



Danny Uziel

A Team That Complemented Each Other

I first met **Yoav Ashriel** in the early 1950's through **Mira**, (Yoav's future wife), who was a dancer in the chug (dance session) that **Gurit Kadman** had started at HaPoel Tel Aviv. **Mira** surprised us when she brought a friend to the chug that she knew from the Nahal dance groups, **Yoav Ashriel**. At that time, the vatikim (veteran dancers) taught newcomers, like me, dances that they knew from the early days; this included dances such as Kuma Echa, Harmonica, Im Ba'arazim and Dodi Li. Once in a while they would introduce a new dance from that time. With his extensive background in dance from the Nahal, **Yoav** took over leadership of the group. At first, he started by continuing with dances we already knew, and every two or three weeks, he would introduce a new dance that he himself had choreographed. When **Mira**, a dancer who was full of energy and the joy of life, demonstrated the dances, the picture completely changed. Yoav and **Mira's** method of teaching and their sheer love of dancing completely changed the atmosphere and more people joined the group. We became caught up with the excitement and the joyful atmosphere. **Mira** also encouraged us to sing the songs while

we danced. After a short period of time, Yoav started a performing group built on the group of vatikim that were there, together with some of the younger newcomers, and I was one of them. The rehearsals took place after the Open Session (chug). I was surprised when **Yoav** said to me, "Danny, you will be dancing with **Mira**". In 1954, Yoav created and produced a special event of dance and song with a live orchestra that was held



Yoav Ashriel with Danny Uziel

At one point, Yoav said to me, "Danny, it's time for you to start teaching too",



Danny Uziel and Mira Ashriel in a performance with HaPoel Tel Aviv, May 1953

Danny Uziel

at Habima Theatre, a major performance venue in Israel. The singers were **Ilka** and **Aviva**; **Mira** and I were the dance soloists. This experience connected me even more to **Yoav and Mira** who, during this time, got married. At first, **Yoav and Mira** lived with **Mira's** parents in Givatayim and I would travel there from Tel Aviv to rehearse with them – both the performance dances and **Yoav's** new folk dances. After a while, **Yoav and Mira** moved nearby to their own apartment in Givat Rambam. To make it easier to rehearse, I moved three houses away. From my kitchen, I could see their balcony and since we didn't have telephones, **Yoav and Mira** would wave to me to come over to rehearse! I was like a member of their family. When **Yoav and Mira** became parents to **Rakefet**, I became "Uncle Danny".

Yoav and Mira began to teach more sessions outside of HaPoel Tel Aviv. Almost every night, they taught different groups. At one point, **Yoav** said to me, "Danny, it's time for you to start teaching too", and he gave me his group at the Ayonot Agricultural School, about 10 miles from Ness Ziona and Rishon LeZion. A car would come to pick up both me and **Ami Gilad**, who was the accordionist and just 14 years old. This paved the way for **Yoav's** asking me to take over his session at HaPoel Tel Aviv where he worked as an employee when he decided to turn his occupation into a profession and become independent; he was the first to do so.

I left for the United States in 1961, but **Yoav** and I kept in touch on a regular basis. We spoke about



Yoav Ashriel with Danny Uziel



Mira Ashriel with Danny Uziel in New York

his sessions, performing groups, performances and hishtalmuyot (workshops for instructors) through which he encouraged and helped to develop young choreographers and to introduce their dances.

Yoav was truly a trailblazer both as a leader of dance sessions and of performing groups. I must emphasize that, aside from their being a couple as husband and wife, **Yoav and Mira** were a team that uniquely completed each other. **Yoav**, as a choreographer, gave us dances that have become classics and are national treasures while **Mira** provided us with the energy and spirit of each individual dance.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize how much I have appreciated both **Yoav and Mira's** encouragement for me to teach Israeli folk dance and to develop my own sessions which then became my life's passion.



Danny Uziel and Ruth Goodman with Yoav and Rakefet in Manhattan, 2008