



# EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE EYE OF THE CAMERA

## To Dance Is To Live

**First Annual Event held in Memory of Yonatan Karmon z"l  
1.4.22, 29 Adar 5782, [April 1, 2022]  
at Ayanot Na'amat Youth Village**

By Miri Shachaf

Photos: Maya Feinholtz Klein

February 6, 2022, marked two years since the passing of **Yonatan Karmon z"l**, dancer, choreographer and the founder of the Karmiel Dance Festival. Yonatan Karmon was one of the leading figures of the Israeli dance world and an ambassador of Israeli culture throughout the world. His life, his vision and his creative work were intertwined with the working settlements, the Palmach and the various aliyot (immigrations). They were influenced by the Bible, Jewish tradition and by the Israeli experience, its landscapes, its sounds and its people. In designing Israeli dance for the stage, Yonatan transformed Israeli dance from a local folk genre into a professional and sweeping art form. He raised generations of dancers and choreographers and worked in collaboration with many Israeli musicians and artists.

Karmon was born in 1931 in Romania and named, **Yonel Kalman**. When he was bar mitzvah age, his parents were taken to the labor camps while he immigrated to Israel alone with the help of "Aliyat HaNoar". He came to Meshek HaPoalot – the Tel Aviv Workers' Farm, where he also discovered the world of dance through **Gertrud Kraus** and **Mia Arbatova**. In 1946 he moved to the Ayanot Youth Village and attended the Ayanot Agricultural School, specializing in work on a dairy farm. At the same time, he continued to study dance and began to create dances for ceremonies and holidays at the school. From then

on, he expressed his feelings for the land and for the period in which he lived through his creations.

Even during his military service as a gunner, he continued dancing and performing. When he completed his service, he was invited to stage, direct and artistically manage for nature holidays and ceremonies in the working settlements. From the mid-1950s he established dance troupes, including "Lehakat Karmon – the Karmon Troupe". This lehaka became a brand name for Israeli culture and until the end of the 1980s, enraptured audiences in the fashionable concert venues of Broadway [New York] and of the Olympia in Paris.

In the 1970s, Karmon also directed musical performances based on Israeli life that were a resounding success. In 1988 he established the "Karmiel Dance Festival", which became a major attraction. He was its artistic director for twelve years. The festival was based on Israeli folk dance, but also integrated dance performances of modern, classical ballet, jazz, ethnic dance and more. In the 1990s he established "Amutat Karmon – the Karmon Association", a nonprofit organization whose goal was to encourage local talent from neighborhoods and development towns and to train a generation of young choreographers.

Since Yonatan always embraced and attached great importance to the period of his life at Ayanot, it was decided to hold an



Rina Meir and Inbar – two generations of former Karmon dancers



Teenagers from the Ayanot Youth Village



Tirza Hodes – Israeli dance personality and behind her: Chani, Yoni, Amira, Tzlila and another friend – former Lehakat Karmon dancers



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Former Lehakat Karmon dancers,  
guests, and teenagers from the Ayanot Youth Village all dancing together.

event in his memory at the Ayanot – Na'amat Youth Village, in the hope that this event would become a tradition and a magnet for all Israeli dance lovers and in the future would lead to a dance center being established in his name for the village students.

The event opened with an emotional reunion of generations of Lehakat Karmon dancers and a memorial tribute to Yonatan. It continued with an open dance session (harkada) after which a ribbon was cut in the foyer for the newly named "Yonatan Karmon Center", at the entrance to the cultural center of Ayanot. The walls of the foyer are adorned with a permanent

exhibition of magnificent photographs from Yonatan's years of creativity, including the dance costumes.

Yonatan Karmon's story was integrated with a spectacular, moving stage performance in which graduates of Lehakat Karmon – the Karmon Troupes took part: Hora Efrochim Yerushalayim, former dancers from the Karmon Troupes; the singers: **Ilanit** and **Izhar Cohen** with songs from the repertoire that was part of the shows. **Rafi Ginat** was the moderator.

This was the first event that will become an annual tradition at the Ayanot Youth Village.



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Shlomo Maman, the national choreographer and Moshe Telem, dance leader elder



At the dance session



Line dancing



Circle dancing



Izhar Cohen in performance



Lucy Maman and Shlomo Maman in the dance, "Yamin U'Smol"



Lehakat HaStudentim Tel Aviv on a background of Yonatan's picture



Hora Efrochim Yerushalayim dancers in Yonatan Karmon's dance, "Hishtovevut – Mischievousness"



Lehakat Karmon – dancers of the last troupe, 2007

