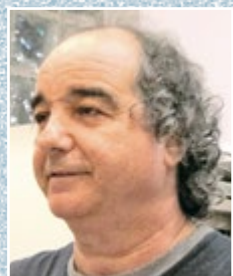


In The Light Of Memories



Shlomo Maman

dancer, choreographer,
Artistic Director of the
Karmiel Festival for 20
years

Translation:

Benny Levy

In my early days as a folk dancer, I really liked Yonatan Karmon's dances. I marveled and was impressed by my ability to perform various variations of the staged performance style.

Over time, I met dancers, instructors, creators and choreographers who danced in "Lehakat Karmon" (the Karmon Dance Company). From them, I heard many stories and experiences about the Lehaka's tours and performances around the world. Everyone emphasized the unique, unusual choreographies of **Yonatan**, the "stage wizard". Each of them, with endless enthusiasm, spoke about him with sparkling eyes. Right then, I made a decision that, in time, I too would join one of Yonatan's groups and this fraternity as a dancer in the famous troupe, and could have the same experiences they had told me about and be exposed to the choreographic work of an admired and statured artist like **Yonatan Karmon**.

At the end of my military service, I was accepted into the Inbal Dance Theater. I danced in the company for almost two years, under the direction of the choreographer and artistic director, **Sara Levi-Tanai**, who was awarded the Israel Prize [in 1973] for her contribution to dance in Israel.

I'M ACCEPTED INTO LEHAKAT KARMON

I had really enjoyed dancing the Inbal Company's dances, but since I was folk dancing almost every evening, I wanted to have the experience with a group that was all Israeli folk style, influenced by the easy, bouncy movements that were an integral part of the Israeli folk dance style.

Indeed, in 1976, I learned that Yonatan was conducting

auditions at Seminar HaKibbutzim [Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and the Arts] in Tel Aviv for a major European tour, and that the premiere would take place in the most famous European concert venue in Paris, L'Olympia [The Olympia]. I went to the auditions and I was accepted. Since dance was my profession and my source of income, I asked Yonatan for an additional job within the company, so I could get some kind of a salary from this big tour. Yonatan agreed and assigned me as his brother Antonica's assistant for wardrobe and stage accessories.

YONATAN'S UNIQUENESS AS A CHOREOGRAPHER

The rehearsals in Israel were intense, very stressful and challenging. There I found to my astonishment that the choreographer creates the dances while rehearsing with us, the dancers, which was something unique to Yonatan and a few other choreographers. Most choreographers create the choreography in advance and come to rehearsals when the dance is already completely prepared. It was very exciting to see how Yonatan creates something out of seemingly nothing. His ability to create endless variations for each section was very impressive. Yonatan's unique talent was reflected in the very "Karmonistic" movements while at the same time he had a spatial view of the stage with all its elements.

His unique style of movement captured us all. He instilled in us a sense of "team spirit". We were proud to represent Israel with his dances that were influenced by Biblical stories, Jewish roots, ethnic dances and the working settlements – the kibbutzim and moshavim.



Lehakat Karmon at the "Olympia", Paris, 1977

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Lehakat Karmon at the "Olympia", Paris, 1977

I remember our enthusiasm with Yonatan's professionalism, from thinking about every detail throughout rehearsals to performing on stage, as he made sure that each dance had a different character and unique style.

As dancers, we had already recognized that Yonatan has the soul of an artist and each of his dances became a classic work which audiences can enjoy even today.

YONATAN IS ALSO ATTENTIVE TO VOICES AND SOUNDS

Yonatan choreographed new dances for new tunes written especially for the troupe by our great composers including: **Yaakov Sagi, Shaike Paikov, Dov "Dubi" Seltzer, Izhak "Ziko" Graziani** and many others.

In one of the dances, he asked us to sing while dancing. It was a new song composed by **Dubi Seltzer**. For me to sing while dancing was a refreshing novelty. I really liked the idea because I really liked the song and for me, the connection between the dance and the singing was perfect.

In one of the medleys, **Dubi Seltzer** composed a debka style tune. In 1978, **Haim Hefer** wrote lyrics for this melody, and the song was called, "Belev Echad – In One Heart" and the song was performed by **Hedva Amrani** at the pre-Eurovision Song Contest. The song came in first tied with "A-Ba-Ni-Bi – Abanibi", sung by **Izhar Cohen**, however, because Hedva's song had already been performed on stage at the Olympia, it lost its place to "Abanibi".

The person who told the judging committee about it was producer **Shlomo Tzach**, who produced our Olympia tour. The show featured the best Israeli artists including **Izhar Cohen, Ilanit, Ilana Avital, The Brothers and the Sisters**, and **Shlomo Bar** (with a band that played special musical instruments). The conductor of the large orchestra was **Ziko Graziani**, and his substitute was a young musician who came to Israel from Romania, **Nancy Brandes**. Thanks to Yonatan, a close acquaintanceship was formed between me and Nancy. Later on, together with him in the largest recording studios in the

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Yonatan in 80s

country, I recorded music and playbacks for dance troupes and unique recordings of folk dance music.

Some of the orchestra players at the Olympia were French and some came with us from Israel. One of the guitar players was **Kobi (Jacob) Lurie** who is now known as a lyricist and composer, who wrote and composed for military groups [e.g., Lehakat Hanachal], including "Ya Lel", "The Slang Song", and others. He collaborated with many other artists including Yeshayahu "Shaik" Levy with whom he works to this day. This is how Yonatan laid out connections between people, and thanks to that, lasting relationships were created.

FROM WHAT DO COWS GET FAT?

At one of the shows, a French Jew who was enthusiastic and excited about the show, came up to us and asked me and Kobi whether he could help us with something. We told him that we were renting rooms at the hotel and that it was very expensive. He offered us one of his apartments in Paris to stay in and we stayed there for an entire month.

One day, a large group of dancers were sitting at one of the restaurants near the Olympia while Yonatan happened to pass by, saw all the cakes we ordered for dessert and scolded us for it. Another time, he saw that the girls in the group were filling large plates with lettuce. Yonatan rebuked them and he said: "What do you think they use to get cows fat? They put on weight with lettuce." That was his way of telling us to watch our figures with humor and wisdom.

STRONG FRIENDSHIP

From that tour we developed a relationship that over the years grew into good friendships and mutual appreciation. In 1978, Yonatan again came to Israel to recruit dancers for Lehakat Karmon for performances in Europe. I suggested to **Lucy**, my ex-wife (who was then my girlfriend), to join the group. Lucy, who was and still is an excellent dancer, and through the years also became

one of the gifted choreographers in the country, took the audition and, of course, was accepted.

When I came to watch Lucy's audition for the company, I met the choreographer and dance instructor, **Shmulik Gov Ari**, who was already a well-known dancer at sessions (harkadot) in the Northern Region of Israel. When I met Shmulik, I was surprised to hear that he did not pass the selection process for the troupes. I convinced him to come back with me into the auditioning hall. I suggested to Yonatan that he not give up on Shmulik. Yonatan agreed and accepted Shmulik into the troupe. There was no doubt that this was a win-win situation – Yonatan enjoyed Shmulik's performance as a dancer and Shmulik learned from him what he knows today about stage choreography. I believe that some of Shmulik's beautiful folk dances were influenced by the time he had danced in the group.

LEHAKAT YERUSHALYIM – THE JERUSALEM TROUPE

In 1980, Yonatan founded Lehakat Yerushalyim – The Jerusalem Troupe. One Saturday, important guests were invited to watch the presentation of the show. On that Saturday, one of the dancers had contracted meningitis. The dancer was admitted to the hospital and could not come. Yonatan "urgently called" me into the show to take his place. I said I was unfamiliar with the dances, but Yonatan pressed me to do it. I ended up dancing the entire show, without even knowing a dance. I simply 'copied' the other dancers.

When the show was over, **Dr. Dan Ronen** ז"ל, a great person who I appreciated very much, while praising and complimenting, said that he was surprised

"I warn you; do not steal ideas and dances from Yonatan, as everyone else does"



From left: Yonatan Karmon, Shlomo Maman, Meir Shem Tov and Shlomi Mordechai

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to find that I was a dancer in this troupe. I told him that I was actually a last-minute substitute for one of the dancers. At that moment, he told me something I will never forget. He said: "I warn you; do not steal ideas and dances from Yonatan, as everyone else does." It shook me.

I later understood Dan's intent. As we know, many dancers and choreographers who danced with Karmon have taken and danced Yonatan's dances as their own, rather than being influenced and inspired by Karmon and choreographing their own dances.

YONATAN, FOUNDER OF THE KARMIEL FESTIVAL

In 1988, Yonatan undertook the task of establishing the Karmiel Festival and becoming its first artistic director. Yonatan met with me and asked me to join him as his right-hand assistant.

It was my honor to serve alongside him in this role. It was a time when I was instructing dance troupes all over the country, artistically directing several festivals in Ashkelon and other cities and even arranging a big festival at the Caesarea Amphitheater.

Of course, I immediately agreed and even suggested that he use the services of my office located at 20 Berdichevsky Street in Tel Aviv. We sat together in this office for seven consecutive years and all through these years with him, I was the producer of the Opening and Closing evenings of the festival.

At the first festival, Yonatan asked me to produce the "integrated" shows in the community gymnasium. It was not easy to get the audience accustomed to attend these shows, but with all sorts of tricks and



Yonatan with Shlomo Maman



Yonatan with Shlomo and Ofra

publicity, we were able to make this an important event that attracted a very large audience.

After the first years, when the dance sessions (harkadot) at the festival were directed by Yehuda Emanuel and later on by Yoav Ashriel, Yonatan asked me to manage them, in addition to the other productions, and so it was. When I was appointed Chairman of Irgun Hamarkidim (Organization of Folk Dance Instructors), I informed him that I was transferring all dance-session management in the festival to Irgun Hamarkidim. He did not object, but his condition was that the responsibility for all content and dancing would be mine alone.

WITH TRUMPETS AND THE SOUND OF A SHOFAR

For the first festival's opening night, Yonatan pictured a large group of dancers with shofars. He asked me to arrange for 60 dancers, and every few days he asked me for more and more dancers. Finally, just from my own performing groups, I managed to arrange 100 boys who danced on stage with shofars. Only Yonatan is capable of making us, the choreographers, ready to carry out every task and idea that came into his mind.

During one of the performances at the amphitheater, the stage was covered with dew and the dancers were slipping. (Yonatan was not around.) I approached the night's MC, **Dr. Dan Ronen**, and asked him to go on the stage and engage the audience. And while he was reading a poem to the audience, I came up on the stage along with dancers and producers, and we wiped the wet linoleum.

His unique style of movement captured us all. He instilled in us a sense of "team spirit". We were proud to represent Israel with his dances that were influenced by Biblical stories

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It didn't really help. After a dance or two, the dancers slipped again. I turned to **Graziani**, the conductor of the IDF Orchestra, and asked him to engage the audience in a sing-a-long, so I could try to solve the problem again. **Graziani** was concerned about Yonatan's reaction. I assured him that it was all my responsibility. As the orchestra played and the crowd sang along, we rolled the entire linoleum back, which later turned out to be a solution to the problem. Ever since, we have never laid linoleum on the Amphitheater stage.

During the community singing, Yonatan arrived and asked **Graziani** for two more songs to sing with the audience. From that event and on, community singing with the orchestra became a tradition in the show.

WHEN WRITERS VIE, WISDOM MOUNTS

One year, Yonatan decided to hold a "folk dance competition," but the choreographers did not cooperate. He contacted the festival's active choreographers and asked them to create folk dances and that's how he made it happen. During the festival, he also asked me to create a dance for the competition. I couldn't work on a professional recording, but I didn't give up, and I choreographed the partner dance, "Ma Omrot Einaiyich - What Do Your Eyes Say", accompanied only by an accordion and it won first place in the competition.

Alongside the folk dance competition, Yonatan conceived of the idea of holding a "stage choreography competition", with the aims of providing an incentive for creating, as well as attracting an audience to come to the (award-winning) competition in order to elevate and promote the field of Israeli dance for the stage.

Over the years, this competition that Yonatan initiated became a very prestigious performance at a festival, attended by outstanding choreographers and the best dance troupes in the country. It is a show that attracts a large audience.

EAST AND WEST

One year, it was decided to extend the festival to four days. One of the main evenings in the amphitheater was called, "East and West." For this evening, choreographers created special dances from both ends of the rainbow. For this show, I choreographed the work called "Resurrection". It was in Chassidic style based on a dance that the Chassidim do at

weddings. This dance was danced by dancers from all my performing groups, and the soloists were the choreographers Dado Kraus and Amos Kav.

The rehearsals were successful, but at the last minute, Dado was injured and I had to replace him. I was very nervous because I didn't really remember the role and I had to improvise the dance. I remember Yonatan helping me behind the scenes, encouraging and supporting me before going on stage. He gave me the strength to go through the show successfully, even though I had gotten into it at the last minute.

IN THE LIGHT OF MEMORIES

One year, Yonatan decided to have a performance of duets at Alon Park, after midnight, in the wee hours of the morning. The show was called, "In the Light of Memories" based on the songs of Shoshana Damari who also performed them. Each choreographer chose a pair of dancers to perform the dance. The general rehearsal took place in front of Yonatan, at Bikurei Ha'itim, together with **Shoshana Damari**. I created a choreography to the song, "Nagen Ugav", performed by two of my long-time dancers – **Lilach Barda** and **Ami Sheetrit**. Yonatan did not really like all the dances. Not wanting to offend certain choreographers, he sat us all down and asked three pairs of dancers to dance their dance again. He then spoke to the choreographers, very gently, asking them to correct the choreographies and to deepen and style them in the character that is unique to each choreographer. This was Yonatan's way of improving and commenting without hurting anyone's feeling. I remember this show as one of the most successful that had ever been in the festival.

HOSPITALITY IN PARIS

When I used to travel to festivals or to dance camps across Europe, especially if it was in France, I always stopped to visit Yonatan and Shuki. There were times that I stayed with them for a few days. At the first time, in that cute little studio apartment in Paris, when I woke up, I couldn't find my suitcase. When I asked, Yonatan took me to the shower, where I found the suitcase that was placed under the faucet.

This apartment was very small but filled with lots of warmth and love. And I had the sheer pleasure of staying in this cozy apartment again and again. Yonatan was an excellent cook, and sometimes he made very delicious Kosher meals especially for me.

At the last minute, Dado was injured and I had to replace him. I was very nervous because I didn't really remember the role and I had to improvise the dance.

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I was most surprised when he showed me paintings and sculptures he had created. I never imagined that he also painted and sculpted so beautifully.

SALUTE TO YONATAN KARMON AT THE 30TH KARMIEL FESTIVAL

I thank God that along with some good friends – **Aharon Solomon, Eli Sadeh, Shalom Carmi, Liat Katz Parachan, Lilach Waxman Rana, and Adi Eldar**, the former mayor of Karmiel, I had the great opportunity of dedicating the opening show at the 30th Karmiel Festival to Yonatan. On this evening, dance troupes re-created Yonatan's dances, artists who accompanied him over the years sang in his honor, and the audience cheered with appreciation and respect. The show, of course, took place on the same stage that Yonatan conceived of before the first festival.

The show reflected the style that Yonatan believed in and outlined from the first festival, whereby all dance styles fit together, co-exist, become integrated and influence each other in a complete way.

A SPIRITUAL TEACHER WHO IS ALSO ENGRAVED IN MY FLESH

Yonatan had educated generations of dancers. I feel that Yonatan was my spiritual teacher. I learned a lot from him about Israeli dance for stage. Everything I know about festivals, directing and stage management with professionalism and in-depth thought – it's all thanks to him. Over the years, Yonatan accumulated tremendous knowledge and since I had been able to be with him for a long time, I learned new things from him every day with love and great passion.

When I was a young dancer, during one of my first rehearsals with Lehakat Karmon, we were rehearsing the Fisherman's Dance, which was full of jumps and tumbles. I was injured on the chin and in need of medical care - stitches to close the skin, which left a scar that is still there until today. This scar is a reminder of those days in the troupe, and of Yonatan as its leader.

Yonatan is already missed by each and every one of us. I miss him as a friend and as a father figure. I cannot forget the day I was notified of my own father's death, a few seconds before the Karmiel Festival's finale. Yonatan gave me a long hug and encouraged me. I stayed with him to manage the



Akum Prize for Yonatan Karmon

stage until the end of the show, and only after it ended, did I go to mourn with the family in Tiberias.

A GREAT MAN, WITH A MODEST AND HUMBLE PERSONALITY

All the greatness and fame that Yonatan had while alive did not make him conceited even for a moment. He remained modest and humble, and all of him was about giving and love. This is a huge loss of a legend, a person who significantly paved the way for the field of Israeli dance. Yonatan has imprinted his unique dance legacy on each and every dancer in Israel and around the world. I still can't internalize his parting from us.

Whenever I think of a dance, Yonatan's image immediately comes to mind. It's hard for me to think I can't call him, consult, talk, and meet with him just like I used to do.

Yonatan was most deserving of receiving the Israel Prize for his immense contribution to Israeli dance for the stage. No one is worthier than him to be praised and recognized for his great work. We, the choreographers, will continue our journey and spread its great heritage everywhere in Israel and around the world. ✎



“What do you think they use to get cows fat? They put on weight with lettuce.” That was his way of telling us to watch our figures with humor and wisdom. ✎