



Susy and Maurice Stone

My Israeli Dance Journey

Maurice Stone's story: Advancing Israeli Dance (IFD) in the United Kingdom



Susy and Maurice Stone wearing their British Empire Medals

*I have known **Maurice Stone** for many years. We are in regular contact. Maurice is very supportive of "Rokdim" and what I do, and I, for my part, help him as much as I can.*

Like all the dance camp organizers outside of Israel, Maurice also tries to bring well-known choreographers and bring new dances to the camps, because that is what attracts participant dancers. However, at the same time Maurice and the organization he founded promote two very important strategies that I have not encountered in other countries:

- A. A regular dance activity in Jewish schools in London, culminating in an annual meeting of all the schools on a concentrated dance day.*
- B. Dancers-instructors who come to "Machol Europa" at a subsidized price, or completely free of charge, in order to learn the dances and become dance messengers in their countries of origin.*

These two things have taught me to appreciate, respect and cherish Maurice Stone throughout the years.

Of course, I would love to read and know about other places that do such important things for Israeli dance.

Yaron Meishar, editor

Beginnings

My dance journey started when my father, who was then chairman of the Glasgow Zionist Organisation, persuaded me to attend the "Habonim" youth club at the age of 9. I did not want to go, but he insisted on depositing me at their door. Two hours later, when he returned to take me home, I did not want to leave. At the end of our Sunday meetings, the group used to come together to dance as we sang our repertoire of Israeli songs.

One Sunday, at age 11, as I returned from the swimming class for a bagel at the "Habonim Centre", the secretary – Mazkir – announced that "Habonim" was putting together an Israeli



Shlomo and Yuval at Moscow seminar with Adrian and Maurice from London

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dance group to perform at an event, and he wanted the swimmers (3 boys) to join in because they needed more people. I joined the group that was then under the direction of **Dvorah Dittman**, a Hebrew teacher at the Jewish primary (elementary) school, Calderwood Lodge. The group attracted girls from the more religious Bnei Akiva youth movement, so my dance partner was the daughter of the Chazan – Cantor – from Giffnock Synagogue. I realised then how Israeli dance could bring people together from across the Jewish religious spectrum. Our 15 minutes of fame came when we were asked to appear on a Scottish Television programme. The Carmel Dancers, as we were called, went on to perform at Yom Ha'atzma'ut – Israeli Independence Day – events.

Although I didn't dance while I was a student at Glasgow University in 1972, things changed

when I transferred to McGill University in Montreal, Canada to do a master's degree. A flatmate told me about Sunday night dancing on the mountain in the middle of Montreal. This class, with **Sue Baxt** at **Hillel House**, reignited my interest in Israeli dance.

London

When I returned to the UK, I moved to London. With some Irish "Habonim" friends, led by **Jack Bloomfield**, we started a dance class at West Hampstead Synagogue. My girlfriend **Susy**, who later became my wife, was at that time the Student Director at Hillel House in Euston.

In 1973, with the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, the teachers of the student Israeli dance class returned to Israel and Susy invited us to move our class to Hillel House. We increased our repertoire by asking visiting Israelis or Americans to teach us a dance in return for a free night's accommodation!

We also established the "Hillel Dance troupe", which performed at prestigious venues like the Royal Festival Hall and Trafalgar Square. One of the highlight performances was at a Royal Air Force base near Reading for Israeli Air Force pilots at the end of their training.

1st Summer Camp

I had read about Israeli dance camps in the USA, and in 1977, I decided to visit one to see if it could be replicated in the UK. Unfortunately, **Fred Berk's** camp was cancelled that year because of illness. [He subsequently died in 1980.] Therefore, I went to **Moshe Eskayo's** International Folk Dance Camp in Upstate New York. Inspired by what I experienced, I decided to try an international dance camp in the UK.

An Armenian dance teacher, **Tom Bozgian**, had done a workshop with us, so in 1978 we invited him to our first "Israeli and International Dance Camp" together with **Moshiko Halevy**.

In 1980 we set up the Israeli Dance Institute as a UK charity to promote Israeli dance. This turned out to be a turning point which enabled us to fulfil a far wider vision for our activities.

They were joined by Israeli dance teachers from London, **Yossi Badihi** and **Lily Cohen**, as well as **Fiona Howarth**, who taught both Israeli and international folk dance. We had 42 participants.

Due to changes in the organisation, our early support from Hillel ended in 1980, so we set up the Israeli Dance Institute as a UK charity to promote Israeli dance. While we were disappointed at the time, this turned out to be a turning point which enabled us to fulfil a far wider vision for our activities.

Machol Europa

In the autumn of 1978, a dance teacher from Israel, **Moshe Telem**, who was on a visit to family in London, came to our class. He agreed to teach a dance and even extended his stay in London to enable him to teach again the following week. His popularity gave us the confidence to change our second dance camp into an "Israeli dance only" event, which it has remained ever since. Until Covid struck, Moshe attended and delighted us with his presence every year.

Over almost 50 years, Machol Europa has developed into to a worldwide phenomenon with many well-known Israeli dance instructors and choreographers attending. In 1981, there were 103 participants. By 1986, we were attracting people from various countries including Australia, New Zealand, France, Holland, Sweden, Italy & Switzerland.

While Moshe Telem and Moshiko were our regular core teachers for many years, we constantly sought to broaden the repertoire of dances with various teachers. Invitees have included **Yankele Levy**, **Eliyahu Gamliel**, **Shlomo Maman**, **Israel Shiker**, **Shalom Hermon**, **Shoshana Kopelovitch**, **Menachem Menachem**, and **Dani Dassa**.

More recently, our regular teachers have been **Shmulik Gov-Ari** and **Moshe Telem**, although Moshe's active participation has now sadly ended after more than 40 years' contribution to



Machol Europa 2010 Performance workshop

our work. We are proud to have also nurtured new talents: notably **Marcello Marianoff**, **Yuval Tabashi** and **Ilai Szpiezak**. This we did through Machol Europa and through an arrangement where we have employed these young talents as Dance Development Directors with IDI-UK.

We are immensely proud of the part Machol Europa has played in spreading Israeli dance around the world.

At the beginning of the revival of Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union in 1989, President Gorbachev gave permission for "Faerlich", a



Maurice and Adrian (IDI Vice chairman) with Moshe, Moshiko, Dudu, Gadi, Shmulik and dancer at Machol Europa

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Rafi Ziv leading dancers at Machol Europa

Jewish ensemble from Lithuania, to attend the Maccabiah Games in Israel. Susy suggested that we could bring dancers from the ensemble to Machol. We managed to contact Maccabi Lithuania and arrange visas for **Anna Kravets** and **Oleg Ziskinder** to attend. We were then invited to send a team to a Chanukah seminar organised by "Faerlich" in Vilnius and so began our work with Jewish communities emerging or in distress.

We raised money from Jewish philanthropists to subsidise these participants, most of whom could not pay for their UK visas or flights. We introduced a three day 'pre-camp', with participants from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia staying with Jewish families in London. After the synagogue bombings in Turkey in 1986, we established strong links with the Jewish community there, with about 8 young leaders coming each summer. In 2013, we managed to invite our first participant from Cuba, sending her home with a suitcase full of Israeli dance materials, since Cuba had no access to our internet resources.

In 2023, in response to different needs, we changed the pre-seminar to provide intensive training with Dado Kraus and Shmulik Gov-Ari for those working with children and teenagers, and with stage choreography. We welcomed trainees from the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, Georgia, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Romania, and the north of Israel.

This structure will be repeated for Machol Europa 2024 when our guest teachers will be **Shmulik Gov-Ari, Shlomo Maman, Tamir Scherzer, Gabo Mirkin, Yael Ya'akobi** and **Dado Kraus**.

University Campus Tour

Following the 1973 War, when Jewish students on university campuses in the UK were facing increased antisemitic and anti-Zionist activity, we decided to bring a dance teacher from Israel who would visit universities around the UK to conduct dance sessions, with an opportunity to speak to students about life in Israel. We needed someone who would share student accommodation and engage with them on a personal level. We chose Moshe Telem for the first campus tour in 1979. Moshiko Halevy came in 1981, and over the following years we invited **Menachem Menachem, Yoav Sidi, Noam Chaver, Yigal Triki, Ilan Givon, Gadi Bitton, Levi Bargil** and **Ra'anán Mor**. Although we have not done the tour for many years, the current situation on our campuses calls out for this kind of activity when the time is right.

*Nitzanim*

Before the Covid pandemic, we were working with 24 Jewish elementary schools across the UK with an average attendance of 400 children, including schools where many of the pupils are no longer Jewish.

Spreading Israeli dance

By 1984, we had made contacts around the UK and in Europe and encouraged a network of classes in Liverpool, Leicester, Manchester, Redbridge, Cardiff, Nottingham, Oxford, Bristol, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Zurich, Stockholm and Paris. Of course, this depended on having local people who were happy to teach, some of whom are still involved today.

In 1985, we produced our first video of "Dances for Beginners" with an accompanying cassette and distributed it widely. We followed it up in 1986 with a second programme. We have gone on to develop many resources which, with the expansion of the internet, we have brought online.

Bringing new generations

When Susy became a teacher, and ultimately head teacher at a successful Jewish Elementary School in London, she inspired me to expand our work in dance to children in Jewish schools.

In the early 1980's, I read about **Hilda Smolash**, who had successfully introduced Israeli dance for children in Quebec and other parts of Canada. In October 1984, we invited her to visit elementary schools in London, Manchester and Liverpool. In 1985 in Israel, I met **Raya Spivak** who had inspired Hilda. Raya would have a profound impact on our approach to working with children. In March 1986, we arranged for her to come to the UK to teach in Jewish elementary schools in Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and London.

In 1987, we received the Chief Rabbi's Award for Excellence for our work in Jewish schools.

Working initially with Raya Spivak, and her late husband, **Yossi**, and for the last 15 years with **Yael Ya'akobi**, we have developed our work with children into teachers' seminars and an annual Children's Dance Festival, where children from several elementary schools, joined by their parents, dance together a repertoire learnt at school.

Before the Covid pandemic, we were working with 24 Jewish elementary schools across the UK with an average attendance of 400 children, including schools where many of the pupils are no longer Jewish. We also have a Festival for Early Years (children aged 5 to 7) which we hold in the schools. In 2023 we visited 10 schools in 5 days with more than 1,000 children participating.

We have also developed a unique online programme of children's dances for the Chagim – the Jewish Holidays, which we adapted during the pandemic to support the wellbeing of families celebrating the Jewish festivals in lockdown.

*Oranim at Karmiel Festival*

Oranim has represented the UK Jewish Community at many inter-faith events and has participated in many Jewish communal events, recruiting and developing its members over many years.



Oranim performing Barry Avidan's tambourine dance

Harkadot

Our original group met at Hillel House in Euston, London from 1973 to 1986. Then we moved to the Habonim-Dror Youth Centre on Finchley Road. Since "Habonim" closed, we have met in different schools in northwest London.

Over the years our Dance Development Managers, **Marcelo Marianoff**, **Yuval Tabashi** and **Ilai Szpiezak** have contributed to developing our Harkada and other activities. Yuval still comes once a year to work with Oranim.

The number of adults involved in the main Harkadot in London is now low, with all classes in London attracting no more than about 80 individuals per week. While lifestyle changes and the relationship of young people with Israel are just some of the factors that explain this, we continue to provide beginners classes and innovations such as online access to provide gateways for people to join our circle.

Performance dance

In 1982, our original performing group, the "Hillel Dancers" became "Oranim". "Oranim" has received choreographic input from **Shomo Maman**, **Moshiko**, **Shuki Hoffman**, **Dado Kraus**, **Yuval Tabashi**, and **Ilai Szpiezak**. It has represented the UK Jewish Community at many inter-faith events and has participated in many Jewish communal events, recruiting and developing its members over many years. During that time, we have also developed groups for children, teenagers and seniors.

There have been many milestones. In May 1984, Oranim won an award from the Greater London Arts Association and performed at the Shaw Theatre. In December 1985, Oranim performed for the Labour Friends of Israel at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton, and the following year at their event in the House of Commons (UK Parliament). In July 1986, we taught the actor **Richard Gere** to dance Yemenite steps for the film, "Life of King David". **Myer Rosen** and **Jonni Brill**, members of the live band who accompanied us then, were involved with the music production for the film. We also advised on **Yehoshua Sobol's** production of "Ghetto" at the National Theatre and for a Royal Shakespeare Company play.



Moshe Telem Instructing in London

the programme included dances from a variety of nationalities including Caribbean, Israeli, Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, and Asian. The event was funded for 3 years only with subsequent years also including Polish and Scottish dancers.

Nurturing the Flame – bringing Israeli dance to emerging and distressed Jewish communities

The invite to “Faerlich” was the beginning of an outreach journey that we are still on. In December 1989, we held the first Israeli dance seminar in the former Soviet Union. People with Israeli passports were not given visas, so I travelled with **Anne Greenwood** and **Caroline Hoffbrand**. On the way back to London, through Moscow, we met **Chaim Topol** z”l, who agreed to become a patron of the Israeli Dance Institute.

From 1990, our work on this project was supported by the UK charity, World Jewish Relief, and the US Joint Distribution Committee. In July 1990, we invited “Faerlich” to the UK to perform, after which we went together to Israel where we appeared at the Karmiel Dance Festival, with “Oranim” and “Faerlich” performing a special dance together called “Balalaika” choreographed by Barry Avidan. It was a deeply moving moment for us all, as Jewish people in the FSU began to rediscover their identity.

In December 1990, at the end of a seminar with Raya & Yossi Spivak and Shlomo Maman, we were suddenly asked to leave the after party and go to the station to take the last train to Moscow. Russian tanks had arrived to invade Lithuania!

In January 1992, we went to Odessa with **Yigal Triki**, **Oren Halali**, **Anne Greenwood**, **Lisa Silverstein**, and **Pamela Glick (Amdurer)** z”l. At the seminar, we met **Julia Karcheschaya** z”l, who went on to support our work as education director for the JDC in Moscow. She was one of many wonderful people who have helped us to bring Israeli dance to communities worldwide.

In 1992, the Israeli Dance Institute received an award from the UK Parliament Soviet Jewry Committee for services to Soviet Jewry.

The seminars in 1993-95 were held in the Moscow area and then moved to Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. One highlight was a children’s dance festival led by Raya Spivak in a military

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barracks. I need to make a special mention of the IDI Vice-chairman, **Adrian Andrusier**, who helped us with this project.

In 1999, we held the first Machol Hungaria with Raya & Yossi Spivak, Moshe Telem and Yaron Carmel. Although our involvement ended, the seminar continues until today mainly with Gadi Bitton. Other Machols across the world, not necessarily run by us, are a tribute to the brand that we are proud to have created!

The last seminar run in the former Soviet Union was in 2006. With no budget to enable us to continue, we have instead focused on raising funds in the UK to bring suitable candidates to Machol Europa.

Recognition

I have never sought any award or recognition for myself for my involvement in Israeli dance activities. My inspiration is Susy, who has encouraged me for over 40 years to indulge my passion with her educator's approach.

However, in 2019, I was awarded a British Empire Medal partly because of our work in reaching out to Jewish communities which are emerging or are in distress, and for our work in promoting community cohesion in the UK through Israeli dance.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to all the dance teachers from Israel who have contributed to the work of the IDI, inspiring both Jewish and other communities across the world.

Finally, we continue to raise funds to enable people to come from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Cuba, and South America to Machol Europa to enhance their teaching skills. If you go to <https://www.idi.org.uk> and click on "Our Work", you will see the testimonies from people who have benefited from our work. 🇺🇸

