

# An Exhilarating Experience, Funny And Enriching



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**Yonatan** was not only unique and distinctive. Yonatan was a rare human being. Beautiful on the inside and beautiful on the outside, with a wonderful sense of humor and an amused view on life and its turbulences. He had the smile of someone who saw almost everything. And so he did: From World War II, through the Kibbutz, from his journey as a child, separated from his parents, all the way from Romania to Israel, through classical dance and Israeli folk dance, to Broadway, the Ed Sullivan Show, the Olympia Theater in Paris, worldwide travels of the Karmon Troupe and the Karmiel Dance Festival in Karmiel, Israel.

Thousands have danced in his troupes; hundreds owe him their careers, not just in the arts. His contribution to the image of the State of Israel and the field of folk dance in Israel and dance in general is impossible to estimate. Every choreography and every folk dance in Israel bears his mark. His influence was huge on all of the country's modern choreographers and dance leaders, although not everyone is aware of it.

I will always be touched by the happiness on the faces of those who have danced his choreographies. They are a testament to the joy that he has given to so many people, on stage and in the audience.

Yonatan was my friend. We used to sit in the same café in Paris almost every week, watching the trees change colors in the square in front of us, season after season. He would point to a special green color of this leaf or that flower. Everyone knew of his aesthetic sensitivity from the costumes and images he created for the stage. This very same sensitivity was as sharp and as moving in those delicate moments of life.

Yonatan was intrigued by the theater of street life: toddlers dashing forward, suddenly startled and turning to look for their parents, old men with strange hats who reminded him of old acquaintances, young people with a special stance... Sometimes he imagined their life story. He never lacked inspiration. The characters who crossed his path in his long career were often larger than life.



During the conversation, with a mischievous look in his eyes, he would tell me how he met Jack Nicholson with a monkey on his shoulder, before he became a star, or how he slammed the door in the face of **Nureyev** or how **Mike Brant** started his career in France. Many more stories followed but will not be repeated here for fear of inappropriate public blushing.

Unlike many others, in Yonatan's case, all the stories were true. He was not flustered by anyone. For decades, Yonatan had met with the greatest artists in Israel and around the world. He never judged, but nothing escaped his beautiful eyes. He was a true king. Everyone liked being around him. His charisma flowed and filled homes, halls, cities and hearts. He never used it adversely. He brought much light and confidence to those around him. He was determined, meticulous, especially in the studio, but everyone knew that he was there to build, not to destroy.

The happiness of **Shuki Spector**, his partner, the love of his life, was the most important thing to him. Being around him was a wonderful, exhilarating and enriching experience.

Yonatan enjoyed strolling leisurely through the streets of Paris, inhaling every breeze that carried the city's history. He especially liked the elusive whisper of the Parisian artistic inspiration, which is so hard to capture and put into words. He knew exactly where and when to wait for it to pass, and then, just enjoy it, not owning or immobilizing it. Just breathing it in.

His contribution to Israeli culture will be told by others. I just loved the man and I feel honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to spend many wonderful moments with him. I miss him already, along with thousands of others. Everyone and their Yonatan. Every time I'll walk by our square, opposite the café, I will send a kiss to the trees. I'm sure they'll pass the message on. 