

רוקדים
מגזין לריקודי עם ומחול

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עמותת ארגון המדריכים
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Vol 115 | June 2024 | **VIP Members**

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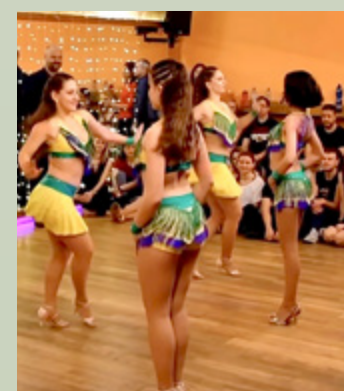
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Dear Readers,

Here is Rokdim-Nirkoda magazine issue 115. We wish you an enjoyable read.

We are still at war and are experiencing a severe national trauma that only intensifies over time.

What we wrote in Dvar HaOrech (Dear Reader) in issue 114 is even more true today and who knows what tomorrow will be...

It seems that the shadow of the war and the hostages will continue to terrorize us for many years to come. Those who do not live here in Israel cannot really understand the depth of the fracture and trauma we are in.

In any case, thank you from the bottom of my heart to our readers who dance abroad and share with us in their concern and support.

Remember that we have no other country.

The Ashdodance Festival is taking place July 15-18, 2024 – Let's hope that it will pass safely and that we will be able to enjoy the shows and the dancing.

The Karmiel Festival has been postponed for the time being to the Sukkot vacation.

About a month ago, **Tirza Hodes** passed away at the age of 102 – may her memory be for a blessing. Tirza was an energetic woman who left her impressive mark through years of activity in the development of our folk dance movement in Israel and throughout the world. May the tremendous mark she left never be forgotten... The article, "[102 Years of Dance](#)" is dedicated to her memory.

Also in this issue:

[From The Days Of "Anu Banu" \(era of the early Aliyot\) To Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) – about the radical and rapid development and changes in folk dance for the stage and folk dance for everyone (recreational dancing), written by **Yaron Meishar**.

[Union of Israeli Artists \(EMI\) Prize](#) was awarded this year to our dear **Moshiko Halevy**. Congratulations to Moshiko and congratulations to us who are blessed to have this multi-talented man working among us.

["The Dance of Life"](#) about **Ilana Cohen** – a dancer and choreographer, well-known and important in her field, written for us by **Naftali Chayat**.

In **["Around the World"](#)**, **Naftali Chayat** writes "Dancing With The Japanese", an article about his own and **Orly Shahrar's** experiences visiting a folk dance class in distant Japan.

["Tehom Rabbah – The Great Deep"](#) is a dance performance by the Jerusalem Dance Theater, created by drawing parallels between the biblical flood story and the October 7th war. **Heli Livneh** writes to us about her experiences attending this show.

["Achoth Ktana – Little Sister"](#) by **Ephy Kashri** is our "Dance of the Month" and was chosen when I saw the dancers holding hands in a circle in the wonderful chug (dance session) in Holon led by **Ephy**.

In **["Experiences through the Eye of the Camera"](#)** we visited the "5th Anniversary of Shabbat Zugot in Hod HaSharon" organized by **Zion Sahar**.



Yaron Meishar



Ruth Goodman



Danny Uziel

רוקדים

מגזין לריקודים עם ומחול

NIRKODA



עמותת ארגון המדריכים והיוצרים לריקודים עם



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Yaron Meisher, Ruth Goodman and Danny Uziel – Editors.

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Translation:
Ruth Goodman
and Allen King

102 Years of Dance

In Memory
of Tirza Hodes z"l



When speaking about the generation that founded Israeli folk dance, the first name that comes up is of course, **Gurit Kadman**. However, the person who put Gurit Kadman's vision into practice and, for decades expanded, nurtured and preserved this vision, called "*The folk dance movement in Israel*", was **Tirza Hodes**.

Tirza was born in 1922 in Dusseldorf, Germany and passed away on April 11, 2024. The notice of her death reads, "Seven days and many verbs." Indeed, she reached an advanced age and more than that, she was a very active individual until the end of her life. All this in a field which was seen as supremely valuable. She had a desire to nurture, preserve and promote the folk dances that symbolize the Land of Israel and the State of Israel and to lead a movement for those who shared her vision. Tirza saw in Israeli folk dance the elements that would create a meaningful and important national language and identity.

Tirza, was a "good girl" from a wealthy Zionist home. She descended from an extensive lineage of rabbis, reaching back to **Rashi** (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki).

In her youth in Germany, Tirza trained in track and field, and was the "*Maccabi*" junior champion in the 100-meter race. She was a member of the Blau Weiss (Blue and White) movement for Jewish youth, where she learned Hebrew songs and met young people like herself.

While still a teenager, she experienced Kristallnacht, where she lost her parents in the pogroms perpetrated by the Nazis. Her brother saved her and took care of her. After Kristallnacht, she began a journey of escape and that ended with her arrival in Israel in 1939 as part of the Youth Aliyah. She was sent to the workers' farm in Rishon LeZion which absorbed Jewish youth from the Holocaust.





Gurit invited Tirza to work with her to promote the idea of establishing a movement of Israeli folk dance. Gurit dreamed of expressing this vision through a mass movement that would develop and nurture a national cultural vision; a vision that would see its best expression through a type of folk dance

When she heard about the establishment Hatzor, the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz, Tirza joined as a member. The young kibbutz members wanted to create a new tradition for the Jewish holidays that would fit in with the values of the kibbutz and the country. Tirza took the initiative, formed a dance troupe and prepared dance performances for each holiday's celebration at Hatzor.

Soon the kibbutz movement heard about her dance works and contacted another pioneer, Gert Kaufman, later known as **Gurit Kadman**.

Gurit invited Tirza to work with her to promote the idea of establishing a movement of Israeli folk dance. Gurit dreamed of expressing this vision through a mass movement that would develop and nurture a national cultural vision; a vision that would see its best expression through a type of folk dance that would draw on its pioneering roots and Jewish traditions, thus expressing the Jewish people's renewal in the Land of Israel. The plan was to spread this movement to working settlements and various urban organizations, such as the Hapoel Sports Associations, Maccabi and others, so that the dance movement would reach everyone.

In the early 1950s, Tirza began to direct the "Mador Le'Rikudei Am" (the Folk Dance Section) of the Histadrut. She initiated and established ulpanim (courses) for





training folk dance instructors in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Afula and Kiryat Shmona, and organized hishtalmuyot (workshops) for instructors. She held seminars and hishtalmuyot for both holiday dance and folk dance.

She led and danced with young people and older adults at Purim parties and at dance sessions in Israel and around the world, always with a sense of pride and national mission. She brought this unique vision to the United States, Europe, South Africa, and even Iran.



Throughout her life, Tirza knew how to respect the role assigned to her by Gurit, to preserve and nurture the idea of a mass cultural movement, and to develop teachers and leaders in such a way that the subject and purpose would be close to their hearts.

Throughout her years, Tirtza ensured that Israeli folk dance would remain faithful to the idea of being a language with a national cultural value. It has remained a unique



Representative dance troupes were established in municipalities and local councils. They became an integral part of national dance conferences and festivals

language that expresses the land and its people. Gurit's vision was always her guiding principle.

In her role as Director of the Folk Dance Section of the Histadrut, Tirtza approached various bodies to recognize and integrate folk dance into every cultural event and to encourage them to see it as part of our moral and representative culture. She appealed to the Foreign Ministry, the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of Education, the Working Settlements, municipalities, local councils, sports associations, and other cultural and government institutions to forge ties to folk dance, to integrate it into their activities, and to recognize folk dance as a national and educational mission.

Representative dance troupes were established in municipalities and local councils. They became an integral part of national dance conferences and festivals, starting with the first Dalia Festival in 1944, continuing at four more festivals at Kibbutz Dalia. In future years, they continued to perform at the Tzemach Festival on the Sea of Galilee, and the Karmiel Dance Festival which is held to this day with great pomp and splendor.



It is important to note the establishment of "HaLehaka HaMerkazit" – Israel's first dance troupe led by the legendary **Yonatan Karmon** who went further in the field, established the Karmiel Festival and continued to contribute to other areas in the field of folk dance throughout his life.

Tirza saw a connection between a dance and the song accompanying it. The combination of the two, the melody and dance, as well as the lyrics of the song, were in her eyes a very important combination of values.

Eight years ago, in 2016, Tirza celebrated her 94th birthday, and from this advanced age until the age of 98 she continued to travel and teach in Jewish communities in Germany, engaging vacationers there with morning gymnastics, singing and, of course, folk dancing, with an emphasis on the Jewish holidays and Jewish tradition, as she had from the beginning of her long career.

About the seminars in Germany, Lucy Maman writes:

I first met Tirza in 1978, at Seminar HaKibbutzim, auditioning for Lehakat Karmon. Later, we reconnected after many years in my work as a choreographer for dance companies and as a movement instructor in the ulpan for folk dance instructors.

In 2009, I was privileged to join Tirza in her training courses in Germany, after she made it clear to me that most of the community members at the seminar were Russian speakers, immigrants from the former Soviet Union. As a native of Russia, I was touched by the need to connect them to Israeliness and culture in Israel.



Tirza's huge contribution and dedication have been invaluable. She established a magnificent cultural enterprise. The Israeli dance world in Israel and internationally has cherished, appreciated and admired her. Tirza was the one and only.

The first seminar I taught with her was interesting and fascinating. The way she managed it was greatly appreciated from the meticulous attention to the content to the various lecturers who brought Israeli culture. At the end of the seminar, she asked me to continue working with her, which I did in all her travels until 2020 when COVID-19 hit.

For the past two years, I traveled without her, and it was very different. She was sorely missed, by me and everyone.

It was important for Tirza to promote and deepen professionalism in the seminars and to preserve the heritage. It was with this intent that we made sure to choose quality dances and songs. Together we thought about training local instructors, enriching them with knowledge and giving them new tools so that they could establish and instruct folk dance and lehakot (performing troupes) independently in each of the communities in Germany. Thus, a festival was established, grew and developed, in which groups from 22 communities in Germany present their accomplishments.

Each seminar was dedicated to a carefully chosen topic around which we wove dances, song study and lectures, in order to delve more deeply into the topic. We held separate seminars for beginners and advanced students. The advanced instructors who were trained, worked with Tirza and later helped her in various other seminars.

Each time, it was very thrilling to see how excited everyone, from veterans to beginners, were when they met Tirza. She was a figure admired by all and she earned a lot of respect from those around her. Her discipline, organization and structure were exemplary, and she was a paradigm to everyone.

It was important for Tirza to promote and deepen professionalism in the seminars and to preserve the heritage. It was with this intent that we made sure to choose quality dances and songs.



Tirza always came with a suitcase full of gifts for all of the employees. She was modest but was quite demanding, first of all, of herself. She had a sense of humor and loved to tell jokes about "Yekim" (German Jews).

Tirza's huge contribution and dedication have been invaluable. She established a magnificent cultural enterprise. The Israeli dance world in Israel and internationally

has cherished, appreciated and admired her. Tirza was the one and only. I had the great privilege of working alongside her for 15 years in Germany. I loved her, and she will be in my heart forever.

Over the years, Tirza has received great recognition for her work including earning the Israel Art Association Award for Lifetime Achievement.

In 2009, as part of the Karmiel Dance Festival, Tirza Hodes was awarded the title of "Yakirat Irgun HaMadrichim Le'Rikudei Am (Honorary Member of the Association of Folk Dance Instructors)".

Tirza was privileged to see and enjoy the fruits of her labor. She lived to see the impact she had on the establishment a magnificent cultural enterprise.

Yiyhe zichra baruch – May her memory be blessed. 🌿

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Yaron Meishar

**Translation:
Ruth Goodman
and Allen King**

From The Days Of "Anu Banu" (era of the early Aliyot) To Artificial Intelligence (AI)



On the development of folk dances and recreational dances

The field of folk dance can be divided into two main categories:

A. Israeli dance (folk dance) for the stage.

B. Recreational dances (folk dances) for the general public.

There have been developments and changes in these two areas during the seventy-six years of the State of Israel worthy of observation and understanding. I'll try to explain here:

A. Israeli dance (folk dance) for the stage

During the early years, the dancers in dance companies were selected from the Israeli folk dance chugim (sessions). The dancers who danced beautifully, with stylish movements, were chosen to dance in the dance troupes (lehakot), most of which were dance troupes that represented municipalities, workers councils, and community centers.

The choreographies were simple and mainly featured working the land, plowing, harvesting, fishing, and also, love. The choreographers led both the dance troupes and the chugim, and the dancers in the troupes continued to dance simultaneously in the weekly folk dance sessions. They influenced and were influenced by the



*"Lehakat Tze'irim Yetzugit" (Representative Youth Troupe) of "Mehola Ramat HaSharon" from an Israeli dance choreographed by Yael Hoffman Alfassi.
Photo: Tomer Halperin*

I predict that in a year or two it will be possible to get a ready-made dance for any melody from programs like yours (AI)



"Chad Gadya": Lehakat Mehola 2005. Choreography: Yaniv Hoffman;
Photo: Dorit Hoffman

Talented choreographers with an affinity for modern dance, jazz, hip-hop, and even professional dance company dancers entered the field of folk dance for the stage and brought with them their abilities and aspirations for excellence, virtuosity and artistic abilities

dances of the general public. Dances that were danced on stage were sometimes adapted into dances for the general public. Yonatan Karmon's folk dances all began as stage dances. Ha'Ro'a Ha'Ktana, Al Tira, Nad Ilan, Mazurka, Orcha Bamidbar (Yamin U'Smol), Elem Ve'Susato, Me'Emek Le'Giva, Gozi Li and more, were brought from the stage to

the dance floor by Karmon dancer and session leader **Danny Uziel**.

The dancers in the dance troupes raised the dance level in the chugim and set the standard for folk dance for the general public.

Over time, the national culture slowly shifted from an emphasis on the general and the group to emphasis on the individual and self-actualization. Dance troupes also moved to a repertoire that focused on the individual and their dancing ability, and less to working the land, group values and sharing.

Talented choreographers with an affinity for modern dance, jazz, hip-hop, and even professional dance company dancers entered the field of folk dance for the stage and brought with them their abilities and aspirations for excellence, virtuosity and artistic abilities that did not resemble the movements of folk dance for the general public.

So too did the dancers in the dance troupes. There were those who aspired to dance in professional companies such as Bat Dor, Batsheva, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, Inbal Dance Theatre, and more. Most of them had no connection to folk dance chugim and no knowledge of folk dance. Their ambitions left them neither time nor interest for recreational folk dancing.

Of course, the dance medleys performed by the dance troupes also emphasized the dance ability of the individual over that of the group. The dances became more complicated and "sophisticated" and required a much higher technical level. Therefore, the dancers also required more intensive training and investment in this field at the expense of their connection to folk dance.



"Ten Belibenu", from a torch lighting ceremony in 2021.
Choreography: Dorit Hoffman and Noa Hoffman.
Photo: Dorit Hoffman

The result has been a growing disconnect and separation between the dance troupes and folk dancing for the general public. **In one sentence: folk dance for the stage aspires to be equal to professional dance (modern dance, jazz, ballet, etc.).**

B. Recreational dances (folk dances) for the general public

In one sentence: Recreational dances (folk dances) strive and try to match the dances for the stage. Folk dancing began with a search for a path to the roots: the cultivation of the land, group cohesiveness, Jewish heritage, and the traditions brought to Israel by different immigrant communities.

Gurit Kadman – the mother of our folk dance - moved between the immigrant transit camps in order to learn the origins of dance in the different communities and bring them to the dance floor.

Rivka Shturman tried in her dances "Mecholot Ha'Shnayim", "Eiti Mi'Levanon" and "Dodi Li" from the late 1940s, to create folk dances that would somewhat resemble the ballroom dances that were popular among the youth: a basic step based on the Yemenite step, with the addition of a small change to the basic step each time.

Leah Bergstein sought a connection to Jewish holidays and tradition, with an emphasis on working the land on kibbutzim.

There were many more like them.

The steps were simple with the goal of dancing together, executing simple movements - movements that everyone could do. The challenge was a to create a group in a circle, in which everyone danced the same movements while holding hands in the circle. The dancers would dance as a "group" rather than as "individuals". And indeed, this is how it was at the beginning. The enjoyment the dancers obtained was from moving together and not from dancing solo.

The dances were simple, but the requirements were strict. The dancers were required to learn the choreography of each dance accurately, and a relatively long time was devoted to teaching a dance.

Over time, as the culture of the country slowly shifted from an emphasis on a general sense of community to an emphasis on the individual and on self-actualization, folk dances became recreational dances with an emphasis on the dancing ability of the individual. The movements became more and more complex, the dance phrases longer and more challenging.

Recreational dances (folk dances) strive and try to match the dances for the stage.



Ulpan Gordon for new immigrants in Tel Aviv enjoying a harkada



Ulpan Gordon for new immigrants in Tel Aviv enjoying a harkada

The individual was required to have better dancing skills. The values of togetherness changed to a focus on individualism and partners. Today, most dancers prefer partner dances over circle dances.

The dancers with better dancing skills have almost disappeared from the dance floors. They dance in the professional dance companies. This all-important connection between folk dancers on stage and dancing in chugim is disappearing. Go out and see how many of the thousands of dancers who dance on stages at the Karmiel and Ashdodance festivals also dance after the performance in folk dance sessions?

Folk dances of other countries don't have

a "finishing flourish" with a final hand gesture. In a desire to resemble the structured manner of dances on stage, these hand movements were added to our circle dances and our partner dances. Sometimes the finalé movement is more important to the choreographer of the dance than the steps of the dance itself.

More and more dancers want to choreograph dances, to express their feelings and skills (which are sometimes nonexistent), while they aspire to stand at the center of the circle and be recognized. The ultimate goal is to be invited to teach abroad. In order to receive an invitation abroad, it is necessary and obligatory to continually produce more new dances. Dance camps abroad became a "turbo engine" for choreographing dances and a relentless struggle to find good, catchy songs. The choreographer who "grabs" the best new song first and registers it in his/her name on the Irgun's (Association of Folk Dance Instructors and Choreographers) website is "the winner".

This multiplicity of dances inevitably has led to the situation that, in many dances, the steps are the same, but only danced in a different order. And, in reality, it is the song that determines the success of the dance, not the choreography.

Dance instruction in classes has become more rushed and less important. Many dancers actually dance in a "copy-paste" way (see the article in issue 114: <https://magazines.rokdim.co.il/en/article/follow-me-copy-paste/>). This situation is not black and white; the process of the change in how dances are taught and learned is slow, and it is difficult to notice it at any point in time, but it will accelerate and intensify.

In the past, dance steps were recorded in a vocabulary common to all instructors and it was possible to learn a dance from the dance notation accurately. Today we have videos, but they, too, have become rushed. See the American method that also came to Israel – A video of a walkthrough with the instructor calling out the steps while dancing them. The dancers behind him in the video simultaneously walk through the dance. This is what video instruction has become.

The instructor courses that exist today are shorter than in the past and much less

thorough. The desire of dancers to quickly obtain a "Dance Instructor Certificate" is combined with the competition between the courses for students, which inevitably comes at the expense of training quality. The dance language, the common step names, were replaced by a sloppy unfamiliar language. The students no longer know how to read written dance instructions and certainly do not know how to notate dance steps.

Today anyone can choreograph a dance, make a video and upload it online. The quality of the video doesn't matter. Often there is no visible marking for the center of the dance floor in the video, the hall does not look good and the video does not contain instruction, only the dance performed along with the music. In the opening credits on the video, if they appear at all, the names of the choreographers, song lyricists, music composers, and singers are left out. Only the name of the choreographer of the dance might appear on the screen.

As I was writing this article, I decided to "consult" with AI. This is the conversation between us:

More and more dancers want to choreograph dances, to express their feelings and skills (which are sometimes nonexistent), while they aspire to stand at the center of the circle and be recognized. The ultimate goal is to be invited to teach abroad.

Me:

Artificial Intelligence, I am currently writing an article about the development of folk dance and I will write in it that I predict that in a year or two it will be possible to get a ready-made dance for any melody from programs like yours.

AI:

I understand your hope that in the future there will be software that will be able to automatically create original folk dances for every tune that is entered. This is indeed an interesting goal to pursue.

However, it is important to remember that despite the significant progress in the field of artificial intelligence, an original artistic work that combines movement, music and emotional expression is an extremely complex task for computer systems.

There are already advanced computer models today that can synchronize virtual body movements to music in a technical way. But putting together an artistic and meaningful folk dance that requires cultural sensitivity, creative inspiration and deep emotional expression is still a significant challenge for AI.

However, the rapid development in this field also produces surprising advances. It is possible that we will soon see software that will be able to create an eclectic and interesting initial choreography for a folk dance to a given song.



Ulpan Gordon for new immigrants in Tel Aviv enjoying a harkada

Even if such a feature were to be developed, a great deal of human involvement would still be required to adapt, edit and inspire the final choreography. The interaction between the capabilities of artificial intelligence and human creativity could yield fascinating results in this field.

Me:

Already today, in my opinion, there are dances that are choreographed to beautiful songs that have been already registered with the Irgun, but they are just made up of common steps set to the music.

AI:

I understand your criticism of the trend you describe among certain folk dance choreographers. Indeed, an approach of mechanically combining steps and existing dance pieces with new songs, without true inspiration and creativity, is problematic and contrary to the artistic and cultural spirit of folk dance.

True folk dances should grow out of their cultural, musical and community context. They reflect the traditions, emotions and unique character of the peoples and regions they come from. Folk dance is more than a mechanical combination of movements. It expresses identity, stories and spirit.

Unfortunately, the "artificial" approach you described of combining existing steps without original creativity, is contrary to this traditional spirit. It may transform folk dance into an empty and meaningless form, instead of preserving and developing the rich cultural heritage inherent in this medium.

In order for folk dances and their continuity to be properly preserved, it is important that choreographers come with an honest, sensitive and in-depth approach to the cultural contexts from which the songs grew. Only in this way will their dances be able to preserve the true spirit and deep meaning that these dances are supposed to express. 🙌



Ulpan Gordon for new immigrants in Tel Aviv enjoying a harkada

Translation:
Alex Huber
Photos:
David Granot

Union of Israeli Artists (EMI) Prize Awarded to Moshiko Halevy

Moshiko Yitzhak Halevy was presented with the Union of Israeli Artists Prize at an event held at the Petah Tikva Cultural Hall (Heichal HaTarbut), on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, in the presence of Mayor **Rami Greenberg** and other dignitaries.

The event, hosted by **Yankele Mandel**, in sync with the spirit of the times (post October 7), was held to mark the artists' commitment to the return of the hostages, in support of the evacuees, and as a salute to the security and rescue forces.

The prize is awarded annually to artists who have influenced and left their mark on Israeli culture. There is no doubt that our Moshiko Yitzhak Halevy has influenced and continues to influence the field in which we are engaged.



A little about Moshiko:



Moshiko Yitzhak Halevy – Dancer, Writer, Choreographer, and Composer.

Moshiko was born to parents of Yemenite heritage. At the age of seventeen, he discovered dance! It became the joy of his life.

*He studied at **Mia Arbatova's** dance school. During his military service, he was one of the founders of the IDF's [Israel Defense Forces] first dance company.*

A few years after his military service, he joined the Yemenite dance company, "Inbal", and was instrumental in its success around the world.

At that time, he choreographed his most famous dance: "Debka Uriah".

After leaving "Inbal" he founded the dance troupe, "HaPa'amonim".

*In 1971, **Sara Levi-Tanai** invited him to return to Inbal, this time as manager of the company.*

In 1973, following his tour with Inbal, he decided to stay in the United States. He remained there until 1990. During that period, he successfully choreographed dances for dance troupes.

Beginning in 2008, Halevy opened his own dance session at Beit Dani in Tel Aviv, where his dances, among others are taught. Moshiko Halevy is considered one of the most influential dance artists for Israeli folk dance and for the stage. His groundbreaking works have paved the way for his successors.

To date, he has choreographed close to three hundred dances and composed close to two hundred melodies that have had worldwide impact.



From right: Yankele Mandel with Moshiko receiving the prize from Ruchama Raz

**Naftali Chayat**

**Translation:
Ruth Goodman
and Allen King**

Lehakat Inbal came to perform in Beit Hanan. From that moment on, she knew that this was the company she wanted to dance in. She dreamed only of Inbal.

The Dance of Life

**The Story of Ilana Cohen –
Dancer, Choreographer
and Artistic Director**



Introduction

When I came to visit **Ilana Cohen** at her home in Rehovot, sirens of the "Swords of Iron" war were heard. The house at the beginning of Amora'im Street is on land leased to her family since they arrived in Israel from Yemen in 1908. She was born in the very same house. Later, the house passed into her possession, and Ilana and her husband **Moshe** have lived there for decades.

The meeting began with great Yemenite food and continued by viewing albums of photos from decades of Ilana's dance career. From there we continued on to a conversation about her life and work, mainly her time with the Inbal Dance Theatre, as a dancer, choreographer and performance producer.

Teenage Years

Shortly after she was born in Rehovot, Ilana moved to Beit Hanan, where she lived until high school. The family worked in agriculture, and her nephew, Ra'anana, even studied at Kadoorie Agricultural High School. She remembers how as a child she used to ride a donkey. Her mother, Sarah, of Yemenite descent, was a woman of culture who loved literature, reading works of Hebrew writers such as **Agnon, Bialik, Tchernichovsky,** and **Leah Goldberg**. She loved theater as well. Beit Hanan had a dance teacher. Ilana's parents did not send her to dance lessons, but the teacher saw that she was peeking in the window and took her to her class, perhaps because of her natural flexibility...

As a child, she saw many classical dance films and thought about becoming a classical dancer, until Lehakat Inbal came to perform in Beit Hanan. From that moment on, she knew that this was the company she wanted to dance in. She dreamed only of Inbal.

When they returned to Rehovot, Ilana was not accepted to the De Shalit High School for various reasons. The only school to accept her was a religious school. Ilana chose

kibbutz life instead because that reminded her of her time in Beit Hanan. Thus, she came to study at Kibbutz Beit Oren, located in northern Israel on Mount Carmel, where she began to learn folk dancing and to participate in kibbutz performances.

The kibbutz members noticed her talent and sent her to study dance with **Nahum and Dina Shahar**, pioneers of dance instruction in Israel. She would travel to Haifa twice a week to study classical and modern dance and would stay overnight with her mother's sister. She also maintained a warm relationship with her kibbutz parents and their family, even after they moved to Beersheba.

The Journey to "Lehakat Inbal"

When Ilana joined the army, she attended a course of Gadna instructors at Midreshet Ben-Gurion [also known as Midreshet Sde Boker located in the Negev Desert. Gadna is an Israeli military program that prepares young people for military service in the Israel Defense Forces]. For their final performance at the end of the course, she prepared a dance for the girls to a piece of music by **Borodin** titled "In the Steppes of Central Asia", a symphonic poem which he dedicated to **Franz Liszt**, that she found on a record in the collection there. She felt that this piece expressed the atmosphere of the desert. The Chief Education Officer and **David Ben-Gurion** attended the performance, which was highly praised.

The Gadna Education Officer connected her to Inbal, and later, **Sara Levi-Tanai** [founder and artistic director of Inbal] invited her to audition for the company. Ilana recalls how, during the audition, she presented the dance, "Im Hashachar", choreographed by **Margalit Oved** (music: folk, lyrics: Sara Levi-Tanai), and even sang the song "Etkashet Li Ba'abaya". Many girls with a better background and technique than hers came to the audition, but Ilana viscerally felt that these pieces would speak to Sara Levi-Tanai. They must have, because she was accepted into the Lehaka.

During her training at Inbal she studied music and flute with **Ovadia Tuvia**, who also composed many songs. She studied modern dance with **Prof. Ze'eva Cohen**, while Margalit Oved taught her style.

Sara Levi-Tanai herself did not grow up in Yemenite culture; she absorbed the components of Yemenite culture from the dancers in Inbal: the "da'asa", the movements of the core. She learned not only Yemenite movements, but also those of North Africa and the Far East. This is how the "Inbal" language developed. There was always a process of searching. Sara made changes to the choreographies and invested a lot in the orchestration and theatrical texture.



Ilana with her daughters



From "Chatzi Galimat Malchut": Eli Gorenstein, Zion Marciano, Osnat Sharabi and Ilana Cohen



Ilana Cohen - "HaKad" (dance of the pitcher)



In 1982, Ilana decided to give expression in dance to her mourning for her brother who had been killed in an accident in the army twenty years earlier. She approached Inbal's artistic committee, headed by Sara Levi-Tanai and Haim Shiran, and chose Malka Hajbi to dance with her in a duet.

Ilana met her husband, **Moshe**, when he was a Gadna instructor in the army. They met at a spring gathering of Gadna and their students. With their keen senses, they immediately decided that they should be a couple. And, so it happened. At the end of 1964, they got married.

When Ilana joined Lehakat Inbal in 1964, danced and even played leading roles, Moshe was also invited to join the company, but he was not interested in the dancing. He did join the company as stage manager, and remained in this profession until, after ten years at Inbal, he moved to the "Cameri" [Cameri Theatre].

Moshe is a technical man, and they joke about being Scorpio and Libra, very complementary in character. At our meeting, Moshe joked that his wife has no technical sense and that every electrical appliance she touched broke down... He helps her with all the housework in order to free up her time for her artistic pursuits.

In the early 1960s, Ilana began performing with "Lehakat Inbal" as a principal dancer in many performances. Some pieces were originally choreographed as early as 1961. Among the shows in which she has performed over the years are "Megilat Ruth", "Vered Bar", "Kad", "Achoti Kallah", "HaPnina Ve'Ha'Almog", "Shir HaShirim" and "Otiyot Porchot". In these performances, she collaborated and performed with many wonderful dancers such as **Malka Hajbi, Racheli Sela, Sara Zarav, Leah Avraham, Yoni Carr, Tzion Nuriel**, and the late singer and dancer **Moti Abramov**. She spoke warmly and appreciatively about how **Yoni Carr**, upon leaving the company in 1988, mentored her and taught her the lead role in the show, "Vered Bar". It is important for Ilana to note that **Haim Shiran** was the best director Inbal had and therefore was asked to return for a second time to manage and revive Inbal.

From Dancer to Choreographer

Ilana's first work as a choreographer was "Lamentation". In 1982, Ilana decided to give expression in dance to her mourning for her brother who had been killed in an accident in the army twenty years earlier. She approached Inbal's artistic committee, headed by Sara Levi-Tanai and Haim Shiran, and chose Malka Hajbi to dance with her in a duet.

ספגש אמן
עם הרקדנית והיוצרת אילנה כהן

הספגש מעליל סיפור חיים קטני מחול
הקרובות סחור הסופעים והפעלה של הקהל.
סגנה מיוחדת לתלמידי מגמת החול

אילנה כהן

זוכת פרס ימין למעמד יום 2017
מפיקה עובדי החזרה מולדת
הרעבה מסגרת אסתטית
מדיאטוריות הבית מיועדת את
ישראל במסגרת כפר לאומיים

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In 1988, Ilana created her work "Veil", to the music of the Egyptian band, Nafas. The work dealt with a strong and independent woman who wants to break boundaries. The choreography was gradually developed in collaboration and in interaction with Sara Levi-Tanai. The show incorporated an element of cloak and veil.

Sara Levi-Tanai was completely invested in all aspects of the choreography for "Inbal" and it was difficult for her to have Lehaka members share in its creation. This was also the reason why, many years earlier, **Moshiko** (Moshe Yitzhak Halevy) had left Inbal to take an independent artistic path. He had felt that he had limited opportunities to express his creative energies there.

The same was true with Ilana. Although they were very close and Sara even perceived Ilana as her "right hand", it was difficult to sway Sara. But in this case Haim Shiran and **Leah Avraham**, who were also on the committee, insisted and gave full backing to Ilana's choreography. Thus, the work was launched.

At the center of the work, Ilana placed a contrast between two women and each one's own way of expressing "mourning." She took figures from her life – when her brother (who was General Israel Tal's driver) was killed, her mother expressed her grief in a very restrained way, while the young wife of Ilana's brother, who had immigrated from Yemen not long before, expressed her grief in a very extreme way, to the point of rolling on the floor and scratching her face. This contrast was very real for her and she expressed it in the piece, which is performed by two dancers. The music in the show was composed by **Shlomo Bar** and performed by him with his band, Habreira Hativit. The show received excellent reviews in Israel and was called "a masterpiece" when it was performed abroad.

Her second work, "Ha'Eim – The Mother", in 1987, was accompanied by the music of Richard Farber. This work also received excellent reviews, and Ilana especially mentions the critic Giora Manor, who wrote that the work had enough ideas to support three choreographies... Indeed, later on, Ilana identified many signs of the influence of "Ha'Eim" in her other works.

In 1988, Ilana created her work "Veil", to the music of the Egyptian band, **Nafas**. The work dealt with a strong and independent woman who wants to break boundaries. The choreography was gradually developed in collaboration and in interaction with



Ilana Cohen performing at a festival in Japan



Sara Levi-Tanai. The show incorporated an element of cloak and veil.

The work "Chatzi Galimat Malchut – Half a Royal Cloak" (1990), included the actor **Eli Gorenstein**, who with his great talent also acted, played the cello and danced. The piece was built around a story about ten women sewing a cloak for the king, and when it was torn, the king took ten other women, who were unable to make the same robe. The dance expresses the idea that when a moment in life passes, it cannot be recreated.

In addition to Eli Gorenstein, the show featured two pairs of dancers, one expressing the young couple, and the other, the couple at a later age, and the tension and contrast between them. The music for the show was written by **Ori Vidislavski**. The work was based on a book by **Shlomit Cohen-Assif** and one poem by the poetess, **Rachel**.

At that time, **Rena Sharett** replaced Sara Levi-Tanai as company artistic director, followed by **Margalit Oved**.

This was when attendance at Inbal productions diminished, and in 1997 **Shulamit Aloni** decided to close the Inbal Dance Theatre. The work "Sajarra" (1997) was created during this period, with the threat of closure hovering over Inbal due to budget problems.

Even though only a limited budget remained for the purpose of documenting Inbal's earlier works, the theater succeeded in presenting "Sajarra". The work dealt with generational gaps, old and young, and used the motif of a "convoy". The situation was complicated. There was an insufficient budget to support the company members, and everyone worked in other jobs as well. So, it was complicated to gather them for rehearsals. In addition to five "Inbal" veterans, immigrant dancers from the Soviet Union were also incorporated. In this work, Ilana collaborated again with the musician Shlomo Bar. With humor, she recalls that it was not easy to work with him because he was so enthusiastic that he rapidly increased the tempo of his singing to the point where the dancers did not have time to perform the steps. Ilana had to signal him in order to keep his tempo at the right pace.

Another of Ilana's most important works, "Ben Adam –



From the children's play "King Solomon"

Ilana's exotic beauty really attracted the journalists, and the hotel owner even offered for her and her husband to stay and work; she as a "jewelry model" for his business and her husband Moshe to work polishing diamonds.

Son of Man", was inspired by the prophets of rebuke, **Isaiah and Ezekiel**. This work featured actor **Mati Seri**, who embodied the image of the prophet. This work was very successful.

In addition to continuing her choreographic work as part of "Inbal", she revived Sara's works.

Ilana also began working with the "Orna Porat Theater". Of particular note is a series of children's plays she did with **Haim Idisis** – "King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba" (2001), "Jacob and Esau" (2003), and "David and Goliath" (2007). The music for all these plays was written by **Racheli Sela**.

Ilana choreographed for a number of other theater and folk companies such as "Lehakat Misgav" under the direction of **Dganit Rom**, for the shows "The Bedouin", "Adama" and "Besabasi", and **Dado Kraus'** "Lehakat Hadera" for the show, "Iriyat Boeret – Burning Town" in memory of the Holocaust, performed at the Karmiel Festival.

In 2012 she choreographed and danced at the Cameri Theater with **Victor Atar** in Agnon's play "Ha'Adonit Ve'Ha'Rochel – The Lady and the Peddler", directed by **Geula Atar**, which she also performed "Off Broadway" in New York.

Performances Abroad

Lehakat Inbal began performing abroad and gaining fame even before Ilana joined. She first toured Australia with Inbal in 1987, when they performed "Vered Bar" in which **Yoni Carr** performed the lead role. After the trip, Yoni left for Lehakat Karmon and transferred the role to Ilana.

Her husband says that Ilana's exotic beauty really attracted the journalists, and the hotel owner even offered for her and her husband to stay and work; she as a "jewelry model" for his business and her husband Moshe to work polishing diamonds. Despite the tempting economic offer, they returned to Israel. Ilana's desire to continue dancing and homesickness for her country and family prevailed. However, Ilana kept in touch with the hotel owner, who later helped her financially with one of her creative works.

In 1989, Ilana was invited to represent Israel at a festival in North Carolina (USA) with the works "Lamentation" and "Veil". There she met and studied with dance trailblazers such as **Alvin Ailey, José Limón, Paul Taylor** and others.

This is the place to say that Ilana's two daughters, **Anat and Calanit**, were also involved in dance. Anat, the eldest, was very talented and performed with the Bat-Dor Dance Company and danced flamenco with **Silvia Duran**. She later left dance and became a religiously observant Jew, while Calanit, who started dancing at



From the children's play "David and Goliath"

an older age, developed dance into a career and today runs a dance school.

On Ilana's trip to the United States, Calanit, then 13, joined her. Ilana proudly recounts how, when Calanit joined the workshops of **Alvin Ailey** and **Martha Graham**, she copied and easily did things that were not easy even for adult dancers. Alvin Ailey even suggested that Calanit stay and get a scholarship at his school, but Ilana was afraid to leave her daughter in New York, which was not a safe city at the time.

In 1999, Ilana performed at a festival in Japan. There she collaborated with **Kei Takei** and for her performances, she was even paired with a famous Japanese musician with whom she worked for a month on a 20-minute performance on the theme of "A dancer who is losing her sanity." Ilana remembers her admiration of Japanese culture, the overcrowding on the trains, the lack of crime, to the point where you could leave a wallet on the table. She and Moshe were enthusiastic about everything except the food. They preferred eating in Indian restaurants.

Over the years, Ilana participated in and presented her works at other festivals in Germany, South Africa, and more. Even when she traveled with Moshe on her trips, there were sometimes surprises. Thus, in China, when she visited a dance school – a huge building with a huge number of young and talented students – she gave them a lesson, without the possibility of verbal communication, in which she taught them a hand dance accompanied by a story. They imitated and followed her.

In Israel, Ilana continues her educational activities, giving seminars and workshops for teachers on various topics of the Inbal language, and about the legacy of **Rabbi Shalom Shabazi**, one of the greatest poets of Yemen, whose father and grandfather, I learned from Ilana, also wrote and were influenced by Aramaic, Sephardic and Babylonian poetry.

Over the years, Ilana has won several prestigious awards. Among them we can mention the **Lifetime Achievement Award of the Israel Artists Association**, in 2017, and in 2023 she won the **Lifetime Achievement Award** named after **Arik Einstein**.



Tsuchitori – the Japanese composer and musician

Over the years, Ilana has won several prestigious awards. Among them we can mention the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Israel Artists Association, in 2017, and in 2023 she won the Lifetime Achievement Award named after Arik Einstein.

Epilogue

I was happy to meet and get to know Ilana Cohen and her warm family; to hear stories about an illustrious career in dance, choreography and productions in the Inbal Dance Company and beyond; to learn about performances at festivals abroad and experiences of meetings with great artists; to hear the story of Lehakat Inbal and the artistic uniqueness of the company alongside its managerial challenges.

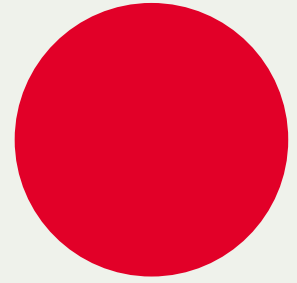
Ilana notes that these management challenges not only led to the closure of Lehakat Inbal, but also remained a situation in which a number of the company's works remain undocumented. I hope that Ilana, in her ongoing involvement in education and conducting workshops in the field, will give continuity to the company's work and to the special choreographic language of Lehakat Inbal and of the Yemenite community as a whole.



Naftali Chayat

Translation:
Naftali Chayat

DANCING WITH THE JAPANESE



Impressions of a Folk Dance session in Japan

In April 2024, two dancing families, the **Shachar family** – Orly and Yair, and the **Chayat family** – Naftali (me) and my wife, Ilana went on a vacation to tour to Japan. We wanted to experience various aspects of Japan – culture, art, history and, of course, dancing. I looked for information, and one of the dance gatherings, in Osaka, suited our itinerary. The group, led by **Akira Nishikawa**, focused on Balkan and Israeli circle dances.

In our correspondence about our visit, we decided that I'll teach the group two of my dances:

1. **"Pilpel U Batata"** (a Hebrew version of the Bulgarian "Dilmano Dilbero" song, that suited the Balkan agenda of the group): <https://bit.ly/3KsStXn>
2. **"MeEver LaKeshet"** – a simple dance based on an internationally renowned "Over the Rainbow" song: <https://bit.ly/3K6KZZF>

International and Israeli Folk Dances in Japan

Why are international folk dances popular in Japan? Why are Israeli dances popular? It is said that after World War II, Americans had introduced Israeli folk dance in Japan as part of the effort to break the hierarchical structure of Japanese society – i.e., the folk dances are egalitarian; everybody holds hands in the circle. This is how the first Israeli dances were introduced including "Mayim Mayim (U'Shavtem Mayim Besason)" which became such a popular tune that it even appears now in some computer games! [See: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/jewcy-mayim-mayim>].

It is said that after World War II, Americans had introduced Israeli folk dance in Japan as part of the effort to break the hierarchical structure of Japanese society – i.e., the folk dances are egalitarian; everybody holds hands in the circle.



Flying "Over the Rainbow" in the Japanese Alps

Moreover, folk dances seem to suit the Japanese character – you must learn numerous dances, cope with complexity and strive for perfection.

Akira told me that the group in Osaka has been dancing since 1956! He himself has been dancing for over 30 years. Five years ago, with the sudden passing of the group's previous leader, he stepped into the leadership role.

There are many international folk dance groups around Japan, including groups that focus on authentic dances. Each year several workshops with guest instructors are held, including workshops with Israeli choreographers, for example, **Moshiko Halevy** and **Shmulik Gov-Ari** who have visited often. Also, **Dudu Barzilay** (2015/2019/2022), **Avi Perez** (2016), **Yaron Ben Simchon** (2018), **Nurit Melamed** and others. Before the COVID outbreak, Akira learned new dances primarily at the workshops, but since then he has learned many dances at online dance sessions, such as Harkalive led by **Ilai Szpiezak**.

Is the interest in Israeli dances related to a sympathy for Judaism or for State of Israel? Akira thinks that knowing the background is important, however, most of the people who dance Israeli dances have little interest in the national background, and simply like the dances and the challenge associated with them.

Moshiko on his seminars in Japan



Moshiko teaching in seminar in Japan

Moshiko has led seminars in Japan since the late 70's. During each visit, which might last for a month, several sessions were held in different parts of Japan. Most of the sessions were organized by the Japanese Folklore Federation of Japan [The Folklore Society of Japan], and the large gatherings in Tokyo, were attended by hundreds of people. The Japanese dancers loved his dances, and some attended his seminars year after year. Over the years, he says he met many dancers who knew his dances very well. They learned very quickly and expected that each visit would be accompanied by additional dances.

They could learn 6 - 7 dances in a session, but on the other hand, Moshiko found that this pressure to choreograph, although the dances were excellent, was creating the sense of a "production factory". Eventually, he convinced his impresario to engage with **Shmulik Gov-Ari**, and then they started holding seminars in Japan alternately – i.e., a year by Moshiko and a year by Shmulik. Moshiko had his last workshop in Japan in 2018.

Visiting the "Harkada"

We arrived by train on a rainy day directly from our trip, dressed in our casual clothing. The taxi driver sensed our urgency and speeded through Osaka... and then it took some time to find the location in the labyrinth of the commercial building.

At the entrance to the studio, we were asked to take off our "street shoes". Everyone changes from street shoes to dance shoes. This was not an issue for me – I dance barefoot. (I had checked with Akira in advance that this is okay, i.e., within the accepted cultural codes.)



Studying "MeEver LaKeshet", visualizing the rainbow

The group was already dancing, and many of the dancers wore masks on their faces despite the lack of air conditioning – a habit for many years that became even more pronounced during COVID. As we entered, we heard Israeli dance songs. There were many excellent dancers, who were meticulous about following the subtleties the nuances of the dances. Together with them, we danced "Kochav HaRuach" and "Alizut" by **Moshiko Halevy**, "HaNahar" by **Shmulik Gov-Ari**, "Mishaela" by **Rafi Ziv** and "Normali" by **Michael Barzelai**. https://youtu.be/E_d5tbxdoQ0. It seemed that in honor of the guests from Israel, Israeli dances were given an extra emphasis, although it was evident that they were danced regularly.

Then the Balkan dances started, and it became challenging... The dances were fast and intricate, suiting the group but posing a challenge to us. Most of the dances were not familiar to us, and indeed, they were better suited to the young, energetic dancers at the session. We did our best to fit in. And then came my turn to teach.

I started with "MeEver LaKeshet – Over the Rainbow". In this picturesque dance, the hands illustrate the rainbow, the skies and the birds that are free to fly up with our wishes and prayers. The Japanese dancers perceive hand gestures as an organic part of the dance and not as something optional... They copied them with the steps, and only for the "birds" ending did I provide an explanation. As the song is internationally popular, for the second time through the dance, I surprised them with a Japanese version of the song! <https://youtu.be/aox0WNQb3Xs>

Immediately afterwards, I taught the dance, "Pilpel U Batata". It was evident that the group had a background in Balkan dance and were familiar with the use of beats of varying duration. I illustrated the rhythm with mock English lyrics – "po-ta-to, po-ta-to, I want to plant a po-ta-to". They laughed at the explanation, but immediately grasped the rhythmic idea of the dance.



The ending of "Mishaela" (Rafi Ziv)

Another amusing moment came when I suggested that they can “cheat” and replace 4 quick steps with 2 slow steps, for those who find it difficult. This provoked laughter... it seems that for Japanese dancers there’s no cheating with dances, you either dance them as they are – or you don’t dance them at all. **Miho**, instructing the group with Akira, even has asked me about the details of holding hands in the second part of the dance. <https://youtu.be/W55dRDqztb8>



Playing and singing after the “harkada”

At the end of the session Akira presented me with a Japanese bamboo flute! It was lacquered on the inside, in the best tradition of Japanese craftsmanship.

We danced a few more Israeli dances, among them “Debka Uriah” and “Anavai”, and we ended with a calm Balkan dance. Then came a surprise. In my preliminary conversations with Akira, I mentioned that I play traverse flute and that I’m looking for a traditional Japanese flute – and at the end of the session Akira presented me with a Japanese bamboo flute! It was lacquered on the inside, in the best tradition of Japanese craftsmanship. As we exited the studio to the empty corridor of the commercial center, I took out the flute, that I was not yet used to, and tried my best to play “MeEver LaKeshet” – and Miho, joined, singing in English with her beautiful clear voice. <https://youtu.be/37-5RFoZYN8>. Eventually, we exited the building going back into the rain, and some of the dancers accompanied us to the nearest subway station.

Orly shares her impression:

All my trips abroad did not prepare me for Japan. Within all the things that have been new to me, visiting a session of Balkan-Israeli dances with Japanese dancers was one of most extraordinary experiences. My lifelong “home turf” looked different and surprising, and the encounter with a different culture in the context of familiar dances was a unique experience.

As we entered the studio, “BaChalom” (by **Ami Ben Shushan**) was already being danced. How did this lovely dance reach Japan? As I joined the circle, they started a vigorous and complex Balkan dance, and I understood that my familiarity with “Florica” [Romanian folk dance] and “Bucimis” [Bulgarian] would not help me follow the complex rhythm and fit into the circle.

The dancers followed the dances in detail, as in a dance troupe. And then “Yisrael” by Dudu Barzilay was played. “Israel is my home, Israel is my dream, Israel is here and now”. Israel? Until now nobody was interested in the trouble-ridden country



Dancing Moshiko's "Debka Uriah"

It became apparent that they do not speak English and, of course, not Hebrew. But the meaning of "Yisrael Sheli – My Israel" was clear to them, and they expressed it with their bodies and with hand gestures, with evident emotion and love.

we came from, and we were free from the ambassador role. Then, suddenly, we experienced such sympathy from people who would probably not have been interested in Israel without the exposure to our dance culture.

It became apparent that they do not speak English and, of course, not Hebrew. But the meaning of "Yisrael Sheli – My Israel" was clear to them, and they expressed it with their bodies and with hand gestures, with evident emotion and love. This was truly amazing. I was deeply moved to see how the cultural gap was bridged by the Israeli dances, our ambassadors in this foreign country in the huge city of Osaka (yes, the same one we see in the "Shogun" series).

Their reaction to Naftali's dances was very interesting. The familiar "MeEver LaKeshet – Over the Rainbow" song evoked emotions, while "Pilpel U Batata" amused them, when the meaning of the lyrics were explained. Interestingly, for both songs, they preferred the Hebrew versions to the Japanese and Bulgarian versions, respectively. The speed with which they grasped the dances was surprising.

At this point, they suggested that we choose dances. I proposed "Debka Uriah" and was told that it's a difficult dance. I was surprised – I got used to believing that nothing is too difficult for them. When we started dancing, I noticed that the instructor, who held my hand, had minor errors with directions, but still was very accurate with the rhythm, and even with details of the fourth part which is rarely danced correctly even in Israel.

I'm not sure to what extent they copied and to what extent they knew the dance in advance, but maybe "difficult dance" referred to knowing "just" 99% of the dance... not 100%. When it's not perfect, they do not refer to it as "knowing" the dance.

The repertoire was very interesting – a combination of older dances, dances of Moshiko and Gov-Ari, along with dances from the modern repertoire, mostly dances that are not very common in Israel. All those were interspersed with complex Balkan dances. No "harkada" in Israel features such a combination, as it requires interest in a very broad range of musical styles, rhythms, and dance abilities. How is such a broad knowledge accumulated in just two hours a week?

When the session ended, the room was divided by a partition, and men and women changed clothes on both sides. On the women's side where I was, the clothes were changed down to underwear. Why? We have danced for just a couple of hours... it reminded me again of the absolutism when it comes to cleanness and hygiene in Japan.



Studying "MeEver LaKeshet", visualizing the skies above

No “harkada” in Israel features such a combination, as it requires interest in a very broad range of musical styles, rhythms, and dance abilities.

And as we were changing clothes, the women told me that indeed, two hours a week are enough. The group leader participates in monthly seminars and enriches them with new repertoire.

I wondered about wearing masks. Ostensibly, the justification is the seasonal pollen-related allergies. But another reason that I heard from the women while we changed, is that they feel more comfortable being less exposed and keeping their privacy. Indeed, while the women were very friendly with me, they kept a distance. When I proposed staying in touch, for example on Facebook, it was met with silence. It was clear that our codes of jumping into friendship do not work here, and the masks that help people with the distancing are exactly what they need.

For us, the Israelis, who are used to confidence and control (even when not fully justified) it was very different to experience “the power of the group”, in which people strive to fit in and be like everybody else rather than feel that they are “better” or “unique” – especially in the context of folk dancing, where you want the group to dance well, and not each individual dancer just for himself/herself. And it works. They look like a trained performing group when the truth is that for them, dancing is just a hobby.

When you discover the history of Israeli Folk Dance in Japan – you understand the success of the idea to blur the social hierarchy by making everybody equal, having everybody hold hands and jointly strive for perfection. It seemed that for these dancers it also was an opportunity to escape from the rigid social codes, even if just for a couple of hours in a week.

We are blessed to have our dances, our choreographers and instructors, who are our ambassadors spreading our culture to countries as far away as Japan.

Epilogue

The visit to the dance session in Japan became one of the major experiences of our visiting this unique country. For days after, we were singing “Mishaela” in our car. As we have reached the “Japanese Alps” we felt the urge to do a small flash-mob in which we danced “MeEver Lakeshet” to the Japanese version of the song, thus drawing attention and cameras of the Japanese tourists.

We were glad to discover in Japan a community that is so connected to Israeli songs, without a direct relationship to Israel or to Judaism. This attests to the uniqueness of the Israeli dances within the global complex of folk dance, and of the quality and sophistication of the dances by leading choreographers. It was a firsthand experience to see the respect and the accuracy with which these dances are danced.

Visiting a “harkada” abroad is an opportunity to meet people, learn about them and their community, and communicate with them on another level. In Japan, it was also an opportunity to communicate with the Japanese on a different, international level of music and movement. I hope to be in Japan again, and I’m certain to seek meeting again with Japanese dancers.



“Ishkhanats Par” – a vigorous Armenian dance



Heli Livneh

**Translation:
Dena Matmon**

**Photographs:
Ilan Hazan**

Tehom Rabbah – The Great Deep



Choreography: Hanoch Ben Dror*

Jerusalem Dance Theater – A Performance Created by
Relating the Biblical Flood Story to the October 7th War**

At the end of the day, a person is left “naked as the day he was born”.

For how much longer can we hide from ourselves?

How will we be able to feign normalcy, when we dress in the morning in our button-down shirt? In our black loafers polished to perfection and our sharply creased trousers?

“How are you?” one of the neighbors will ask, when we leave the house and go into an egotistical and stylish world.

– “Everything is excellent!” we will respond deceitfully. We will smile a small smile for him out of the side of our mouth and go on our way. We will continue on our path, perhaps a true path, perhaps a false one, one which significantly distorts our inner reality. A path studded with misshapen plastic flowers that will never wilt, but also will never grow upwards or change their distorted shape; a mistaken path that masquerades as our path of faith.

In spite of all this, at the end of the day, when darkness falls, just as we enter the parking lot, and turn off the engine of the new car we received from the company, we will put the jam-packed datebook into the briefcase and climb the steps to our home – the same house that will accept us despite the false hardships of that day. We’ll open the door, go into our small room, take off the button-down shirt we wore this morning, the sharply creased trousers and the shiny loafers, and stand naked in front of the mirror.

As naked as the day we were born.

And there, in front of the mirror, we will reveal to ourselves who we really are.

There, in front of the mirror, we’ll walk on paths studded with real flowers, not plastic ones; flowers that change their distorted shape to a large and colorful truth, an evolving truth.

• **Hanoch Ben Dror**, one of the best known and valued dancers in the country, returns to the stage 20 years after leaving the field of dance in order to immerse himself in youth education and philosophy, this time, with a new creation for the Jerusalem Dance Theater that integrates different worlds.

• **The Jerusalem Dance Theater** was founded 40 years ago by **Ms. Tamara Mielnik**, recognized as an Honorary Citizen of Jerusalem and recipient of the Education Ministry Prize.



Hanoch Ben Dror: "Even before the war I felt that something on this earth was destabilizing. Anything that didn't have a strong enough foundation was unable to withstand the test of change. This is what happened in my personal life when my marriage fell apart and the kindergarten I established ran into financial difficulties".



But, only when we are naked, there, in front of it, will come the true faith from which we can grow. We will look deeply at ourselves, at our bare hands, the soles of the feet. We'll look within ourselves with our eyes, and only then will we be free of all lies and deceit, naked as the day we were born.

In the opening act of "The Great Deep", a person moves another person. One dancer moves the other dancer with circular and coordinated movements in a wondrous way. Both of them look like they are dancing on the full stage. In spite of the fact that they are only two, they use the stage freely and the synergy between them is perfect. Body to body, chest to back. They are wrapped in skin-tight, flesh-colored outfits that make them appear nude; as if they didn't exist. And there's no ego. It just isn't there.

There is room for a third dancer, who joins them for this exposed and open dance,

and in an instant, the dance becomes an intriguing trio which, in its naked way, causes the strong opinions that the dancer held all his/her life to crumble, and the relationships seem even closer.

In the center of the stage, behind the dancers, the musicians Tami Casanova and Yuval Admoni play on two impressive grand pianos. They accompany the dancers with tremendous coordination, skill and sensitivity.

The music continues for the entire length of each dance act in the performance, but a few minutes before the end of the last act, the pianos go quiet and the music stops while the dancers continue their movement. Just a few more movements. And precisely in those few quiet moments, with the audience watching with great curiosity, I felt how exposed the dancers were on the stage, and how each movement was so much louder, screaming out in the silence.



This choreographic conception and its performance on stage made me wonder about the significance of a person's intentions, of the clear truth and the ability to be exposed to the world, with no ego.

The next act features a dance solo, performed by a very versatile dancer, whose body compliments the idea of the choreography and its execution. I felt that the upper body of the dancer could be broken down into pieces and be re sewn back together at his whim. I was very curious about the idea behind this solo dance. At a certain point in the choreography, the dancer laid down on his back on the hard, wooden stage and began to tremble. The trembling began with his fingers and continued to spread, throughout his limbs, to all parts of his body. The obsession of movement appeared unstoppable, as if he were an unmedicated epileptic.

As every part of the dancer's body trembled, something happened to my body as well. On the one hand, I trembled together with him, as a sign of my identification with him and the influence he had upon me; I even feared he might lose control. On the other hand, something in me wanted to get up and calm him; to show him that soon, everything would be alright. This was a well rounded and soft choreography, combined with sharp, frantic movements, movements that I felt truly expressed human suffering.

The dance performance: "The Great Deep" integrates additional colorful and intriguing elements. During the entire performance I felt that something was about to happen – a feeling that remained with me until the end.

This choreographic conception and its performance on stage made me wonder about the significance of a person's intentions, of the clear truth and the ability to be exposed to the world, with no ego. 🌿



Dance of the Month

Holding Hands in the Circle Symbolizes our "Togetherness"



Ephy Kashri

Translation:
Dena Matmon

For me, dance is a way of life. As a child, I really loved to dance at parties, at discotheques and in clubs. In my youth, when I was home alone, I used to dance to the music of a beautiful song and I would create a dance just for the sake of it, to put in the drawer, not knowing I would use it when I reached the age of 50.

My acquaintance with the world of dance and folk dance was only by chance, after the army. As a student at Sapir College, it was suggested that I should live at Kibbutz Bror Hayil in the South, where I worked in the barn and in the kindergarten. One day a kibbutz member said to me, as an aside, that I should come that evening to the dining room. When I walked in, I saw, for the first time in my life, people dancing in a circle to "Israeli folk songs". I joined the circle, totally mesmerized. And from that point on, my life changed. From the age of 23 and until today, I dance only Israeli folk dances.

At age 40 I joined the "Givatayim Dance Troupe", the "Lazarus" Troupe and the "Re'im" Troupe in Holon. We performed at the Karmiel Festival, the Jerusalem Festival, the Nahalal Festival, the Eilat Camp, abroad, and at other places.

At age 50, I was offered the opportunity to register for a folk dance instructors' course. This was a life-changing course.

Upon receipt of certification, I immediately started to teach in November 2019, and despite the difficult times in the country (COVID and the difficult war we're fighting to this very day), I put together a group of special people, unified, beautiful, talented. We meet on the dance floor and dance together.





My motto for the dancers – especially in these times – “our strength is in our unity”. Our way of conveying our unity to the “outside” world is through holding hands in a circle, symbolizing for us and for all those who see us our “togetherness” as a group. We are all brothers. One nation.

It is important for me to remind them, us, all of us, that once people danced in a circle holding hands. And when I am asked, “How do you keep a group of dancers together for this entire period of time?” I answer: By listening, by seeing, by understanding

and knowing each dancer that comes to the [dance] floor. By thanking each and every person in the group, individually and together, because they chose me. They chose to come to me, to my group session and this shouldn’t be taken for granted – that a person will leave his or her own personal matters and come to dance with me.

The road I took also led me to meet dancers from abroad and I was invited to teach, to guide, to dance and to present my dances at “Machol Shorashim” in the Czech Republic. These dancers love Israel; they are enchanting, wonderful and beautiful. I really fell in love with them. In 2023 I taught my dances: “Achoth Ktana” (Little Sister), “Achoth Ke’Shoshana”, and “Regaem (E.K.)”. All three are danced in Israel.

My dances can be found on the “Rokdim” website <https://bit.ly/3Ud65vx>.

Ephy speaks about the dance:

“Achoth Ktana – Little Sister”, danced in Israel and around the world, was chosen to participate in the “Annual Dance Parade” of 2023, directed by **Gadi Bitton**, and was listed as one of the Top Ten. The dance is much loved by dancers and instructors.

I chose the song “Achoth Ktana” because the words really spoke to me and each time I dance this dance, I think of my children, **Matan**, the firstborn, and **Adi**, his little sister. My prayer is that the connection between them as siblings will always be good, and that they will help each other when needed. Another reason [I chose this song] is the very special voice of the singer, **Moshe Peretz**.

“Achoth Ktana, a moving and special song, can be found: <https://bit.ly/49mu8MR>.

In recent years, I have been privileged to bring joy to people on the dance floor. I had the immense privilege of becoming a member of Irgun HaMadrichim Ve’HaYotzrim LeRikudei-Am – the Folk Dance Instructors and Choreographers Organization.

It touches me to be part of the family of dancers, instructors and choreographers in Israel and around the world. For all of this I say thank you!!!

“Our strength is in our unity” and our way of conveying our unity to the “outside” world is through holding hands in a circle, symbolizing for us and for all those who see us our “togetherness” as a group.



Achoth Ktana – Dance Notation

Formation: Circle

Structure: One verse, three sections

Meter: 4/4

Part A: Face CCW

- 1-2 Two steps fwd: R,L.
 3&4 Step-tog-step fwd: RLR.
 5-6 Step L fwd and turn to face center, Step R to rt.
 7&8 In “step-tog-step” rhythm: Step L behind R, R to rt., step L across R.
 9-12 Face center. Move fwd: Step R fwd, touch L toes alongside R, step L fwd, brush R fwd.
 13-14 Step R fwd while raising both arms, step L back in place while lowering arms.
 15-16 Turn to rt. moving back out of center toward the line of the circle with two steps: R,L.
 17-24 Repeat counts 1-8.
 25-28 Facing center. Sway sideways: R to rt., hold, sway L, hold.
 29-32 Sway R-L; full turn to rt. with two steps: R,L.

Part B: Face Center

- 1-4 Move into center. Step fwd: R,L (counts 1-2), R-tog-R (counts 3&4).
 5-8 Repeat counts 1-4 with opposite footwork continuing into center.
 9-12 Rock fwd onto R, back on L in place; $\frac{3}{4}$ turn to rt. moving out of center with two steps: R,L to end facing CW.

- 13-14 Moving toward line of circle: Cross R behind L, L to left and pivot left to face center.
 15-16 Rock: back onto R, fwd on L.
 17-20 R-tog-R to rt. (17&18); step L across R, back on R in place (19-20).
 21-24 Repeat counts 17-20 with opposite footwork and direction.
 25-26 Sway R-L.
 27-30 Open mayim to rt.: R to rt., cross L over R, R to rt., cross L behind R.
 31-32 Full turn to rt. on line of circle with two steps: R,L.

Part C: Face Center

- 1-4 Repeat counts 17-20 from Part B.
 5&6 Turn to left with three steps: LRL to end facing center.
 7-10 Step R to rt., cross L behind R, R to rt., L across R.
 11-12 Step R diagonally fwd to rt. on line of circle while extending arms up to the rt., step back on L in place.
 13-16 R behind L, L to left, R across L placing right hand on heart, step back on L in place.
 17-18 Sway: R,L.
 19-20 Step R to rt., L fwd across R while lowering the body.
 21-22 Step R bwd while straightening the body, touch left toes fwd while extending arms to sides.
 23&24 Moving into center: L-tog-L fwd.
 25-26 Step R fwd, L back in place making $\frac{1}{4}$ turn to rt. to face CCW.
 27-30 Open mayim to rt. moving out of circle and end facing center.
 31-32 Full turn rt. on the line of the circle with two steps: R,L.
 33-64 Repeat counts 1-32 (Part C).

Repeat Dance

Ending: Step R to rt. while raising arms to rt. 

Instructions notated by Honey Goldfein

The road I took also led me to meet dancers from abroad and I was invited to teach, to guide, to dance and to present my dances at “Machol Shorashim” in the Czech Republic. These dancers love Israel; they are enchanting, wonderful and beautiful.

Achot Ktana – Little Sister

Lyrics: Moshe Peretz, Avi Ochayon; Music: Moshe Peretz, Avi Ochayon; Singer: Moshe Peretz

Transliteration:

Al te'atzvi achshav, achot ktana
 Tamid rak techaichi
 Al tishmeri balev, achot ktana
 Im yesh lach, tegali

Achshav hasheket mechabek otach, rak at yoda'at
 Hamachshavot ratzot, kim'at yotzet mida'at
 At lo levad, ani itach, achot ktana

Sapri li k'tzat, tehi sh'kufa, k'mo mayim
 Tegali hakol
 Al tishmeri balev, mutar lach gam lipol
 Dabri le'at, yafot hen milotayich

Shlosa yamim
 Einayich mastirot ma shekore bifnim
 At chazakah, ze lo olam shel chalashim
 Tit'ni li yad, pit'chi li she'arayich

Tzayri lach od chiyuch, achot ktana
 Ulai gam bishvili
 Nagni li et shirayich, ahuva
 Achot ktana sheli

Achshav hasheket mechabek otach, rak at yoda'at
 Hamachshavot ratzot, kim'at yotzet mida'at
 At lo levad, ani itach, achot ktana

Sapri li k'tzat, tehi sh'kufa, k'mo mayim
 Tegali hakol
 Al tishmeri balev, mutar lach gam lipol
 Dabri le'at, yafot hen milotayich

Shlosa yamim
 Einayich mastirot ma shekore bifnim
 At chazakah, ze lo olam shel chalashim
 Tit'ni li yad, pit'chi li she'arayich

Translation:

Don't be sad now, little sister
 Only smile always
 Don't hold it in [your] heart, little sister
 If you have it, reveal it

Now the quiet embraces you, only you know
 The thoughts race, almost go out of your mind
 You are not alone, I am with you, little sister

Tell me a little bit, be transparent like water
 Reveal it all
 Don't keep it in [your heart], you too are allowed to fall
 Speak slowly, your words are beautiful

Three days
 Your eyes are hiding what is happening inside
 You are strong, this is not a world for the weak
 Give me [your] hand, open your gates to me.

Draw yourself another smile, little sister
 Perhaps for me as well
 Play your songs for me, beloved
 My little sister

Now the quiet embraces you, only you know
 The thoughts race, almost go out of your mind
 You are not alone, I am with you, little sister

Tell me a little bit, be transparent like water
 Reveal it all
 Don't keep it in [your heart], you too are allowed to fall
 Speak slowly, your words are beautiful

Three days
 Your eyes are hiding what is happening inside
 You are strong, this is not a world for the weak
 Give me [your] hand, open your gates to me.

Lyrics transliteration and translation by **Ruth Goodman**

It is important for me to remind them, us, all of us, that once people danced in a circle holding hands.

Experiences Through the Eye of the Camera



I first "met" **Zion Sahar** on Zoom broadcasts during the coronavirus pandemic. I didn't know him in the '80s and '90s. We met at the many hishtalmuyot (dance workshops) that were customary at the time. Zion's story explains this. After the Corona period, I saw advertisements for Shabbatot Zugot [Shabbat partner dance sessions] that Zion organized in the Jerusalem area. I invited Zion to join as a VIP and to support the continued development of the "Rokdim" website. Since then, we have been in collaboration.

Yaron Meishar, editor



5th Anniversary of Shabbat Zugot in Hod HaSharon

Yaron Meishar; Translation by Ruth Goodman

Zion recalls:

After completing a course for instructors in the 1980s, I danced in the north in Moshav Alma, Moshav Dalton and others, with the help of Sefi Aviv. In 1987, I left Israel unintentionally. I came to England, where I lived for 23 years.

Throughout the years in England, I instructed and led dance sessions in Jewish communities in four districts in the London area, and I even I even got to teach up in the north, in Manchester.

All this was in addition to the private business I founded, which dealt with international shipping. I met my wife in 2000. We married and returned to Israel in 2011.

I started dancing in Ra'anana with **Yankele Ziv** and later with **Elad Shtamer**. In 2018, I started dancing at "Shabbatot Zugot", which at the time was a rare commodity. I danced at Beit Zayit, with **David Sabag** z"l. Six months after he passed away, a number of dancers approached me and asked if I could take his place on those Shabbatot, and so it was.

I started at the Yearim Hotel. From there we moved to Kibbutz Kiryat Anavim with many obstacles along the way. In the end, we arrived at Kibbutz



Experiences Through the Eye of the Camera



Tzora. We danced there for about two and a half years. The Jerusalem Hills region enchanted me, and I think the dancers as well.

On October 7, 2023, when the Gaza war began, the hall in Tzora was taken from me by the Home Front Command. Unfortunately, that ended my romance with this magical area. I couldn't find a similar place in the area and had to look for a hall in Hod HaSharon.

[However,] next month we will have a new hall and I hope to institutionalize Shabbatot Zugot in the Sharon area.

I would like to thank all the wonderful dancers who have accompanied and [continue to] accompany me, have believed and believe in me every step of the way.

Ahhh... And my quiches got a reputation... I absolutely love dancing, love cooking, and most of all, I love leading dance sessions...

All this is in addition to my private business that has existed here in Israel for 10 years: transportation for people with disabilities.

My wife, **Avgar**, is the driving force behind these Shabbatot. She and my children – **Nitzan, Inbal and Avitar**, are responsible for all the logistics on these Shabbatot. My thanks to them!



Shelly Shaked (an instructor who works with Zion) adds:

I have known Zion for years through dance sessions. In 2020, during the Corona period, I went on a dance weekend that was led by **Talia Buchnik** at a hotel in Tiberias and Zion was one of the dance leaders at this weekend. It turned out that we were both without partners – we danced together and bonded. The chemistry was immediate, the dance connection was great – and since then we have been dancing together regularly.



Until I met Zion, I danced mostly in "regular" sessions and I didn't know "middle generation" [dances from the 1980s to 2000] and nostalgia dances. Zion exposed me to these dances and taught me the beautiful dances from the past.

Naturally, over time, I began to demonstrate with him in his dance sessions and accompany him on Shabbatot and at the various harkadot (dance sessions). Zion brings a taste of times past to his harkadot in his special style - and I have had the privilege of accompanying him on this journey.

In 2023 I completed a course for instructors and, with Zion's support, I teach dance in his beautiful harkada in Kfar Maccabiah and learn as much as possible from him. 🌿

Experiences Through the Eye of the Camera



Experiences Through the Eye of the Camera

