



Roni Siman Tov

Translation:

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Just One Original Idea Is Sufficient

That's How I Started Choreographing Folk Dances

Spring 1981, Friday evening. The traditional marathon of **Mira and Yoav Ashriel** at Wingate. The sports hall was packed with dancers and filled with positive dance energies and joy...

My girlfriend (at the time), **Nira**, and I, who were still serving in the army, had been invited to the event by our friend, **Lucy Maman**, who we had known for a long time from folk dance classes and dance troupes. Between dances, **Lucy** introduced us to **Yoav**, who was focused on conducting the session. "Get to know each other..." she said and added, "**Yoav**, I recommend that you meet with them. **Roni** dances in 'Lehakat Karmon' and is also a dance choreographer..."

Yoav took my phone number and said, "I'll get in touch on Sunday". I thanked him and thought to myself that he was quite polite and that would be the end of it, as they say at the auditions, "Don't call us, we'll call you..."

To my surprise and delight, the following Sunday, **Yoav** called us at home. (In the 80s, there were not as yet mobile phones.) The conversation was very pleasant but quite short because the words simply got stuck in my throat... The giant of the generation is talking to me. **Yoav** invited me to meet him and we arranged for the meeting at the end of **Mira's** dance session at the Dubnov School. Needless to say, I



Dance session at the Dubnov School, 1986

was extremely excited about the upcoming meeting. On the evening of the meeting, **Yoav and Mira** welcomed us so warmly and showed extraordinary interest in us. From the very first moments we had the feeling of family closeness.

At the end of the dance session, after everyone had dispersed, **Yoav** asked us to present the dance... **Nira** and I presented, "Teivat HaZimra", sung by **Ofira Gluska and Lulik Levy**... we danced and danced and danced...

At one point, **Yoav** stopped the music and asked, "Are you willing to accept my critique?" "Certainly!", I replied. When I remember his words today, I smile and am filled with feelings of appreciation... But, at that time, I was very tense and anxious because after all, it was my first dance creation... and in waltz rhythm...

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The intention, of course, is to perform a musical edit in which sections [of the song], like the transition passages, are eliminated and only sections of the song itself remain for the dance, so that they fit into a regular dance cycle! In a calm voice, **Yoav** went on to say: "There is no need to drive the dancers crazy. As it is, they come after a day of work..."

I, who was stunned for a moment, did not know what to say! **Mira**, who was watching in the background, suddenly intervened and said, "Wait, but there are a lot of beautiful elements here". **Yoav** nodded and immediately came to my aid. After a minute of thought, he suggested that

I connect part of the first section with part of the second section, double them and then add the "third idea" in the chorus... "Good luck!" he added. For me, it was a lesson "on one foot", but an instructive lesson!

Thus was born a first dance, with difficult labor pains, but those which followed already



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emerged into the world with insights from the Maestro's school.

I cannot forget the first hishtalmut (teachers workshop) when we came to teach. **Yoav** introduced me to the veteran instructors... asked them not to be disruptive and also walked around the hall to make sure they would allow me to teach...

At the time, the veteran (vaticim) instructors did not accept the young choreographers sympathetically and sometimes even mocked them... **Yoav** said that, he himself, had experienced disruptions in his youth when he taught and therefore, implored the vaticim that, they must give the young people a chance!"

From then on, we shared a lot of work related meetings and exchanged professional opinions. Most of the meetings were held after the dance sessions and ended late at night. But, even at night, Tel Aviv is bustling with life, so we would often end the meetings with a "tzolelet – submarine", a desert drink made of chocolate milk that contains chocolate pieces that "dive" into the drink... **Mira**, like every "Yiddishe Mama", was the one who had invited us saying: "You are soldiers. I am paying!"

Later, when I came to **Yoav** with "Kayitz Al

Ha'lr", he was a little reluctant. "What? A tango in folk dance?" My girlfriend, **Nira**, who recommended the song with the different rhythm, and I, looked at him in wonder, but only for a moment. Together, we regained our composure and said, "Yes, a tango. The song is completely Israeli. The lyrics are by **Yossi Gamzu**, the melody by **Sasha Argov** and the performance is by **Yehoram Gaon**. So basically, why not? Is there something more Israeli than that??", I reasoned.

Mira, like a lioness protecting her cubs, immediately came to my defense and said, "You're right. **Yoav**, do not touch it! It's beautiful".

Yoav was silent for a moment and after a minute said: "You know? Even when I created 'Erev Ba', everyone told me I was crazy... so probably you should not be afraid and should go with your gut feeling..." Thus began the era of folk dances with a tango; later, when there were more works in this style, they were already easily accepted.

To **Yoav's** credit, it must be said that, despite the perception of the veteran leadership in the Mador Le'Rikudei Am (Folk Dance Section) then, it was time to embrace new ideas and move forward with the spirit of the era. That was the

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way it was with "Masa Bein Kochavim" – the first Israeli folk dance in rock 'n' roll style.

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Yoav's professional comments were wise. Sometimes, when he encountered a complex dance, he would say to the choreographer: "Think about it a little more. Sleep on it. Something better will surely come about". And I, in fear of hearing such a verdict from **Yoav**, would take the trouble and make the effort ahead of time, before meeting him. I would check myself over and over and make sure I had put enough thought into avoiding any obstacles in the dance.

The culmination of **Yoav's** openness and artistic sincerity was evident when I came to show him a dance called, "Shir Megaresh Et HaChoshech", and he said to me: "You know, I have a dance to this song. It's called, 'Gogoli'..." Out of shame and not knowing what to do with myself, I looked down and was silent. He then added, "But your dance is beautiful, and I will include it in the hishtalmut".

Today, in retrospect, I consider myself lucky to have gotten to know both **Mira and Yoav Ashriel** ז"ל. They opened the doors to the world of folk dance for me and many others. Among them, young choreographers also found an


open home there, and together with the veteran choreographers, we brought a wide variety of works to Israeli songs of all styles that have left their mark on Israeli dance.

From each of the **Ashriels**, I took "tools for life". From **Mira** I learned the style of instruction, that is, how to get inside the dance, disassemble it so that the dancers could optimally absorb it, or as I like to call it, create "neurological engraving". From **Yoav** I adopted the joy of creation. Adapt the steps to the style of the music and the rhythm; create a choreography that will allow for focusing on the music more than the steps and that will simply, "flow with the melody", as **Yoav** used to say...

It should be noted that, **Yoav** was a wizard in accurately notating dances, even before the coming of the video age. In each hishtalmut, he distributed a booklet to the instructors and choreographers containing the notations of the dances and even made sure to include a personal dedication...

During the many years in which I had the privilege of working with the **Ashriel** couple, I felt that **Mira and Yoav** loved my wife **Nira** very much and in a special way. May she have a long, healthy life. They opened their private home to us and **Yoav** even visited our home several times. It was always, "**Mira and Yoav**", "**Nira and Roni**"...

Apparently our relationship, both in life and in work, reminded them a bit of themselves and this, of course, made us very happy and allowed us to communicate "on the same wavelength"...

Thank you **Yoav and Mira Ashriel**. I miss you both. We will remember you forever! 



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