



Alon Schmidt

dancer and manager of
Lehakat Karmon – the
Karmon Troupe

Translation:

Ruth Goodman and
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Yonatan And Me

I find it difficult to define the exact time that I met with **Yonatan**, the schedules are obscure, and it seems that he has always been a part of my life....

While in my youth, as a dancer in "Hora Neurim" in Jerusalem, I followed "Lehakat Yerushalyaim". I remember being so impressed with Yonatan's creativity that I used to sneak into the Arlozorov School to watch the Lehaka dancers dancing in the gym, where sparks of pure "harmonious genius" flew.

My first encounter with him was at random, at a time when I was about to enter a year of permanent service in the army. We met with **Bracha Dudai** ז"ל, when Yonatan came to her with **Yossi Tal-Gan**, to finalize things for the first Karmiel Festival. The introduction was brief, but I already felt a closeness to him and a special connection.

During my permanent military service in the Air Force, I taught dancers at the base to dance during transfer of command ceremonies. For the purpose of the show, I decided to contact Yonatan and ask him to lend me a set of costumes. Close associates warned me not to dare to ask and that he would consider it rude. I decided to ask anyway. When Yonatan heard from me that I needed a set of costumes for the army, he immediately agreed: "Of course, the storage is downstairs right beneath the festival headquarters, next to the Chinese restaurant. Go ahead and take whatever you need". I knew exactly what I needed, and this surprised Yonatan. It was the costumes for "Haro'a Haktana...: "Mr. Soldier," he said. "Remind me, what's your name?" And the rest is history.

Over the years I worked alongside him producing shows at the Karmiel Festival. From the performances of dance troupes in the sports arenas to the nighttime performances at Alon Park, and of course at the opening and closing performances on the main stage. For all intents and purposes, I was by his side, and this has continued over the years with the Karmon Association (formerly Amutat Ami), as a dancer and administrative manager of the troupe.

Working as the troupe manager alongside Yonatan led me to work with additional creative people. It

is impossible not to mention Bertha Quartz and Galina, the seamstresses.

Those who did not experience this did not see the teamwork with thought about every detail (ribbon, bead or embroidery) and going to Goldstein in Nahalat Binyamin to together choose the appropriate fabric for each dance.

Unique sketches and patterns were part of these two precious seamstresses. Unfortunately, Bertha was run over and killed when a bus hit her as she crossed the road near the office. It was the day before two performances in Givatayim and after she had prepared everything that was needed for the show. Yonatan went to the funeral and we had our rehearsal, and when we were backstage he had the ironing board standing with a single memorial candle waiting for Bertha's last ironing to be remembered tenderly.

The Gulf War - Nachash Tzefa (Viper Snake alert code)

In January 1991, during the Gulf War, I worked at the television studios in Jerusalem. Suddenly I received a pager message: "When are you coming to town (Tel Aviv)? Call! Yonatan".

I was very surprised. This was not the time that Yonatan used to come to Israel from Paris. I immediately called and arranged to meet with him the next day on Berdichevsky Street, in **Shlomo Maman's** office. At the meeting, the details were all clear to him:



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"So, there is an artistic dance festival in Munich and we are flying to perform. We will take 7 couples. We'll perform two Kabbalistic medleys and Rikud Chassidi (Chassidic dance), Magash Hakesef (Silver Platter) and Rhapsody. We will rehearse together. It will be okay. We're going for four days. He issued a printed program with a photo of Lehakat Karmon" from '67.

"The troupe's name will be "Karmit," he added. "Why Karmit? Ahhh ..., it's a little Karmon..." he said, smiling. "And who will dance"? I asked. "We will recruit dancers" he replied. "You" (Me? I never thought this would be offered to me), "we'll talk to **Amos, Barry** and other dancers and think about girls, too." And so it was. I returned home happy and we started to assemble a group that eventually traveled to Munich, just like that, in the middle of everything and with gas masks.

Thus, between one scud and the next, from "Viper

Snake" to "Heavy Heat Wave" [alert codes], we rehearsed in Givatayim and prepared for a festival in Munich. The rehearsals were meticulously conducted. Every leap, every turn and every pas de bourrée, connected with the movement and emotion that only Yonatan knew how to get out of the dancers and bring them to the precise performance execution. In addition, I remember working on the musical editing in the studio in Jerusalem and traveling with **Odeda and Yonathan** to Karmiel, to bring costumes for the show, while in the background the sunsets and sirens were strangely intertwined.

In Munich, we received a royal welcome at the Kempinski "Four Seasons" hotel. The excitement was great. We spent the days and nights with intensive rehearsals and, all of a sudden, we were on a stage with the greatest artists of that time. It was an unforgettable four days. Seven couples who appeared in two shows with two Tel Aviv air raid sirens that were broadcast on CNN in the background.

Yonatan and my mother Pnina

In December 2002 my mother, Pnina, became ill. In the past, she worked at a ticket office in Jerusalem and had connections with many communities. The troupe planned a performance at "Beit Shmuel" in Jerusalem. One day, as I was helping my mother I talked to Yonatan about the show and ticket sales for the show. Yonatan asked to speak to my mother and told her that the troupe needed to sell tickets to ensure a full house for the show and he was asking for her help. My mother replied that she did not have the strength but would try to help. "I trust you will succeed," he told her.

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From right: Lilach, Dganit, Maya and Omri Schmidt with Yonatan in Paris, 2010

The conversation ended and like magic, my mother recovered and began to give me instructions: "Alon, bring the ledger out of the drawer, call everyone I tell you! So we sat for a few hours and called all the Jerusalem elite members, friends and important professionals in Jerusalem. My mother took care of all that without anyone knowing that she was ailing.

The time came for the show. I went to my parents and pleaded for my mother to come. She said: "We'll see, it will be okay." Finally, she got up, got organized, put on makeup, and came to the theater. Yonatan asked her to sit next to him at the command post and watch the show from there. So it was. He was sensitive and considerate and did not leave her while managing the show. The hall was jam-packed. The energy from the show kept her for another two weeks, but soon after, my mother passed away with a sense of achievement as only she knew how to accomplish.

Yonatan and my family

Yonatan had a special relationship with my family – my wife **Deganit** and our children **Lilach, Omri** and **Maya**. **Deganit adds:** Over the years, Yonatan became an integral part of our family. Almost every time he and Shuki arrived in Israel, we would meet. When I was in my ninth month of pregnancy with Lilach, my first born (22 years ago), Lehakat Karmon set rehearsals every Friday. The rehearsals were conducted very seriously and professionally. Only Alon was allowed to have an open cell phone in case I went into labor. At every phone call that Alon received, the rehearsal was stopped and Yonatan was interested in knowing what was going on, and if there was a birth. Thus began his special connection with Lilach and later with my other children.

Only our children were allowed to run around among the dancers during rehearsals. Yonatan's relationship to the children was very special. He showered them with warmth and love, and they loved him back. At one rehearsal, when I came with

Lilach, she started crawling among the dancers and Yonatan said, "Don't let it bother you". "Just keep dancing...". And so he would lift her up and dance with the dancers. He had an amazing connection with the children.

In one of our visits to Paris, Yonatan wanted to spoil the children with the food they liked. Lilach loved sauerkraut, and Omri, hot dogs. Yonatan walked around the markets with us to find what they wanted and invited us to his home to prepare a glorious meal for us with these products. It was very important to him for the children to enjoy themselves and have a good time. He hung out with us in Paris and showed us all the special sites. At the end of the trip, when we boarded the bus that took us to the airport, Omri was really crying, and they both put their palms together from both sides of the bus windows. Yonatan also seemed to have a small tear.

Years have passed since then and the children have grown up. Yonatan was always interested in their well-being and happy to see them when he came with **Shuki** to visit us. He became a family member and the children saw him as their "third grandfather".

We loved him very much, not only because of his creativity and his extensive work, because for us he was a close and beloved person, a charming man with a huge heart. We will love you always!

Yonatan was special in his approach to people. He was very special in his creations and his works. "Everyone has his own star in the sky". I say: "Everyone has his own Yonatan". He "touched" every one of us. His star grew as more people connected with him. He left his own unique mark on each one of them and with his special talent, he knew how to bring all of them together through the powerful love of dance.

Yonatan was and still is an object of admiration and a symbol in my eyes of Eretz Yisrael Hayafa Ve'Hatova – the beautiful and good Land of Israel, even today, in times when such a concept sounds like a "cliché". The dance creations were and will remain impressive and unique, not to be imitated but rather to serve as a source of inspiration. Working alongside him was extremely fascinating, thrilling and enriching, in every creation and preparation for a production... He was a spiritual father to me and a source of inspiration in the field. I'm sure it has been so for many others as well. 