (Canada). One of the reasons to have chosen Edmonton of all places, was the existence of regular dance sessions, then led by **Meirav Or** at the local JCC. Noriane was surprised how quickly she became accepted in this Jewish environment as a non-Jewish dancer. In France, as in many other west European countries, Israeli folk dance is in general not an integral part of Jewish life, at least not the kind of Israeli folk dance as it would be defined here. It rather appears in a secular non-Jewish social environment.

After a year abroad, Noriane moved back to France, namely, to Nantes and then to Lyon finishing her studies to become a high school teacher. Certainly, the Covid-19 pandemic affected her dance aspirations, but she never stopped dancing, even if the chosen dance space would have been only her living room. Nowadays she lives in the alpine town of Chambéry (population roughly 60,000), south of Geneva and east of Lyon, working as a school teacher. There she joined an Israeli folk dance class regularly attended by around 25 participants. About the flood of new dances introduced each year she shrugged her shoulders. The best will "survive" – while she likes "well-structured" dances the most. However, she is aware that she still misses many of the classic dances, since they all are older than herself, as she points out. Just recently she taught herself "Shir" from the internet. A huge part of her social life is based on or the result of being involved with Israeli folk dance: "I simply would not be myself without those dances", she said.

### Natalia Hakenberg, Poland

Natalia was born in 1990 in the city of Gliwice (Gleiwitz, Upper Silesia), the place where on August 31st, 1939, the German "Schutzstaffel" (SS) faked an allegedly Polish-led attack on the local radio station which served for the Nazis as a pretext to invade Poland – the beginning of World War II. Surprisingly, dance of any kind was not an issue for the family until they moved to Warsaw in 2002. Soon after, Natalia's father overheard by coincidence an announcement made by the leader of an already existing Israeli folk dance group called "Snunit" (= swallow), led by **Monika Leszczyńska**, who was looking for new members in her group. As a result, Natalia's mother, **Lucyna Hakenberg**, a sports teacher, took her, then 12-year-old, and her elder sister, **Miriam Hakenberg**, to the class, where they learned dances like "Hora Hadera" and "Kleizmer".

Natalia liked not only the music. She was especially impressed by the whole atmosphere of unity and happiness that everyone radiated, of holding hands (in Israel, long since "out-of-fashion"), of following set step sequences instead of improvising, which Natalia in fact disliked. Since she was still considered to be too young for regular attendance at the class, Miriam and her mother nevertheless joined and retaught the new dances back home. In 2003 Miriam returned from Machol Hungaria and familiarized Natalia with more modern Israeli folk dances. From 2004 on, now being 14 years old, she finally started to join the regular weekly "Snunit" dance class. The first dance camp she ever attended was in 2007, organized by the same dance group in the small town of Śródborów, just a few kilometres southeast of Warsaw, with guest teacher **Boaz Cohen**. The experience of having learned new dances from a genuine Israeli dance instructor and having participated in such an event strengthened her focus on Israeli folk dance.



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Natalia continued to learn as many dances as possible through videotapes, as filmed at Machol Hungaria or the Munich workshops, in addition to YOUTUBE videoclips.

Her physical education teacher allowed her to teach Israeli dancing to classmates for a whole hour once a week. At the same time, she also started to occasionally teach the "Snunit" dance group. Furthermore, she took Hebrew language classes. Her first visit to Israel was in 2010 with a Polish youth group, participating in the project, "Living Bridge Poland-Israel". This was followed by another two-week trip to

Israel in 2012, with the emphasis and only goal to dance as much as possible. Instead, to recover from studies, Natalia actually led an "exhausting life" during the fortnight in Israel, as her daily schedule became: Dancing until after midnight, getting back to the hostel, sleeping until 11 am, packing the rucksack, travelling to a new place and trying to arrive as quickly as possible to the new dance session, preferably from the very beginning with the basic dance repertoire.

In 2013 Natalia started with her studies in "Management" at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. In the same year, the Hakenberg family also began to organize their Israeli folk dance camps named "Polin Rokedet" (= Poland dances). During the years until 2021, it was held eight times in different locations (with the exception of 2020 when an online live broadcast was organized). Invited dance teachers and choreographers included **Oren** and **Lena Ashkenazi**, **Yuval Tabashi**, **Bonny Piha**, **Avi Levy**, **Elad Shtamer**, **Hila Mukdasi**, **Yaron Elfasi**, **Ilai Szpiezak** and **Michael Barzilai**. In 2014 she graduated from the Course For Israeli Folk Dance Instructors ("Ulpan") in Israel. She never felt too tired to also travel abroad and visited places like, just to name a few, Munich in 2010 with guest teacher **Gadi Bitton** (organized by "Israelisches Tanzhaus"), Machol Hungaria in 2011, with guest teachers **Eran Bitton** and **Yaron Carmel**, Riga in 2012 with **Avi Levy**, Leipzig (Germany) in 2015 with **Dudu Barzilay** and Vilna in 2018 with **Rafi Ziv**.

While working for a high-tech company in Gdansk on the Baltic Sea from 2017-2019, she led a local dance group. With the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, dancing also became difficult in Poland. With proper knowledge of Hebrew, in late summer 2021, she moved, so far temporarily, to Tel Aviv working in a Polish-Israeli recruitment agency, again providing her with the opportunity to dance at Israeli folk dance sessions almost all over the country. In principle, she likes both, older and new dances. In older dances, however, Natalia likes the fact that there is more holding hands and thus a more intense feeling of togetherness. On the other hand, in general, she would rather not pay too much attention to the creation date of a dance as long as she feels somehow connected to the steps and music.

In regard to the enormous number of newly created dances, Natalia tries to see the positive side: This way dancers may have a larger choice to find the dances they favor. And if a dancer would rather stop putting the pressure on himself to learn all the dances, he or she would certainly find more joy in Israeli folk dancing. Last but not least, Natalia sees in Israeli folk dance, not only the opportunity to find amazing friends throughout the world; her personal gain was to become a more open and more assertive person through Israeli folk dance. 🙌



*Natalia Hakenberg and Rafi Ziv at "Machol Baltica" in Vilnius, 2018*

"She was especially impressed by the whole atmosphere of unity and happiness that everyone radiated, of holding hands (in Israel, long since "out-of-fashion"), of following set step sequences instead of improvising, which she in fact disliked"



David Ben Asher

Edited and  
Translated by  
Benny Levy

Photos:  
David Ben Asher,  
family album

# The Lyricist, the Musician and the Choreographer

## Moshiko Halevy tells about and shares his personal perspective

This is **Moshiko Halevy**, a unique, extraordinary phenomenon, unique in Israel and throughout the world, in the holistic complexity of works of movement as far as the field of dance is concerned. This special combination of composing the melody, writing the lyrics, performing the song and choreographing the dance – all done by the same person – is very rare. As far as I know, this multidimensional talent does not exist among songwriters and dance choreographers.

Moshiko, 89-years-old, holds a record of more than 300 folk dances (“Israeli dances” by his definition, and more on that follows), of which about 180 are to his musical compositions. He also wrote the lyrics for 70 of them. He is the performing singer, accompanying vocalist, drummer or a flute player for many of these. His professional record, spanning over 70 years, includes countless choreographies and performances as a dancer, choreographer, director and instructor, in Israel and around the world.

***[Israeli folk dance choreographers are often referred to as “creators of a dance.” Based on that, the following question: BL] What is the difference between a creator and a choreographer?***

“We do not create,” says Moshiko, “we compose and assemble the movements of the dance.” As a person who wears a kippah (yarmulke), Moshiko gives credit to the Creator of the world: “He is The Creator and He is the only one who can create out of nothing; and since we do not have the skills that The Creator of the world has, we should not be referred to as creators, but rather, as choreographers. Choreographing a dance is like putting a puzzle together – if it is assembled (i.e., put together) correctly, is good and appropriate, a complete picture emerges. We did not create the parts, nor did we invent. We simply found and only assembled the parts to the desired perfection.”



Moshiko Halevy in 2021



David Ben Asher

"For this reason and the degree of modesty required, we should call ourselves 'choreographers' and not 'creators'."



*Instructing with Nourit Grinfeld*

Moshiko explains his doctrine of "creation" formation and "choreography" and the basic concepts that are accepted among those who are engaged in the field of dance in particular, and in the arts field in general: "With all due respect, dance choreographers have no ground to carry the title "creators" since none of them has ever invented a step. All they do is simply reproduce steps and movements and enjoy what exists.

For this reason and the degree of modesty required, we should call ourselves "choreographers" and not "creators," Moshiko said.

And I repeat again, since all the choreographers are nourished by what exists, there is no place here to define a dance composer as a "creator." Dance composers are accustomed to the title of "creator" and enjoy using it because the title of creator elevates them to the divine rank.

***In light of your vast experience both in choreographing dances and in teaching and training at countless hishtalmuyot (workshops) worldwide, what exactly is it to choreograph a dance?***

It is important for an individual to have at least a natural sense of rhythm and music, and the talent to incorporate the steps into the musical structure. No scientific or philosophical knowledge is required to compose a dance that is built on a stanza and a chorus or two stanzas and a chorus.

Each choreographer imprints his/her own mark on the dance they compose. I do not seek to generalize, however, many of the new generation of choreographers use existing steps from different dances and incorporate them into the dance they have composed. They already belong to the group of "choreographers" who see themselves as "creators".

***You also have reservations about the common definition of "folk dance". What makes this definition problematic?***

Folk dance must be a cultural cross-section that characterizes our people and reflects the

**David Ben Asher**

diverse cultures of our people. This is true for different peoples of the world. Folk dance has a common denominator with characteristics and steps rooted in a culture of generations of the same people.

The people of Israel come from various ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, our dances do not have a specific characterization of our society and culture, so I find it difficult to call them “folk dances,” but rather, “communal/recreational dances”. Our dances do not have a common denominator for everyone and therefore my definition. I neither deny them, nor do I pass criticism; I am very pleased with this very blessed social activity. All we have to do is call it by its appropriate name.

***And what do you think about dance sessions throughout Israel?***

I think that engaging in dance sessions as a social factor – breaking the routine, listening to music and the actual activity – is important. I would say that the aspiration to become refreshed is also a good reason to attend sessions, to take part in a social gathering, to recharge your batteries and that finding a partner is also part of the legitimate motivation.

I would like to add some insights regarding our partner dances. Many of the dancers are older people and those who are approaching old age. Due to the complexity of the steps, there is an element of memory sharpening in the dance activity. I suggest not fleeing from either challenging or innovative dances, nor settling for familiar and beloved “nostalgia dances.” I am aware of the fact that a significant proportion of dancers are discouraged by the abundance of new dances and refrain from learning them. I suggest not to give up! You should make the effort and learn. It is good for the brain and to polish the memory. Once you have tackled the new, you do not have to adopt it. The decision is yours.

Another thing that I find unusual is the phenomenon where some dancers come to classes with pre-arranged partners. This, in my opinion, is an anti-social phenomenon. A social activity in which there is no change of partners is an activity that does not serve the social idea. At the beginning of my career as a dance composer, I choreographed a dance called “Ga’aguim – Longing”, during which the couple changes partners four times. I saw this as a very important social value.

Unfortunately, this phenomenon only exists in Israel; the dancers are already captive to the established concept of fixed partners, without compromise. I personally have not encountered such a practice in any country in which I have visited and taught.

Another note refers to the joining of hands that has almost completely disappeared from our dances. The purpose of holding hands (while dancing) was to transfer energy from one to the other in order to create harmony between the dancers, and it is a pity that this positive attitude no longer exists with us.



*Moshiko Halevy with Ron Huldai*

**There is a difference between “inventing” and “discovering”. Everything exists in the universe. We must acquire the tools that will help us discover the missing parts.**



David Ben Asher

***Moshiko, many of your songs and dances are not widely known within the dancing community in Israel, and only some of them are danced in the many sessions in the country. This is compared to currently popular dances that have been choreographed to familiar songs.***

Indeed my dances, in steps and style, constitute a fundamental difference, and they are suited to dance groups that seek and love to undertake challenges. The challenge in my dances allows the dancers to transcend themselves, and their satisfaction is greater. I can still remember the beginning of our Israeli folk dances. They consisted of innocence, naivety, and some simplicity compared to the dances choreographed today, which express a lot of confidence and positive Israeli presence.

It is interesting that in the wider world my dances are danced without difficulty in light of the extensive experience in the folk dances of different peoples. I hope that in the future we will find a way to overcome and we will also be able to perform complex dances.

***Today, many dances that are danced in Israel have been choreographed abroad. Are these Israeli dances?***

We live in an open country which is exposed to external influences. We, as a relatively young country absorb literature, music, movies, and more. In my opinion, there's nothing to get excited about, especially because dance choreographers from Israel lend a hand and cooperate. This is neither a work of art nor a labor of a deep thought; it's but a coincidence and I'm not surprised that these dances are danced by us (in Israel).

***What exactly makes a dance an inalienable asset, surviving for years on the dance floors, compared to lots of dances that are learned and disappear after a short time?***

The success of the dance depends upon the combination of steps to the melody. Choreographers usually tend to compose a dance to popular tunes and songs. They think that the popular song guarantees fifty percent of the success of a dance. Then, they attach steps to it. Only survival over time will tell whether a dance is successful or not.

***And the dance itself, should changes be made to the song, such as removing interludes that are not part of the song, shortening the number of stanzas, shortening the end of the song, or changing the speed?***

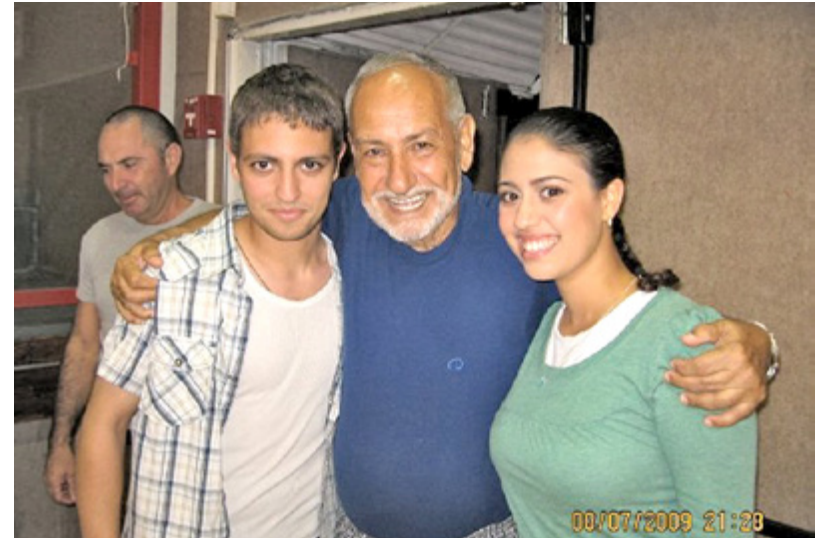
Choreographers use melodies and songs intended for singers, who need interludes for a short rest between stanzas. Since we do not have [music] composers who write specifically for folk dance, choreographers are compelled to adapt the songs to their needs. Many times, we see that steps are built into the interludes with choreography to the musical transitions in a song. The question is whether this is proper.

If we talk about the concept of "rikudei am - folk dance", after all, in the beginning of our Israeli folk dance path all of us accepted that the dance should be connected only to the original melody and not the intermediate sections, which are actually "a musical arrangement for a specific singer". Other singers perform the same song with a different musical arrangement and with different transitions. The solution was to take out the transition sections in the dance





Moshiko and his children: Yiftach, Chemed and Uriah



Moshiko and his children: Ben-Ya and Libi

recording and leave only the original melody, and even make a uniform structure of a stanza (or two stanzas) and a chorus and keep that structure throughout the dance.

On the other hand, if we are talking about “communal/recreational dancing”, as I explain below, everything the dancers do to increase their pleasure is blessed. Similarly, when the choreographer chooses to include steps for the musical transitions as part of his/her choreography, in my opinion, under the heading of “communal/recreational dance”, it is quite alright. The very ending of a dance is spontaneous – some people make up their own ending on the dance floor - that, too, does not in any way change the content of the dance.

The purpose of evening dance sessions is to have fun. Since there is no compulsion for the dancers to perform the dance the way it is, the dancers present their own interpretation for entertainment. Even in my dances – the dancers perform comic movements and in opposite directions. In my opinion, one should not get excited about the unusual phenomena. The goal is to maximize the enjoyment of dancing during the harkada.

Another phenomenon is the shortening of a dance song recording from three repetitions to two. In most cases the dancers are the ones who are not willing to repeat the dance three times and the instructor responds accordingly.

***Moshiko, do you think that the Israeli folk dance choreographers should receive royalties for their dances used in the sessions, as do the lyricists and composers who receive royalties for playing their songs in public through ASCAP [the Israeli ASCAP. BL]?***

No!!! says Moshiko. There is no such precedent in any country in the world.

Successful choreographers are booked to teach abroad and are generously rewarded; there is no justification for an additional source of income. Choreographers should be pleased with the fact that their dances are done in sessions all over.

***Moshiko, as mentioned, you are, indeed, unique in your field of work. Song composer, lyricist, choreographer of the dance steps, the musician and singer for some of your songs. I do not think there is anyone else like that. How do you do it? What goes through your mind with this rare combination?***

This phenomenon started with me quite accidentally. I had been far from Israeli musical



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sources; I then examined my skills and talents in composing music. I play chalilim (recorders/flutes), then I record myself, and that's how my melodies are born, even though, I neither read or write music notation. Some of the melodies were composed especially for verses from the [Jewish] sources.

In time, I realized that I have the talent to produce melodies and songs of my own. Dancers around the world have responded positively to the melodies and songs and especially to the dances, and from them I drew encouragement. The positive reaction of the dancers gave me confidence.

On one of my tours in Japan, I taught a few dances that were not mine. The Japanese told me that they prefer to hear melodies and songs that I had composed. It was an encouraging and moving compliment. As a result, I immediately recorded nine (!) vinyl records in the United States. Over time, those records, as well as many more that followed, became CDs. To date, I have produced over 20 CDs. I worked with the best musical arrangers and producers, such as, **Albert Piamenta, Amir Froilich, Herzl Bodinger, Haim Hadad, Gabi Suissa** and these days I work with **A.B. (Avshalom) Kazes**.

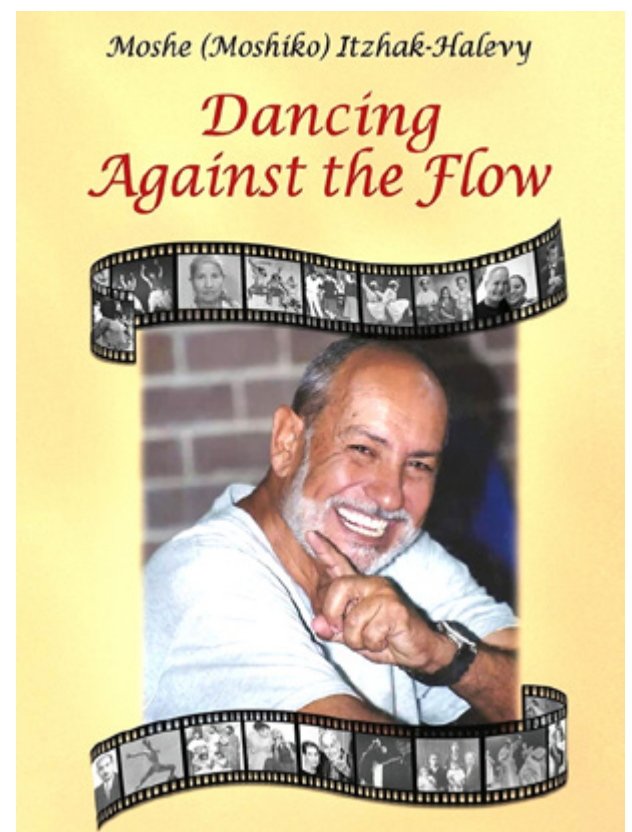
### Moshiko's Big World – A Life Story

In 2017, Moshiko's book, "Dancing Against the Flow" was published. It is an extensive book that unfolds the rich, adventurous, often challenging events of his life, filled with good deeds around the world, the culmination of his diverse talents. A huge legacy in the field of dance, written from a personal and national perspective.

Moshiko was born in 1932, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, to his parents, **Shalom** and **Rachel**, from a well-known family among Yemenite Jews of that time. The Aliyah (immigration to Israel) of the family from Yemen is a fascinating story in itself, and the family's integration in the Land of Israel in the 1930's consisted



1950s at the Tel Aviv beach



of a series of coping strategies with the living conditions in the days of building the Promised Land, which did not always live up to its promises.

As Moshiko says in his book, already by the fourth grade, he was transferred to the "Aliyah Alef" school where children with behavior problems were concentrated. Yes, even then, the boy Moshiko went against the flow. As a teenager, Moshiko was sent to

Our dances do not have a specific characterization of our society and culture, so I find it difficult to call them "folk dances," but rather, "communal/recreational dances".



*Malkat Sh'va (The Queen of Sheba) – Margalit Oved, Meir Ovadia and Moshiko Halevy*

abilities from the **Mia Arbatova** school, he was accepted to the "Li-La-Lo" and "Do-Re-Mi" Theater Companies as a dancer in musicals. He also substituted for the renowned dancer, **Yonatan Karmon**, in the dance company of **Naomi Aleskovsky**.

In 1953, the renowned Jewish choreographer, **Jerome Robbins**, ("West Side Story", "The King and I") visited Israel to get an impression of the level of dance in Israel. Several dancers were carefully selected to attend a special course given by Robbins. Moshiko was one of them:

"It was a challenge for me and I was glad I could meet the demands of the renowned choreographer," Moshiko writes in his book. It is interesting that precisely under the influence of Robbins, Moshiko joined the world-famous dance company, "Lehakat Inbal – Inbal Dance Theater", under the direction of the founder, **Sara Levi-Tanai** and was given leading roles. Moshiko also had the opportunity to prove his choreographic skills as the troupe performed dances, such as, "Debka Kna'an", "Rikud Habani" and "Rikud Teimani Mekori - Original Yemenite Dance". His works were a great success in performances at various kibbutzim and at other places around the country.

After leaving "Inbal", Moshiko opened a school for tap and jazz dance, but after a year, he returned to Inbal for a world tour in Europe and America.

When "Lehakat Inbal" returned from a trip to the United States, Moshiko decided to form

a residential institution for needy students. After two years, he joined a "garin" (training group) at Kibbutz Giv'ot Zaid, in the Jezreel Valley, named after **Alexander Zaid**. As a boy, Moshiko spent most of his years away from home, although he maintained constant contact with his family.

His dance skills were revealed at the age of 17 to the famous dancer, **Hannah Eliazov**, who referred him to the Mia Arbatova Dance School. The latter happily accepted him since, at that time, there were not enough men in the field of classical ballet.

Moshiko advanced with the study of ballet and other dance styles. Upon his enlistment to the IDF, he was placed in a military troupe, "Carmel", and later on, in an army dance troupe. After military service, with proven



*Moshiko Halevy as The Queen's Guardian*



**David Ben Asher**

his own company. With **Yona Levy** and **Yitzhak Eliazarov** he formed the dance troupe, "HaPa'amonim – The Bells". This was a great success with a full repertoire for performances all over the country. The main style of Lehakat "HaPa'amonim" tended toward modern, ethnic, and Israeli culture.

After several quite surprising years, Moshiko was asked to return to "Inbal," this time, as the director of the company. As part of his work with Inbal, Moshiko choreographed a dance without a melody. When the dance was completed, a melody was composed by **Nehemiah Sharabi**, Boaz's brother. I liked that melody, and I named the dance, "Debka Uriah," after my eldest son. According to Moshiko, at the same time, Lehakat HaKibbutzim was rehearsing for the 1959 Democratic Youth Festival in Vienna. The troupe's management heard that Moshiko choreographed a unique dance and Moshiko was invited to work with the Lehaka on "Debka Uriah".

At the Vienna Festival, the dance won the silver medal, second place after Yugoslavia and before the troupes from Russia, China, and many other countries with their more famous troupes. It was a huge international achievement. (The author of this article, **David Ben Asher**, participated in that festival as a volleyball player as part of the Israeli national team).

At that time, Moshiko had already taught his dances, such as, "Debka Uriah", "Debka Kurdit", "Et Dodim Kala" and others, in hishtalmuyot madrichim – folk dance instructors' workshops.

In 1968, Moshiko accepted an invitation from the Dutch dance organization, "NEVO", to teach his dances there. After a three-month stay in the Netherlands, Moshiko was surprised by the level of technical ability of the dancers who performed his dances with astonishing precision.

Moshiko returned to Israel and continued with folk dancing.

### The American Chapter – the 1970s-1980s

At some point in his career, Moshiko decided to work in the United States. In 1973, after a tour of Europe with "Inbal", the troupe arrived in New York, and from there, a change took place in

... "if we are talking about 'communal/recreational dancing', as I explain below, everything the dancers do to increase their pleasure is blessed. Similarly, when the choreographer chooses to include steps for the musical transitions as part of his/her choreography, in my opinion, under the heading of 'communal/recreational dance', it is quite alright."



*A folk dance workshop with Moshiko in Hong Kong, China*

*David Ben Asher*

his professional life. Moshiko was fully booked for dance workshops across the United States and the creative momentum also did its part:

"If in Israel I choreographed 20 dances in ten years, Moshiko says, then, in all my years of activity in the United States, I choreographed 70 dances and composed dozens of melodies. It was a burst of tireless work," is how Moshiko describes that beautiful period.

The USA period lasted for 16 years, during which his name became known throughout the continent, where he was constantly sought after by Israeli and international folk dancers and instructors as well as dance lovers in general.

In the United States, Moshiko had a contact with **Fred Berk**, and Moshiko took part in the Israel Folk Dance Festival, directed by Berk, held at Madison Square Garden, which was a resounding success.

While in the United States, he was also invited to Canada to prepare choreographies for two troupes in Ottawa and Toronto. In Ottawa, he did choreography based on modern ballet and ethnic elements. And in Toronto, Moshiko worked on choreography based on classical ballet, jazz and tap dance. Moshiko was also in demand in other countries and made numerous trips to teach, train and impart knowledge in various forums.

Moshiko returned to Israel in 1989. Later on, Moshiko opened a dance session in Beit Dani, Tel Aviv, with **Haim Tzemach** – a dance class of various styles. Many of Moshiko's dances were danced in this session. At the same time, he continued, of course, to choreograph dances and to teach. That, in fact, has never ceased to this day.

Occasionally, Moshiko is invited to teach abroad at dance workshops in America, Russia, England, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Belgium, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Moshiko's stylistic versatility is one of the characteristics of this dancer-artist.

The basis of his works is, in fact, classical ballet. From here, it evolved into modern ballet, jazz, tap, folk dance and folklore. Some people define Moshiko as "the mediating factor between the founding generation of the field of Israeli folk dance and the generation that continues in Israeli dance."

His dances emphasize traditional ethnic elements, even though he has extensive experience in other styles, as described here in the article. It is said that he draws his ideas from ethnic sources in Israel and from the Mediterranean basin and processes them to meet the needs of contemporary Israeli dance.

In our long conversation, the eloquent, enthusiastic, determined man was again revealed; he was determined to convey his ideas without assumptions and imbued with motivation to teach, persuade, add knowledge and quite a bit of uncompromising tenacity and opinion.

***Moshiko, what do you want to do "when you grow up"?***

"I'm now 89. I still continue to compose music, choreograph dances and write songs. Every day I hear sounds, see steps and write songs. Overall, I look back with satisfaction and a good

**"The basis of his works is, in fact, classical ballet. From here, it evolved into modern ballet, jazz, tap, folk dance and folklore. Some people define Moshiko as 'the mediating factor between the founding generation of the field of Israeli folk dance and the generation that continues in Israeli dance'."**



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**"Overall, I look back with satisfaction and a good feeling that I contributed something. When I go online, on the computer or a tablet, I see people dancing my dances; it makes me very happy."**

feeling that I contributed something. When I go online, on the computer or a tablet, I see people dancing my dances; it makes me very happy.

Time is now at my disposal and I take advantage of it in a positive way. So, I thank God, I thank the dancers and all dance instructors."

Yes, this man who has done so much for the culture of our country definitely deserves official recognition and his receiving of The Israel Prize. 🙌

Here is a song that Moshiko recently wrote and composed:

### My Jerusalem

Lyrics and music: **Moshiko Itzhak-Halevy**

I will carry a prayer to my Jerusalem  
My heart longs for Jerusalem  
Your holiness is wrapped in beauty  
From ancient times

Jerusalem, you are in my spirit  
Jerusalem, you are deep in my soul  
The eyes of the world are on you  
The beacons are lit on your walls

Chorus:

All the big cities in the world  
Bow to you, they bow in your honor  
Because you are a joy, a joy to your cities  
And I wish to kiss your stones

Jerusalem, you are the heart of the world  
Your believers all worship you  
Above your head the sun glows  
Jerusalem, you are my consolation

My beloved Jerusalem





Naftali Chayat

Translation:  
Dena Matmon

# What is an Israeli Folk Dance?



## Notes from a Panel Discussion from "Ashdodance 2021"

A discussion took place at the "Ashdodance 2021" Festival, the title of which was "Israeli Folk Dances – Where are they headed?" **Dr. Ronit Ronen Tamir** moderated the discussion. Panelists included **Elad Shtamer, Yankale Ziv, Michael Barzelai, Michal Afek, Roni Ashkenazi** and **Racheli Weizman**. The panel members represented a broad spectrum of occupations – dance instructors, choreographers and members of Israeli dance troupes, from very senior ones to some that were very young. The audience took an active part in the discussion where we heard from **Yaron Ben Simchon, Shlomo Maman, Avi Levy, Dado Kraus, Moshe Telem, Yaron Meishar, Yigal Betzer** and others.

### How Did They Begin?

The panel members described how they began their path in folk dancing. Most of them started dancing in elementary school. **Elad Shtamer** was exposed to Israeli dances and music in his home, at a very early age, and at folk dance sessions led by his father, **Eli Shtamer** z"l. After his father's death, he began to choreograph. Elad dedicated his first dance, "Ilan", to him.

**Michael Barzelai**, 32, was exposed to folk dancing when he was 8 at the country club that he and his mother went to. During his childhood, he was already imagining what steps would be suitable to what music. Six years ago, he started to introduce his dances, when he was invited to instruct at a camp abroad.

**Roni Ashkenazi** started dancing in a youth movement. He danced at sessions in the Krayot. His main function was participating in and organizing dance troupes.

**Michal Afek** started dancing in the fifth grade within the framework of "Beit Sefer Roked" in Kfar Saba. Later, she danced at large dance sessions and from there, she developed her professional dance career.

**Yankale Ziv** spoke about dancing at Beit HaHistadrut (Histadrut House) when he was in

Roni Ashkenazi suggested bringing lehakot (dance troupes) to the schools to perform in order to encourage boys to dance and thus reduce the problem of not enough boys in lehakot and at harkadot (dance sessions).





Dr. Ronit Ronen Tamir

**Shlomo:** “The folkloristic base isn’t familiar enough to choreographers, so they have nothing on which to base their revival. He doesn’t think dances need to be simply ethnic, but that they should be characteristic of the local Israelis – our energy, our songs which combine sadness and joy, and reference the content and rhythm.”

elementary school and later, he got to know a group of girls who danced with an accordionist. No one danced in Yankale’s home – it wasn’t considered proper. But later, his family supported him and became proud of his dance career.

**Racheli Weizman** spoke of her 25 years of work with dance troupes and of winning several dance competitions with new dances at the Karmiel Festivals. Her most famous and successful dance is “Ha’Rakdan Ha’Automati – The Automatic Dancer”.

### What are Today’s Folk Dances? How Do They Differ From Those of the Past?

All the panelists agreed that the folkdance field at open sessions (i.e., “participatory dance” as opposed to “dance for the stage”) has undergone great changes, from the task of creating a unified dance heritage – as an ideology, with roots and culture – to the task of creating for a leisure culture. This change took place parallel to changes in society itself (i.e., the switch from an agricultural and cooperative society to one that is industrialized and individualistic), and to cultural changes (for example, the number of Mizrahi and Mediterranean songs since the 1980s).

Elad emphasized that this process caused many changes – the number of new dances increased as did participation in the sessions, the dances became more complex, the music changed. At the same time, the fact that Israeli folk dances underwent a change isn’t sufficient to define them as Israeli folk dances.

Ronit used the metaphor of “a bowl of salad” in which each vegetable preserves its own presence and shape but they have a common Israeli spice.

**Shlomo Maman** focused on the folkloristic base. In his opinion, the folkloristic base isn’t familiar enough to choreographers, so they have nothing on which to base their revival. He doesn’t think dances need to be simply ethnic, but that they should be characteristic of the local Israelis – our energy, our songs which combine sadness and joy, and reference the content and rhythm.

Michal emphasized the songs and the ability to sing them. On the other hand, she reminded us of the importance of the steps and not just of the popularity of the song.

According to Elad, the entire field, both dancers and instructors, makes it an Israeli entity, even if the melodies and the songs aren’t from here [Israel]. A dancer, sitting in the audience, mentioned that folk dances are dances intended for a non-professional audience, dances that can be done by everyone, dances that create a sense of cohesion and “togetherness”. Folk dances will survive because of what effect they have on the mind, body and soul.

## A Proliferation of New Folk Dances

The discussion turned to the subject of the proliferation of new dances and the accompanying phenomena. Some have claimed that for every new song heard on the radio there is a choreographed dance. Some have claimed that young choreographers (and especially those who recently graduated from instructors' courses and are less selective) do not have a sufficient base for quality work. On the other hand, Michael Barzelai notes that this phenomenon is nothing new - as he examined old songs, he discovered that most of them have choreographies and only some of them have survived the test of time and preference by the dancers. Today there are more songs, and since personal creativity can't be stopped, the relevant question becomes: what causes some dances to remain while others disappear?

Moshe Telem and Avi Levy raised the political aspect and expressed nostalgia for a strong organization and for the "organizational committee" (as **Yoav Ashriel** z"l, did in the past) which would choose appropriate dances. It is interesting that Michael, the youngster in the group, quoted from Moshiko Halevy's book that, "politics" always was and always would be a struggle over which dances would be taught and to whom and there were boycotts and struggles over who would be invited to teach his/her new dance and who wouldn't.

There were those who would argue that the many new instructors were the source of the proliferation of new dances. But, on the other hand, there were those who said that today, the power is concentrated in the hands of the prominent instructors (for example, **Gadi Bitton**) and that they set the repertoire and the agenda. Elad pointed out that, in the final analysis, the instructors listen to their crowd, and dances that don't interest their dancers will very quickly descend into the abyss of oblivion.

## How to Attract Young People?

The panel devoted time to the question of the younger generation – how do you attract the youth to folk dance? How can opportunities be created for youth to be exposed to dance?

Topics were raised such as "Beit Sefer Roked", which is almost non-existent at present, including dance into the gymnastics classes, or in activity breaks, and also encouraging the formation of performing dance troupes. Roni Ashkenazi even suggested bringing lehakot (dance troupes) to the schools to perform in order to encourage boys to dance and thus reduce the problem of not enough boys in lehakot and at harkadot (dance sessions). Michal



*Dance sessions at the Festival*

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*Performances at the Festival*

Afek spoke about how she incorporates folk dance into the required high school physical education program.

An equally important topic was, what kind of repertoire is most appropriate to attract and bring youth and new dancers into dancing. On one hand, there were the proponents of heritage and the preservation of the classic dances. On the other hand, Elad and Michael claimed that there's no chance of this because the youth will be bored and lose interest. Youth want more energetic music, more "contemporary", the kind that they can also find on the radio. It is also desirable that the instructors be young because people aged 40-50 already seem to be anachronistic and irrelevant to youth. Only after the youth connect to folk dance through the new repertoire, will they be able to develop a taste for traditional dances too. But, there's no chance they can begin dancing with these dances. Therefore, an up-to-date repertoire for beginner dancers is also required.

A point mentioned by Roni Ashkenazi was the increased number of young dancers abroad. This writer can testify that he encountered entire families abroad, including young people, who come to the dance sessions. It might be from the desire of the families to strengthen the connection of the younger generation to Judaism and Israel.

## Summary

Ronit summarized the discussion by quoting her father, Dan Ronen: "Without knowledge of the past (your roots), there is no future". This is happening within folk dance sessions. True, we are not shepherds playing the chalil (shepherd's flute/recorder), we are not farmers, farming is decreasing around the world and we no longer sing, "Shir Hashirim -The Song of Songs," as a love song. It's important that folk dancing should continue to be a means of expression through which people may find their place in life and from which they can take great pleasure. The dances aren't just a casual pastime or a body building activity. They are also a worthy expression of "Beautiful Israel".

## Thanks and Comments

I would like to thank Orly Shachar who helped formulate this article and also contributed her experience and opinions on the topics within it. Looking back on the discussion, I was pleasantly surprised at the depth of observation of the choreographers and instructors of the new generation, including their thoughts on preserving this field and passing it on to the next generation.

I was amazed that the existing debates about dances to non-Israeli melodies and songs weren't expressed more sharply in the discussion. The approach was conciliatory and inclusive, although some people continue to be very critical. Anyway, it was an interesting discussion and I enjoyed participating in it and hearing the variety of opinions on key topics in the field of folk dance.



Dr. Michael Mero  
Translation:  
Ruth Goodman

# Today We Dance Recreational Dance and Not Folk Dance

## Interview with Zvi Hillman (Tacho)

*Zvi Hillman at the celebrations of the 67th anniversary  
of Israel's independence, Kibbutz Ginegar, 2015*



### **Shalom Zvi Hillman**

Shalom, Shalom.

***You are better known as Tacho and you are connected to the world of folk dance, a very significant connection.***

I understand this is a compliment.

***Of course ... come tell me how you're connected to the world of folk dance?***

It is a story that begins more or less in 1956, when my classmates and I were in high school and youth group members in the Tzofim (Scouts). In our activity sessions we dealt a lot with literature and the history of Zionism because the group included **Amos Oz** z"l and the madrich (leader) was **Boli (A.B. Yehoshua)**, but we also danced simply, "Ben Loke'ach Bat" and lots of hora.

Not far from the location of the Tzofim's activities was "Beit Hillel, and after the activities we would run there for folk dancing... It was a new world for us; we were among the youngest kids there and we were mesmerized by this thing called Israeli folk dance...

At that time, there were two institutions of higher education in Jerusalem: the Hebrew University and the Bezalel Academy, and these attracted students from all over the country, including those who came from folk dance "strongholds", mainly Haifa, the suburbs and Tel Aviv. And so it happened that in Jerusalem there was quite a collection of excellent dance instructors.

***Who actually came from all over the country and not particularly from Jerusalem?***

There were quite a few Jerusalemites, too. At that time, one of the important instructors was **Moshe Eskayo** who also formed a performing troupe (lehaka). It was not easy to form a lehaka at that time because dance troupes were usually formed by organizations such as the





Dr. Michael Mero

"Dance instructing is not just jumping around and showing the correct steps and being nice. He instilled in us the values of leadership and the ability to influence others to accept us as mentors."

Histadrut and the municipalities and, believe it or not, even the Mapai party wanted to have its own lehaka. This is how the story of "Lehakat Hora Yerushalayim" (Hora Jerusalem Dance Company), founded by **Haim Berenzon** began.

***So basically, it all started with the "Tzofim", in an atmosphere that is very connected to the land, to Zionism... through the folk dances and did you feel that you were formulating your own nationalism?***

It is difficult to say that at age 16-17 we thought of "nationalism", although we were already in work camps in kibbutzim, at Ma'ayan Tzvi and Hanita, and there we absorbed the spirit of the kibbutz, the rural culture, if you can call it that. My gar'in (core group) completed Kibbutz Magal of the Scout alumni and was also blessed with the culture of that period.

***You said dancing at "Beit Hillel" where they came from all over, how did it develop from there?***

Before I enlisted in the army in 1958, Nachal of course, there was a huge dance conference at Kibbutz Dalia and we performed there in a lehaka called "Lehakat HaHistadrut B'Yerushalayim". A performance which was very successful. Then I saw many performing troupes including those of **Yonatan Karmon** that were famous. I was really taken by it.

When I enlisted, I thought I would do the usual route, i.e., basic training, preparatory training, settlement, but at the end of the basic training, they pulled me out and sent me to Pikud Ha'Nachal: "You do not go to the gar'in; you will go to Pikud Ha'Nachal and first of all, to a dance course". What would I do at a dance course? I asked. "There you will learn how to instruct and there is no room for argument."

That's how I came with my friends, **Dan Biron** and **Haim Berenzon**, to the course headed by **Yossi Abuhav z"l**, and he was the one who turned us into dance instructors and lovers of folk dance. Dance instructing is not just jumping around and showing the correct steps and being nice. He instilled in us the values of leadership and the ability to influence others to accept us as mentors. It is clear to me that Yossi, of blessed memory, was the man who, in addition to leadership, also enabled many instructors in the country to also understand what folklore is, true folklore, folk knowledge that stems from the roots of Jewish and Zionist tradition. Later on, we learned from famous people in the field: **Gurit Kadman, Tamar Alyagor, Yonatan Karmon, Margalit Oved, Rivka Shturman** and **Eliyahu Gamliel**; the entire group on which the folk dance movement was founded.



***"That's how I came with my friends, Dan Biron and Haim Berenzon, to the course headed by Yossi Abuhav z"l, and he was the one who turned us into dance instructors and lovers of folk dance."***

"...every time that a recruitment cycle ended their basic training, they had to send a pair of soldiers from each gar'in to a dance course. By then I was no longer one of the trainees, but one of the instructors, and again with Yossi Abuhav. That's how we spread folk dance throughout the country."



***Tacho, you're saying that you learned to instruct within the framework of the army ...***

While I was wondering what I would do within the framework of the army, I was integrated into Tzevet Havai Ha'Nachal. The idea came from **Joe Craiden**, who was the Nachal's education officer, according to which people with stage ability were recruited into the framework of Tzevet Havai that went from place to place in the army-controlled settlements, etc., and spread the "pioneering culture" of those days.

***Tzevet Havai of the Nachal also dealt with dances – folk dances, with Israeli folk dances and not just songs?***

Of course, and not only that; every time that a recruitment cycle ended their basic training, they had to send a pair of soldiers from each gar'in to a dance course. By then I was no longer one of the trainees, but one of the instructors, and again with Yossi Abuhav.

That's how we spread folk dance throughout the country. Each team consisted of a song and music instructor, a dance instructor, an accordionist and sometimes a decoration expert. At the time, I even established the framework of a performing troupe. For example, at the celebration of the settling of gar'in "Ketziot" to establish Ein Yahav, we were assigned as a team to prepare the celebrations of new settlements. I was very young and it was a very interesting task.

***Did knowing that you had the backing of the army framework, the funding and the entire organization, make life easy?***

Correct. Preceding us, there were the Nachal Tzevet Havai teams, who were actually artists for all intents and purposes and from them came artists who were much more famous, such as **Ran Eliran, Nechama Hendel, Shaika Paikov** and many others. The history of the Tzevet Havai teams even includes **Naomi Shemer**.

***Very interesting indeed. Is that what you did in your military service?***

Yes, the teams did not travel to the settlements in a military vehicle, but rather traveled by bus or by hitchhiking...

When I was discharged from the army and began to study at Hebrew University, the connection with the Nachal was not cut off. Whenever there was something connected to folklore, I was



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always recruited as a reservist until I completed my bachelor's degree and went to the United States for advanced studies.

In the United States, at the end of my studies, I was appointed director of the Jewish Students Organization in New York and formed a dance company there that was very active. At that time, the most prominent man in the field of Israeli folk dance in New York was **Fred Berk** and, of course, we became friends. So I was involved with Israeli folk dance on all levels, classes, conferences, summer camps and more.

When I returned to Israel, I didn't neglect folk dance and even began creating some dances. I don't like the expression, "choreographer"; I'm far from a choreographer in the true sense of the word. I created dances to popular songs, those sung by the people.

***Interesting definition: "We created dances to popular songs"...***

Not just any songs, but those that continued to be played for at least 20, 25 years. My first dance, "Erev Shel Shoshanim", is danced to this day all over the country and is very popular, I think, mainly because of the song.

***So when "Erev Shel Shoshanim" is danced, it is a Tacho dance?***

Yes.

***Very nice. Are you saying that when you came to Israel it was actually some sort of a profession?***

Already in New York, I felt that I was engaged in dance as a professional. However, when I returned to Israel, I took upon myself the large chug (dance session) that was then at the Hebrew University. Many of today's madrichim (instructors/leaders), the vaticim, were my apprentices, if you can call it that.

***So you coordinated the Folk Dance Chug at Hebrew University?***

At the same time, I was also in "Lehakat HaStudentim" (The Student Performing Troupe).

***You managed Lehakat HaStudentim and were also a drummer?***

Management of the Lehaka came after I stopped dancing due to an ankle injury that had sidelined me.

Upon my return to Israel, I was recruited by **Ya'akov Gil** from the Jerusalem Municipality, to a new section of the municipality, as Director of Central Youth Activities in the "Youth and Sports branch". I took on the entire subject of folk dance and urban youth theater. One of the first things I did was to put Lehakat "Hora" into the municipality framework. "Lehakat HaStudentim" remained under the auspices of the university and the student union.

***Did you view your actual connection more with Lehakat HaStudentim?***



"...the problem is that it's not folk dance ... Every now and then, there is a return to folk dance. They now call it nostalgia. It's usually back to the dances of the eighties, but that's not enough."

Dr. Michael Mero

Yes, but at some point I was having problems with my leg so I didn't actually dance, I just managed.

### **Was it more administrative?**

Yes, but in other things I was very active; in instructing, of course, and in other areas.

I was very connected to the "founding family" of folk dance in Israel: **Gurit Kadman, Rivka Shturman, Tamar Alyagor** and others who worked within the Histadrut.

### **So you were in "Lehakat HaHistadrut", "Lehakat HaStudentim, you created dances ... you are connected body and soul to folk dance; when you look at folk dance today, what do you say?**

Oy ... I'll tell you... the problem is that it's not folk dance... Every now and then, there is a return to folk dance. They now call it nostalgia. It's usually back to the dances of the eighties, but that's not enough.

For an example, last Tu B'Av, I thought it would be nice to suggest that the large folk dance sessions integrate during that week the dances that were inspired by Shir HaShirim – the Song of Songs.

There are about twenty such dances. These are songs that are based on our sources and I thought it was appropriate for the event, however, none of them used it. Today, unfortunately, people are not so educated on the subject of "village culture".


**I think that a folk dance should be based on a song that has been sung by people for at least a generation. When I created the dance "Erev Shel Shoshanim", the song was already known for a long time as it was when I created "Hava Nagila". Today, every troupe that travels abroad dances "Hava Nagila", because it is a very well-established folk song.**

Many years ago, there was a classical dance teacher here in Jerusalem. She created, among other things, "Sheavtem Mayim" (Mayim Mayim). Her name was **Elsa Dublon**. Have you ever heard of her? No one mentions her or heard of her, but when it comes to dance, the whole world has danced it. Who's dancing it today? Only on Yom Ha'Atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day).

Today's dances are unfortunately not folk dances. I wrote an article about it at the time and gave it a name. I do not want them to stop dancing, but let's decide that these are "recreational" dances, like tango and similar dances. Such dances are

invented on the fly, or, as they say here, before a song came out, the dance had already come out. I do not accept that. I think that a folk dance should be based on a song that has been sung by people for at least a generation. When I created the dance "Erev Shel Shoshanim", the song was already known for a long time as it was when I created "Hava Nagila". Today, every troupe that travels abroad dances "Hava Nagila", because it is a very well-established folk song. I don't have a lot of dances, but they are all based on this understanding and being able to say it really is folklore.

I had an extraordinary experience when I was asked to mentor Mormon students at the Jerusalem branch of Brigham Young University in the United States. They held a learning semester every six months in Jerusalem.

Part of the curriculum included Israeli "folk dance", a program that was very popular at the university. 





Yehuda Ben Harush

Translation:  
Ruth Goodman and  
Ruth Schoenberg



# International Folk Dance in Israel and the World – A Short History

## Background of the Development of International Folk Dance Sessions in Israel

### Balkan Folklore

A few words about the definition, “Balkan”. The Balkans is named for the mountain range that is in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Stara Planina, meaning “Old Mountain”, is the name for the entire mountain range. The peninsula is surrounded by the Adriatic Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea (which includes the Ionian Sea which is connected to the Adriatic Sea to the north). The Sea of Marmara is an inland sea located entirely within the borders of Turkey. It connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea. And another thing that is common is, of course, the Danube River that crosses much of the Balkans.

The countries that are fully or partially included in the Balkan Peninsula are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia and a small part of Turkey. We, the lovers of the Balkans, have unofficially added Armenia, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Hungary,

Most of the countries are populated by Slavic people, i.e., those who speak the languages that belong to the Balto-Slavic group of languages that are part of the Indo-European language family. Greece and Turkey still have populations with ancient roots. The population of Romania, of Roman origin, is stuck in the middle of the Balkans and, of course, the population of Hungary is completely different in terms of origin and language.

Despite the various differences, a common denominator is still found in Balkan folklore, such as identical handholds, vocalizations, mainly in Romania and Hungary, a variety of costumes in which common symbols can be found, music and dances shared between Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria.

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There are similarities but there are also many differences. Sometimes within one country you can find a large variety of dances from region X that are completely different from region Y. Northern Romania is completely different from that of the south, as is the case with Serbian and Bulgarian dances, as compared to quite similar dances that are danced in different countries, sometimes with the same music and steps.

For example, the Bulgarian "Paidushko Horo" ("limping" dance) with the unusual meter of 5/8 is danced under the same name with different music in Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and even Romania.

How can one define Balkan dances without reference to the gypsies in the Balkans, who are a small minority, but have had a huge impact, especially on the music? (Tzoanim in Hebrew, Gypsies in English and Zigan in most of the Balkans, but they call themselves "Roma".) They are present throughout the Balkans but are mainly concentrated in Romania and Hungary.

Gypsy music is very prominent given the minimal percentage of gypsies in the population (which is less than one percent). The selection of dances, however, is much smaller, except in Romania and Hungary where they have gypsy versions of the regional dances. It should be remembered that, in this regard, in Romania there are about 1.5 million Hungarians who still speak their language and live in separate villages. Therefore, it is not surprising that gypsies also have their own villages, but some of the villages are comprised of Romanian gypsies and some of Hungarian gypsies.



Yehuda Ben Harush – being Greek in Greece

## The Dances

The international folk dances are divided as follows:

- A. Balkan dances, most of which are circle dances
- B. "International partner" dances
- C. Circle dances from all over the world (fewer dances)
- D. Israeli folk dances

Dances from the Balkans, the vast majority of which are circle dances, are the main subject in this article. These are folk dances that have been danced for centuries in the Balkans. Balkan folklore is extraordinarily rich (in comparison to Western Europe, for example), in songs, dances, costumes and in musical instruments.

For example, in Greece. Most of you are familiar with the "Hasapiko" [meaning the Butcher's

Dance] [see "Vari Hasapiko" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XgQsT9RUUU>] and "Hasaposerviko" from the Greek film, "Zorba" [1964], and this is the worldview of most of us regarding Greek folklore. However, it is only a small fraction of Greek folklore. I assume that most of the dances will be less attractive compared to "Hasapiko". In my opinion, even the original music will be difficult for many to recognize and like.

Basically, in the Balkans the dances are divided into regions, sub-regions and villages. In a certain region (particular in a province) you can identify the dances by style, musical instruments and more. As "Balkanists", we do not indicate the name of a country when we



In each region, each village still has its own dances or local variations for the region's dances. Today, because of the large number of instructors in the world who make their living partly from dance workshops, many choreographies have been created but, at the end of the day, few survive.



*Dunav Group in folk costumes*

present a dance, but first the area/region, i.e., Balkan, a dance from "Shop" (Bulgaria), dance from "Epirus" (Greece), or a dance from Maramureş (Romania). In each region, each village still has its own dances or local variations for the region's dances. Today, because of the large number of instructors in the world who make their living partly from dance workshops, many choreographies have been created but, at the end of the day, few survive.

Balkan dances have a lead dancer at the beginning of the line, and it is usually he who determines when to change steps. He is, in short, the leader. In Greece, even the last dancer in the line has a role, and at celebrations in the villages, it is customary for the last dancer to "buy" the leader role by "tipping" the orchestra.

In Israel, our dance chugim (sessions) have a very rich repertoire (e.g., "Dunav" has a repertoire of close to 1,000 dances) and over time we dance most of them; these folklore dances do not die. "Dunav" is an Israeli nonprofit organization that works to promote Balkan folklore. We dance once a week, hold annual seminars, weekends, and document Balkan folklore through an extensive website that includes dance photographs, costumes, song lyrics, our performance videos, maps from the Balkans and more (the author is the chairman of the association).

It is important to mention that Balkan dances are danced only with hands held (i.e., "V", "W", on the shoulders, front or back basket, etc.). The only time we have danced without any handhold has been during the Coronavirus pandemic, after the first quarantine. There is great meaning to dancing together, not just the handholds but also the shape of the circle, open or closed, short lines and more.

It's most important to emphasize: Do not shorten dances (!!!), even if the steps are simple, keep dancing until the end. A good example of this is the most famous gypsy dance in the Balkans, "Čoček" [pronounced "cho'-chek"], (as opposed to "Čačak" from Serbia), which may last 3-8 minutes according to the various [musical] arrangements. Of course, at festive events we come with colorful costumes that makes the atmosphere, which is also special, an impressive experience.



*Yehuda Ben Harush*

There are also partner dances in the Balkans but they are really few; a bit in Transylvania, [a region in central] Romania. On the other hand, Hungarian dances (N.B. Hungary is not actually included in the Balkans) are predominantly partner dances. In fact, if we take out a small Hungarian community in Transylvania in Romania called "Csángós", where a lot of circle dances are danced, we would only have one Hungarian circle dance left that is danced only by women ("Karikázó").

Is this great folklore still alive? Well, unfortunately no longer in most Balkan countries; remnants can be found in Romania. In Greece there are traditional celebrations in villages (that are organized by nonprofit associations and not something that is voluntarily done).

The big surprise is Hungary, where there are dance sessions almost every evening and most of the participants are very young, but this is not recommended for Israeli folk dance enthusiasts, because all evening they dance only one dance. (The classes represent regions in Hungary, so each session only dances the dance of its region). It is very fascinating for me, but everything is in the eye of the beholder. In Israel, we Balkanists are proud of the fact that we are the ones who preserve and document Balkan folklore and that is also reflected in our name (i.e., "Dunav" – the association for the promotion of Balkan folklore in Israel).

The "International partner dances" that we dance in Israel are indeed dances from all over the world, but if we look closely, we notice that they are mainly those dances from the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany, Poland, Russia, Mexico and the USA (with the most dances). Naturally, all the dances from the USA are new choreographies, but those from Europe and Mexico are mostly authentic. The collection of partner dances in Israel is much smaller than that of the circle dances from the Balkans; there are only about 250 dances, and we also dance them regularly.

In "Noa-Am", as well as in "Dunav", we chose to document and managed to film all the dances and they can be found on YouTube.



*Serbian dance – the costumes*



*Dunav – Dance weekend in Ginosar, 2010*

## The World

What seems so natural today – to dance different Balkan dances in the same session (i.e., from Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Albania, Hungary and, of course, the Romani, colloquially known as Roma, aka gypsy dances), is quite a surprising fact



**Yehuda Ben Harush**

since folk dances from the Balkans were only danced by immigrants from the same country and only those dances of the country from which they came.

In general, some sessions dance both dances from the Balkans and partner dances from the rest of the world (under the title of International) and in some, only dances from the Balkans. Additionally, there are still many sessions in which only dances from one source are danced.

Very little research or work has been done on this subject but basically there is evidence for the existence of sessions in which dances were danced from all over the Balkans during the 20th century from the early 1930s to the 1950s, but the really big boom started in the early the early 1960s.

What caused it? There is no clear answer but at least it is clear who the participants were. These people were Caucasian from an upper social class and most of them were women and quite a few Jews. They mostly conveyed an openness to folklore in its various forms.

**At the beginning of the journey (in the first half of the twentieth century) there were several instructors who led this new movement most of whom were not of Balkan descent. They introduced dances as originally taught to them, or from the immigrant communities in their country. Some really made an effort and traveled to the Balkans to bring back dances straight from the source.**

One of the first instructors, **Yves Moreau** of Canada, argued that most of the phenomenon stemmed from Jewish immigrants' desire to return to their roots in Eastern European and Balkan folklore, which explains the high number of Jews in Balkan dance sessions in the United States. This explanation encountered difficulty since, for the most part, Jewish immigrants were mostly from urban areas and therefore less exposed to authentic folklore.

From the United States, sessions have evolved in Europe and a few other places in the world like in the Far East but the expansion has been quite limited. Balkan sessions cannot be found in most counties in Asian, African and South American countries.

At the beginning of the journey (in the first half of the twentieth century) there were several instructors who led this new movement most of whom were not of Balkan descent. They introduced dances as originally taught to them, or from the immigrant communities in their country. Some really made an effort and traveled to the Balkans to bring back dances straight from the source.

Over the years the appetite increased, and a significant number of instructors began to choreograph dances to original music and this caused a long-lasting debate about whether to just preserve folklore (which also includes music) or create new choreographies - yes or no.

There are thousands of original folk dances in every country in the Balkans and yet some of the instructors preferred to create choreographies (some of which are really great), so the need for innovation was not due to a shortage but to the preferences of the instructors. Some even came from the Balkans to the United States only with new choreographies even though they had a rich repertoire from their country of origin.

Over time, remaining organizations began to hold dance evenings with local musicians who fell in love with Balkan music and began to map (trace) the dances and try to locate an historical source. They created a tradition of weekend dance camps and, not settling

## Yehuda Ben Harush

for local instructors, began inviting instructors from the Balkans - straight from the source. Over time, of course, organized trips to dance seminars in the Balkans began, which continue to this day.

These days, this charming phenomenon is disappearing; dance sessions are shrinking and the community is getting older. The future looks bleak.

I have written mostly about dances from the Balkans, but I have already mentioned that there is also a lot of room for partner dances mainly from Europe, but not exclusively. There are also folk dances that, over time, have had their choreographies altered. However, there are still quite a few dances from original sources that have never lost their flavor.

In a nutshell, that's it. But before we turn to Israel, it's important to know that this phenomenon migrated to us [in Israel] from the USA.

### In Israel

We have several international folk dance sessions in Israel, but they mostly do Balkan dances:

For over 30 years, the longstanding chug in Haifa, "Balkanitsa" the Haifa Balkan Dance Group, has been run by the "Balkanitsa" Association. [Balkanitsa Haifa Balkan Dance Group]. A chug in Jerusalem, that will soon celebrate 50 years, is conducted by the Dunav Association. A mixed session of Balkan and partner dances, that meets once a month on Fridays (for almost 60 years!!), is run by the "Noa-Am" organization.

There are also several other international folk dance sessions for older adults in Jerusalem, conducted by **Motti Kotzer**, as well as classes for Greek dance only in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Noa-Am was established in Israel in 1959 and exists to this day. The association aims to dance folk dances from all over the world, which can be limited to Balkan and partner dances. The association, founded by **Miriam Flex** and a few other members, continues to exist thanks to **Miriam Lerner** who very quickly began to lead the association, (for many years together with Aryeh Wax z"l who also demonstrated dances and was a management partner), which she still manages as of this day. The association was established as a closed members club that has been open to everyone for the past twenty years.

Also in Haifa, before the current chug was founded, there was a session with a similar framework to "Noa-Am", established and led by the late Nahum Shachar z"l. Nahum was among the first to bring International partner dances from the United States to Israel. A significant part of the large repertoire that remains today, exists thanks to him.

As you can see, the main classes are run through associations and nonprofits; all the dance leaders do so voluntarily.

Unfortunately, even among international folk dancers, we are experiencing a decline in the number of dancers and an increase in age, however, during the last twenty years a great



*Friends of Dunav from Hong Kong*





*Dunav – An evening of Serbian dances, Ginosar, 2004*

resurgence has begun. The Dunav Association began a documentary campaign that still continues to this day. As part of it, about 300 dances were filmed and uploaded to YouTube and the association's website. Instructors from the countries of origin [of the dances] were invited to conduct workshops in Israel. We started organizing "weekends" with guests from abroad and a local band of musicians, produced CDs, books with the song lyrics, established an extensive website and more.

The "Balkanista" organization is also a partner in this journey of revival and they organize national Shabbat meetings, large events and invite instructors from abroad.

## The Dancers

Despite all of the above, in the end, the vast majority of Balkan dance dancers are not of Balkan descent. However, one thing is clear. We are getting older and our numbers are dwindling. The younger generations naturally have an abundance of cultural content that was not present in our time.

How then do you get to dance Balkan folklore? In the United States, you can join through the universities where there were, and still are, Balkan dance sessions. In Israel, it is a wonderful initiative by those devotees who brought it, not from the Balkans, but from the United States directly to Israel.

Connecting to the Balkans is, in my humble opinion, through the music that leads to the dances, but I cannot not vouch for every ear. Greek music is very popular in Israel (not ethnic) and, in my opinion, also Romanian and Hungarian to some extent, but still, not everyone who comes to our sessions will remain. Those who remain are characterized by openness, tolerance and, of course, healthy curiosity.

In the United States, most Balkan dancers are loyal to authentic folklore. In Israel, naturally, most dancers have been exposed to Israeli folk dances, with which it is easier for them to integrate into and it is difficult for them to adopt the Balkan dance style.

## About the author, Yehuda Ben Harush

It has been 20 years since I founded the Dunav Association with friends. There have been many dozens of trips to the Balkans, especially to remote villages, as well as to seminars, weekends, song workshops and more. For years, I have been cultivating a database containing tens of thousands of songs, music, dances, lyrics to songs, authentic maps of the countries and, of course, a photographic collection of costumes (and also actual costumes).

I have set up an extensive and comprehensive website based on some of the collection I have amassed. In recent years, my focus has been on Hungary, including learning the language.



Yehuda Ben Harush – as Romanian



Yehuda Ben Harush – as Serbian

I've also researched a challenging German dance in partners called "Zwiefacher" and filmed 50 different versions of it.

### Useful information

Dunav's website: <https://dunav.org.il/>

Dunav's YouTube page (350 dances): <https://www.youtube.com/user/dunavfolk>

YouTube page of the German dance "Zweifacher": <https://www.youtube.com/user/Zeifacher>

Noa-Am's YouTube page (250 couples' dances): <https://www.youtube.com/user/Noamfolkdance>

Balkanitsa website: <http://balkanitsa.org.il/>

### Chugim (Sessions) in Israel

**"Dunav"** – every Thursday from 8:00 to 10:30 pm, in the Reform Synagogue "Kol Haneshama", 1 Asher St., German Colony, Jerusalem.

**"Balkanitsa"** – every Tuesday from 9:00 to 11:00 pm, the Sports Hall at the Technion, Haifa.

**"Noa-Am"** – on the first Friday of each month (monthly class) from 4:00 to 7:00 pm, circles and couples. Kiryat Sharet Community Center, Ammunition Hill 27, Holon.

**Greek only session** – on Tuesdays from 7:30 to 9:00 pm. Kol Haneshama Reform Synagogue, 1 Asher St., German Colony, Jerusalem.

**Motti Kotzer** instructs in the morning at several folk dance classes for adults. Details can be found on the "Rokdim" website. 

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**Connecting to the Balkans is, in my humble opinion, through the music that leads to the dances, but I cannot not vouch for every ear. Greek music is very popular in Israel (not ethnic) and, in my opinion, also Romanian and Hungarian to some extent, but still, not everyone who comes to our sessions will remain. Those who remain are characterized by openness, tolerance and, of course, healthy curiosity.**

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Liran Zecharia Amir

Translation:  
Ruth Goodman



**L**iran Zecharia Amir, 35, is married to **Yaniv Amir** and is the mother of two children, **Lia** and **Koren Moshe**. She was born in Jerusalem and at the age of 19 she spread her wings and moved to the big city – Tel Aviv. She currently lives in Kfar Saba.

Liran holds a Bachelor's degree in communications and psychology. She studied at the "Beit Zvi" School of Performing Arts and graduated with honors from the course for instructors at Wingate College.

For eleven years, she has served as artistic director and choreographer of the "Orot Habama" dance troupes in Mevaseret Zion under the direction of **Hanan Cohen**.

Liran began her professional career as a choreographer at the age of 15, starting with the "Mehola Yerushalayim" lehakot [dance troupes] from where she grew and developed to become the artistic director of the lehakot. She founded the the "Or Hagalim" lehakot, in Bat Yam, served as rehearsal director of Lehakat HaStudentim Tel Aviv with **Shlomo Maman** and was artistic director and choreographer of Lehakat Rishonim in "Hora Yerushalayim". She was a dancer and drummer in Lehakat "Tararam" in which she performed in many national and international productions and among them, created the opening choreography for the 100th anniversary celebrations in Tel Aviv. She starred in "Nolad Lirkod (Born to Dance) 1" and reached the top ten. She danced in the "Hora Yerushalayim" and "Mehola" lehakot and dances in "Hora Re'im Holon".

Over the years, she has produced and created as part of the International Film Festival for Children, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tourism, Education and Information, the Jerusalem Municipality, the IDF, the Jewish Agency, and the "Tzabarim" project.

Over the years, Liran has won many awards in Israel and abroad, including:

- Second place at the Karmiel Folk Dance Competition in 2021 with the folk dance, "Shir Rechov".
- First place in the Contemporary Dance Competition for the Stage at the 2019 Karmiel Festival with the dance, "Shir Eretz".
- Winner of the Best Folkloristic Dance Award in 2019, at the Karmiel Festival Dance Awards Ceremony, for the stage dance, "Haro'a Haktana".

## Dance of the Month

- First place in the "Orot Hamachol" Competition in Dimona in 2018 and 2019 with the dances, "Shir Eretz" and "Haro'a Haktana".
- Winner of the Contemporary Dance Award in Dance For The Stage with the dance, "Lech Eli" at the dance awards ceremony in 2018 at the Ashdodance Festival.
- First place, in both the 2013 and 2014 "Grand Prix" Competitions for Children and Youth in St. Petersburg with the dances for the stage, "Tarantella" and "Pa'amonei Ha'Emunah".

### Liran says:

In my work, I believe in the power of movement and the body to challenge social conventions, cultural traditions, to connect past and present, East and West, and of course to connect folk dance with stage dance. For me, this is the essence of Israeliness.



Photo: Nurit Mozes

My repertoire includes reference to the sources and heritage of Israel along with giving space for contemporary work. I see the dance mosaic I seek to create as a platform for shaping and reflecting the Jewish and Israeli identity of both the dancers and the audience alike, everywhere. To this end, I put on a show in honor of the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel that took place in Manhattan [in New York City at the Israel Folk Dance Festival and Festival of the Arts, directed by **Ruth Goodman** and **Danny Uziel**, RG]. Another show, "MiSho'ah Le'tkuma – From Destruction to Restoration", took place at the Modiin Cultural Center in 2018.

The bodies of the dancers on stage tell a national story about community, identity, ethnicity and roots. It is a story that I seek to continue, with a connection to and respect for experts from the past and with faith in the renewed work. In addition, I see dance as a developmental educational tool. This is an integral part of my mission: to present a cohesive, responsible and vigilant Israeliness to the story of our lives here – then and now. I am very emotionally connected to all of my works, but there are three of them that I have had as "milestones" in my life, like a guiding hand from above. The first: "Agadat Opheilia – Legend of Ophelia", 2010, a professional crossroad and the choice of my path.

The second: "Haro'a Haktana – The Little Shepherd", 2017, my belief in pure Israeli folklore.

The third: "Shir Eretz - Song of the Land" - 2019, the work I am most connected to, a work so emotionally complex that every time my dancers just take the first step, I can shed a tear and fall apart from the inside and, on the other hand, be alert and strong. Just as in life.

In addition to my being a creator, I am also, "Liran, the Dancer". Dance is my biggest passion, I always say: "When I'm on stage, I'm the most complete person in the world; it's a moment no one can enter. It's me, my music and my body. My body speaks my feelings with a silent scream. I will not be ashamed to say that there are moments when it's like a good orgasm".

The harkadot (dance sessions) became part of me when the corona [pandemic] began. During the first lockdown, I realized that if I did not do something – I would go crazy. At the same time, **Gadi Bitton** established a program called "Ulpan Bitnua – Studio in Motion." Very quickly I found myself building a special segment for the choreographers of Israeli dance. My world



## Dance of the Month

was then quickly mingled with the world of folk dance. I started going to the harkadot of **Tamir Scherzer**, corona-adapted harkadot (small) and from there, the dances very strongly captured me so that not a week goes by without at least one harkada!

Beyond the fact that I contracted a “bug” called folk dance, a new and additional window was opened for me and for my work in the stage world and for that, I am grateful! My stage dances, “Haro’a Haktana”, “Orcha Bamidbar”, “Nigun Romani”, “Mecholot Damar”, “Shuvi Le’Beitcha”, “Hora Ahava” and more, are some of my works taken from folk dances and I turned them into dances for the stage that are danced at our festivals in Israel - Karmiel and Ashdodance, and of course, abroad.

### About “Shir Rechov” she says:

In 2011, I joined **Shlomo Maman** to work alongside him with Lehakat HaStudentim. The theme of the Karmiel Festival that year was “Lehakot Tzvai’ot – Military Troupes”.

The talented **Haim Asner** arranged new music for me for “Yamim Tovim”. Within the musical arrangement was both “Yamim Tovim” and “Shir Rechov.” The dance came about for a choreography competition for Israeli dance that year.

In 2019, for the Folk Dance Competition at the Karmiel Festival, the request was to compose dances to songs that were recorded up to 1979 in either an old or new arrangement and to which dances had never been choreographed. I immediately knew that “Shir Rechov” with its new musical arrangement would be my folk dance for the competition! A hora dance! Without frills – a true folkloristic hora. I took my stage dance, “Yamim Tovim” and modified it to suit a folk dance that fit the song, “Shir Rechov”.

“Shir Rechov” competed in the folk dance competition at the Karmiel Festival in 2021 with entries from the best stage choreographers who took part in the adventure with me. We rehearsed, wore lehaka shirts and sneakers and just enjoyed every magical moment of being together, holding hands and hora dancing

In the last week of September 2021, I taught the dance for the first time at Camp Bitnua directed by **Gadi Bitton**. I was excited to see hundreds of folk dancers and performers dance it together.

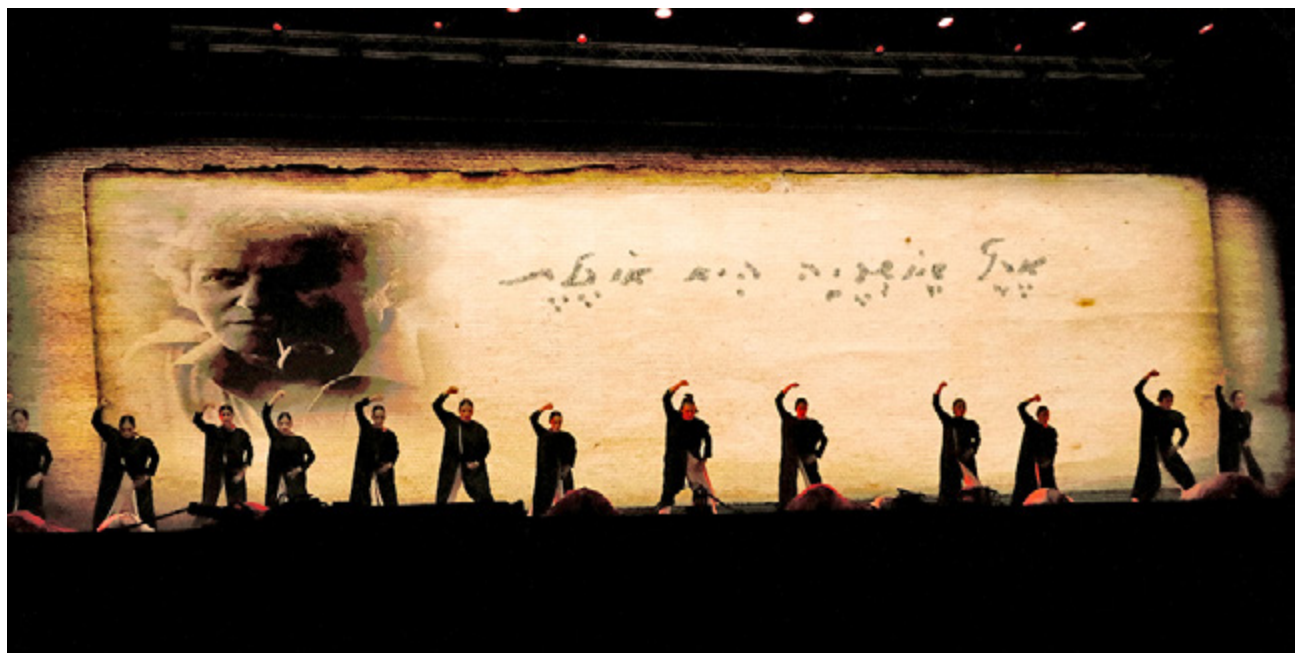


Photo: Meital Krispel

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*Dance of the Month***Shir Rehov – Street Song**

Meter: 3/4; 2/4

Formation: Circle

Structure: One verse, 4 sections

**Part A:** Hands joined facing center; move CCW.

- 1-4 Open mayim step beginning with R to rt. (step R to rt., cross L over R, R to rt., cross L behind R).
- 5-7 Face CCW: Three running steps fwd on the line of the circle (R,L,R). On the third step, face center.
- 8& Double time: cross L over R; step on the ball of R to rt.
- 9-10 Repeat 8& twice more.
- 11 Cross L over R.
- 12-22 Repeat counts 1-11.

**Part B:** Face center with hands free. Move in and out of center.

- 1-2 Kick R fwd., step R fwd.
- 3-4 Kick L fwd, step L fwd.
- 5-8 Tcherkessia step rocking fwd and bwd on R (fwd on R, step L back in place, bwd on R, step L fwd in place).
- 9-10 ½ turn rt. with two steps R, L to face out of center.
- 11-12 With back to center: Rock back on R, fwd on L.
- 13-24 Repeat the steps of counts 1-12 moving out of center to end facing center.

**Part C:** Face center; move CCW.

- 1-2 Step-hop on R to rt. side while lifting left leg backward.
- 3-6 Mayim step beginning with L over R (cross L over R, R to rt., cross L behind R, R to rt.)
- 7-8 Step-hop on L crossing L over R with Rt. knee lifted fwd.
- 9-10 Face center. Step R to rt., cross L over R while clapping hands.
- 11-12 Repeat counts 9-10.
- 13-14 Sway R-L.
- 15-16 Full turn rt. on the line of the circle with two steps: R,L.
- 17-32 Repeat counts 1-16.

**Part D:** Face center.

- 1-4 Box step: leap diagonally rt. onto R, cross L over R, step back on R in place, step L to left.
- 5-6 Moving into center: 3/4 turn rt. with two steps R,L. End with rt. shoulder to center.
- 7-8 Face CW: Sway R-L.
- 9-10 Close R next to L while clapping hands overhead; hold.
- 11-12 Sway R-L.
- 13-14 Moving out of center: Quick step-tog-step RLR crossing L over R and moving out of center.
- 15-16 3/4 turn to left with a quick step-tog-step LRL. End facing center.

The dance is done twice followed by an ending:

**Ending:**

- 1-32 Repeat Part C, counts 1-32.
- 33-36 Repeat Part D, counts 1-4.
- 37 Step R fwd while raising arms upward. 🙌



Photo: Alisa Volosnikova

“Shir Rehov” competed in the folk dance competition at the Karmiel Festival in 2021 with entries from the best stage choreographers who took part in the adventure with me. We rehearsed, wore lehaka shirts and sneakers and just enjoyed every magical moment of being together, holding hands and hora dancing



## Shir Rechov – Street Song

Music: **Yair Rosenblum**; Lyrics: **Avi Koren**

What a wonderful day going out on the street  
Go out to the street  
Again you can just drop on the beach  
It's comfortable on the beach  
It's not cold anymore and I'm not so wet  
It's good for me, very good because  
How good it is to just sit on the boulevard  
Just because

What a wonderful day dropped on my head  
Resting on my head  
It warms my heart so much again  
Take my heart  
Coats are already stored in the closet  
Stored in the closet, stored in the closet because  
Sun suddenly kisses my head  
Suddenly it's quiet

What a wonderful day fell on my head  
Resting on my head  
What a beautiful face the street suddenly wore  
Smiling and happy, the cypress also suddenly sings  
And the boulevard now answers it in a duet

Look at what a great day burst into the square  
Ran to the square  
The apple happily blooms  
Happy heart  
On all roads we will run all day  
Run all day run all day because  
We are already drunk from the sun  
Already drunk

What a great day burst into the square  
Ran to the square  
What a beautiful face the street suddenly wore  
Smiling and happy, the cypress also suddenly sings  
And the boulevard now answers it in a duet  
Look what a wonderful day going out on the street  
Go out

Eize yom nifla yotze la'rechov  
Tze la'rechov  
Shuv efshar pashut litzno'ach ba'chof  
No'ach ba'chof  
Kvar lo kar ve'lo ratuv li nora  
Tov li nora tov li nora ki  
Kama tov lashevet stam ba'shtera  
B'li matara

Eize yom nifla tzanach al roshi  
Nach al roshi  
Mechamem hu shuv kol kach et libi  
Kach et libi  
Me'ilim kvar muchnasim ba'aron  
Sim ba'aron sim ba'aron ki  
Shemesh et roshi nosheket pi'om  
Sheket pit'om

Eize yom nifla tzanach al roshi  
Nach al roshi  
Eize yofi shel partzuf ha'rechov lavash lefeta  
Me'chayech u'me'ushar gam ha'brosh pit'om kvar shar  
Ve'ha'shdera ona lo ka'et be'duet

Habitu eize yom gadol paratz la'kikar  
Ratz la'kikar  
Hatapu'ach melavlev me'ushar  
Lev me'ushar  
Bekol ha'kvishim narutz kol hayom  
Rutz kol hayom rutz kol hayom ki  
Min hashemesh anu kvar shikorot  
Kvar shikorot

Eize yom gadol paratz la'kikar  
Ratz la'kikar  
Eize yofi shel partzuf ha'rechov lavash lefeta  
Me'chayech u'me'ushar gam ha'brosh pit'om kvar shar  
Ve'ha'shdera ona lo ka'et be'duet  
Habitu eize yom nifla yotze la'rechov  
Tze



## ALEX'S EXPERIENCES

Alex Huber documents important Israeli folk dance events with his camera

### The Energetic Rafi Ziv with the Eternal Smile Selected Photos From 20 Years of Acquaintance

The first time I met with **Rafi Ziv** was in the late 1990s in New York at a "Tamaron" Dance Camp. Rafi, then a young man, with a full head of hair, arrived at the camp with tremendous excitement and even feared that he would not succeed as a choreographer. But he was very successful with his five circle and partner dances that he introduced.

Since then, we've met in folk dance camps around the world. In the United States it was almost every 3 months; also, in France, Brazil, Latvia, Hungary and more.

Our paths also crossed when Rafi would come every year, from 2001 to 2018, to instruct the dancers enrolled in the



Machol Hungaria, 2009



Autum Marathon, 2021



Giv'a Achat, Tel Hai



Giv'a Achat, Tel Hai



Masada, 2013



Karmiel Festival's Overseas Instructors Course where he taught from his dances with love and with his well-known and familiar energy. He has always been a crowd favorite.

During the last decade, when I immigrated to Israel, I followed his work at harkadot (dance sessions) throughout the country and, of course, the highlight was the lavish marathons that he produces. The explosive energy in the harkada is always boundless, both in terms of the presentation and in terms of the food served.

Rafi recently married and happily became a father. When he is in the position of DJ, he is portrayed as a quiet person, but the moment he is in the center of the circle, he does not stop frolicking, dancing, jumping and connecting to the crowd with his tireless, infectious energy.

Rafi also runs his marathons with great courage and includes many special dances that are almost never danced at sessions run by other dance leaders. Some say that at his harkadot, Rafi plays music at a high volume and too fast, but at the end of the day, the community votes with their feet. Rafi infuses endless energy and agility on the dance floor with much charm and lots smiles.





# ALEX'S EXPERIENCES

Alex Huber documents important Israeli folk dance events with his camera



Summer course, 2010



Exercises, 2007



Machol Oz, 2015



Machol Hashalom, 2005



Autum Marathon, 2021



Autum Marathon, 2021



Summer Marathon, 2010



Brazil, 2005



Tamaron, 2007



Rikud, 2005



Marathon, 2010



Tamaron, 2005