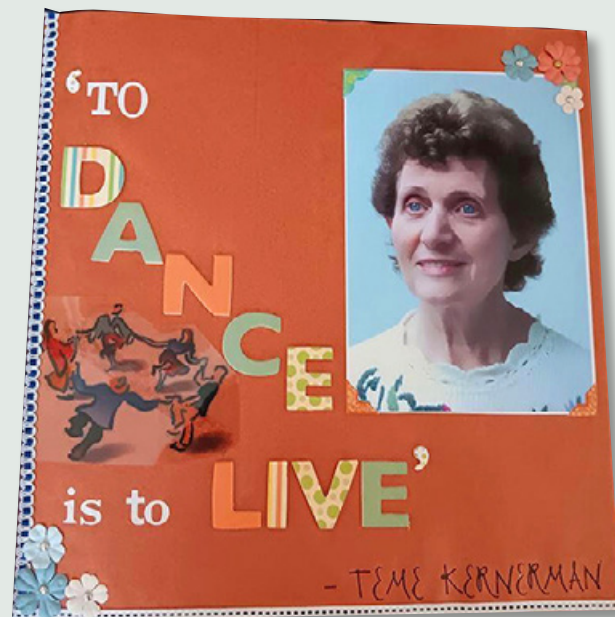




Livia Burghardt

To Dance Is To Live

**Teme Kernerman –
the “Mother of Israeli Folk
Dance in Canada”**



*The commemorative album presented during the
Tribute to Teme Evening at the Toronto IsReal Dance
Festival in 2007*



Teme Kernerman

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as the “Mother of
Israeli Folk Dance
in Canada” for
good reason.
Dance has always
been her passion
and priority.**

I remember hearing Teme’s name when I was a novice Israeli dancer. By the time I attended her class for the first time, Teme was already a legend. When I entered the room and asked someone to point her out to me, I saw a petite and sprightly woman with bright blue eyes.

For such a diminutive figure, **Teme London (Landman) Kernerman** looms large in the world of Israeli folk dance. She was born in 1932, in Toronto, Canada, to a Canadian mother of Polish heritage and a Russian father, who was a great dancer and an actor in Yiddish theater. Teme is known as the “Mother of Israeli Folk Dance in Canada” for good reason. Dance has always been her passion and priority. She was first introduced to Israeli dance as a 14-year-old, at a meeting of the Labor Zionist Youth movement, Habonim, which she had attended with friends. At age 15, she was hired as a counselor for Habonim’s Camp Kvutza, a Jewish children’s summer camp outside Toronto. When she arrived, she was dismayed to find out that she would be teaching arts and crafts – not her strong suit. In contrast, during rehearsals for the counsellors’ dance group, she was bursting with ideas. After one suggestion too many, the counselor in charge walked out in a huff, retorting, “Why don’t you take over?” So, she did! It was the beginning of her several stints as dance director at the camp. Under Teme’s tutelage, the dance program blossomed and the camp hosted festivals during which campers, together with guest performing groups, showcased their skills for parents. This is also where Teme met her future husband, Barry, who was serving as the camp’s Sports Director.

Back in Toronto, Teme continued teaching for Habonim. At the same time, she furthered her interest in international folk dance by studying with **Ernie Krehm** and **Ivy (Krehm) Wittmeyer** at the University Settlement House. In 1952, Teme’s passion for Israeli folk dance led her to Kibbutz Geva in Israel where she lived for a year and participated in the Habonim Dance Workshop. Upon returning to Toronto, she pursued both folk dance and modern dance at the YMHA/YWHA, studying under **Dorothea Buchholz (Cappiello)**, a modern dance teacher from New York who became her mentor. Teme spent her days working as



Teme with Fred Berk

a nursery school teacher and her nights on the dance floor, until, on one occasion, her young charges had to shake her awake when their nap time was over. This convinced her to focus exclusively on dance. When Buchholz returned to New York City in 1955, Teme followed her. Needing a place to stay on a limited budget, she rented a room in what turned out to be a brothel. Unfazed, she quickly arranged alternative accommodation in the apartment of **Mrs. Loveman**, an elderly woman who needed companionship. Teme devoted herself to modern dance during the day and folk dance at night, coming home only to crash on the couch, which served as her bed. Unfortunately, at the crack of dawn, Mrs. Loveman would breeze into the living room, throw open the curtains and sing: "Lazy Mary, will you get up... will you get up? It's five o'clock in the morning!"

New York was a whirlwind of activity for Teme and the most exciting time in her life. In addition to her eight modern dance classes each week, she also attended five folk dance classes – international folk dance with **Mary Ann and Michael Herman** and Israeli folk dance with the legendary **Fred Berk** – the "Father of Israeli Folk Dance in America". In addition, she studied children's dance with **Ruth Doing** and Virginia Tanner. Teme supported herself by teaching dance in Jewish schools on weekends and helping to run children's dance festivals under the leadership of **Dvora Lapson**. In 1956 and 1957, Teme also received scholarships to the summer dance program at the Connecticut College School of Dance, run by **Martha Hill**, and a "kitchen scholarship" to attend the Maine Folk Dance Camp where she was thrilled to be steeped in the culinary and dance traditions of different cultures. During this period, Teme began her close partnership with Fred Berk, first acting as his demonstrator, then as substitute teacher, assistant for his teacher training course, performer, choreographer, and finally, stage manager.

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Through these experiences, Teme decided that her greatest strength and satisfaction lay in being an educator, which was lucky for her students, since she is truly a dance teacher par excellence. As **Margot Levitt**, who had danced with Teme, put it, "With [Teme], there is no such thing as "can't dance", or in the words of another of Teme's dancers, **Annie Petroff**, when acknowledging Teme at the 30th Rikudiyah, "What appeared difficult and complicated was broken down [in]to the famous 'walk, walk, "Iemenite" [left yemenite], "remenite" [right yemenite]. In fact, Teme promised: "I can get rid of a person's two left feet and leave them with one right and one left."

Teme also extolled the virtues of dance as a confidence-builder and a form of therapy. In her words, "... you can come and lose yourself. Whatever your problems are, they don't exist when you're dancing." "The music, the movement, the socialization – it is the best nonmedicinal high that anyone can get."

In 1957, Teme was enticed back to Toronto by Ivy (Krehm) Wittmeyer to teach dance at the YMHA/YWHA (currently the Miles Nadel Jewish Community Centre). The same

year, she was charged with setting up and directing the YMHA/YWHA Dance Centre. Under Teme's leadership, the Dance Centre became a huge success, expanding to include ballet, tap, jazz, ballroom, modern and folk dance. In 1959, the Krehm and Kernerman duo founded the Ontario Folk Dance Camp. When Teme's artist husband, **Barry Kernerman** (who had conveniently taken over the Arts and Crafts program from Teme at Camp Kvutza), was invited to run an art gallery in Tel Aviv in 1960, the two made aliyah. In Israel, Teme continued to study modern dance, to teach modern, international, and Israeli dance, and to lead teacher training courses for Noa-Am, Israel's first international folk dance association. Teme spent seven years in Israel, deepening her connection to the land, forging strong bonds with the leading choreographers of the day and raising her two Israeli-born children: **Doron Noam** and **Varda Rifka**.



Teme (left) in a performance at Camp Kvutza



Teme (center) in a folk dance at the University Settlement Centre

In 1967, when Teme left Israel for Toronto, she stepped back into her role as teacher and director of dance at the YMHA. In 1970, she became the part-time coordinator of the Folk Dance Division at the Koffler Centre of the Arts School of Dance and, from 1982 to 1985, she served as its full-time director. However, being based in Ontario didn't stop Teme from collaborating with a professional Quebecois folk dance company, teaching Israeli folk dance in Montreal Catholic schools, and acting as guest instructor at an international folk dance camp in Quebec. These experiences inspired her to create the Ontario Folk Dance Association and the Ontario Folk Dance Teachers Association. During this time, Teme also revived her Israeli dance troupe, "Nirkoda", which she had founded in 1956. In 1972, Teme also spearheaded the creation of a professional dance company in Ottawa, "Ami Chai" and, in 1977, she established "Chai", a performing group for seniors, dispelling the myth that professional dance is only for the young. In fact, the Chai dancers credited dance for keeping them youthful, exclaiming, "We would rather dance than eat!" Teme continued to lead the troupe for 26 years.

Thanks to Teme's tireless efforts, Israeli dance became a mainstay in Ontario schools. A stream of notable choreographers, including **Moshiko**, **Seadia Amishai**, **Moshe Telem** and **Moshe Eskayo**, headlined the festivals

and workshops that she organized, and Toronto gained notoriety for its flourishing dance scene. From 1985 to 2000, Teme directed the Fifty-Five Plus Department of Senior Adult Services at the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, running a full slate of activities that included trips and performances, while continuing to lead folk dance classes for dancers of all levels, ages, and abilities. Teme was instrumental in creating a Move n' Mingle (R'Kod v'Hitmazeg) class with **Helen Winkler** for dancers with special needs, a monthly Nostalgia



Teme performing modern dance

session with **Yossi Strauch**, and an international folk dance class with former Kvutza camper, **Sandy Starkman**. In 2007, at the behest of fellow congregant, folk dancer, and children's book author **Simon Shapiro**, Teme also set up an "Israeli Dance Chevra" for the reconstructionist congregation Darchei Noam. Throughout the years, she also continued to teach at multiple dance camps, including the Ontario Folk Dance Camp, Mainewoods Dance Camp, and the week-long Blue Star Fred Berk Israeli Folk Dance Workshop held at Blue Star Camps in Hendersonville, North Carolina (U.S.A.).

When asked about her most memorable dance experiences, Teme responded without hesitation: New York and Blue Star! She spoke glowingly of the modern dance greats she had the privilege of working with in New York: **Dorothea Buchholz** and legendary artists including **Hanya Holm**, **Louis Horst**, **Doris Humphrey**, **Alwin Nikolai**, and **José Limón**, who once offered her his arm to use as a barre in an overcrowded class, much to the envy of the other students. She also talked nostalgically about Blue Star, which she called the highlight of her year. Teme was an integral part of the camp for 17 years, running her famous warm-ups, and teaching children's dance sessions. She relished



Nirkoda performance. Picture courtesy of the Ontario Jewish Archives

As far as Teme is concerned, if there is no clap in the dance notation, there should be no clap on the dance floor



Blue Star 1995 (Teme is to the right of Tuvia Tishler – 3rd from center on the right)

the opportunity to “learn from the source and to meet dancers from all over the States and beyond.” She remembers, with great fondness, her debut as a ‘pop star’ at the camp’s talent show in 1996. When it was announced that “tone-deaf Teme was going to sing”, a dismayed silence descended upon the room. Nonetheless, the lights came up and there was Teme, lip synching and undulating to the sultry strains of that year’s dance hit, “Nadia”, while the audience howled with laughter.

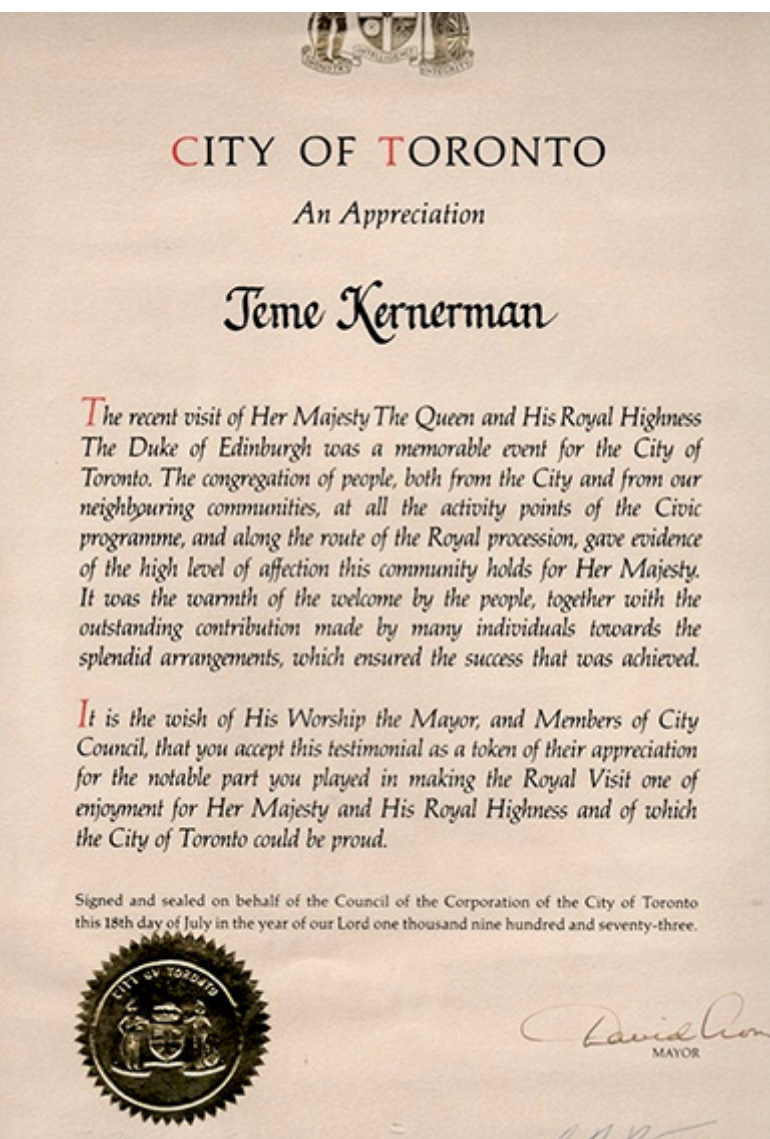
Throughout her long career, Teme has mentored innumerable people. I am incredibly lucky to be one of them. Teme threw open the doors of the dance world for

me, changing the trajectory of my life. When I was just a beginning dancer, she brought me to Blue Star as a volunteer, fulfilling my dearest dream. Soon after Blue Star, I took her “Ontario Folk Dance Teacher’s Association” training course, run by the organization she had founded in 1969. When I couldn’t get enough dancing in London, Ontario, Teme procured a job for me in Toronto, practically overnight, and invited me to help with her sessions. Teme’s tenacity was never more evident than when an autoimmune disease prevented her from dancing for several years. Undaunted, she continued to teach while I served as her feet, as she had once done for Fred Berk. When I got a work contract in China in 2003, Teme put me in touch with Hong Kong dance leader, **Kenneth Tse**, who wined and dined me, hosted me, and escorted me to all the local folk dance sessions. Teme had met Kenneth in 1990 when she conducted a workshop for a corps of professional dancers in Guangzhou, China. Invited to neighboring Hong Kong by one of the dancers, Teme was asked to teach an impromptu master class to a group of dance teachers before leaving for the airport. When she protested that she no longer had the music, having given the last copies of the cassettes to the workshop participants, they told her: “Just sing!” As she drove off, the dancers serenaded her with “Mayim Mayim” – completely off key!



Chai dancers

Teme's impact on the lives of so many is immeasurable, as evidenced by the multitude of heartfelt thank-you notes, accolades, and poems in her overflowing file boxes. Long-time folk dancer, **Cindy Wodinsky**, described being taken under Teme's wing when she was a high school student: "Teme was my second mother. She was very invested in all of us... so caring and dedicated. She taught me everything about dance and dance etiquette – all the basic things that no one thinks are important to teach anymore..." However, Teme's uncompromising pursuit of excellence also, at times, made her a formidable taskmaster. She was known for constantly tweaking her choreography, even during dress rehearsals, to make it better, and then even better. One of Teme's Chai dancers, **Ann Talesnik**, credited Teme with "the patience of Job, the strength of David, the wisdom of Solomon, and the determination of Churchill"! Wodinsky recalled being sent to the bathroom to pad her bra with toilet paper before a dance performance. "Teme was after a look and didn't care how she got it. I remember coming back from the bathroom wondering if I had 'done enough'!" she confessed with hilarity. When it comes to folk dancing, though, Teme is an avowed purist. As **Florence Shulman**, a special education teacher and passionate folk dancer, expressed to her: "I have always admired how you kept the truth in our dancing...there is enough joy and beauty in dancing without any hokey embellishments." As far as Teme is concerned, if there is no clap in the dance notation, there should be no clap on the dance floor. I'll never forget the look of chagrin on her face when she once got so carried away that she gleefully clapped by mistake!



Certificate presented to Teme for coordinating 30 ethnic dance groups in a performance for Queen Elizabeth II in 1973

Teme's career spans over seven decades, and the list of her contributions to the dance community could fill volumes. Naomi Fromm, one of the committee heads for the "Teme Tribute" evening and former Kvutzah camper, explained: "Anything that has to do with Israeli dance in Toronto, basically she started it. She would go in anywhere that she saw a void and she would create a department." As one of Teme's protégés, **Dale Hyde**, put it, "Teme didn't HIT the start button, she IS the start button!" Toronto dancer, Zev Nadel, described Teme as "the rock upon which Israeli folk dancing is anchored."

The range of Teme's talents is mind-boggling. A few of her lesser-known achievements include helping to produce the Dancecraft LP, "Dance Israel" in 1969, coordinating 30 ethnic dance groups in a performance for Queen Elizabeth II in 1973, choreographing the dance sequence (performed by Teme and her Chai dancers) for the 1992 TV film, "Last Wish", and writing the descriptions of the Israeli dance steps for the "Dictionary of Dance: Words, Terms and Phases". It is impossible to do justice to Teme's long and illustrious career in this article, but her accomplishments were recognized when she was presented with the Ontario Arts Council Choreographers Award in 1978, and the Ontario Folk Arts Recognition Fellowship Award for outstanding achievement in 1991.

On June 29, 2007, Teme was honored at the Toronto IsReal Dance Festival. All along the far wall of the dance hall, we strung silver star-shaped balloons. Beneath the balloons were poster

All along the far wall of the dance hall, we strung silver star-shaped balloons. Beneath the balloons were poster boards with a pictorial chronology of Teme's life, detailing her countless contributions to the world of dance, as a performer, educator, choreographer, consultant, coordinator, and director, both in North America and overseas.



"In the Footsteps of Teme" – tree with messages of thanks for Teme at Tribute evening during the 2007 Toronto IsReal Dance Festival

boards with a pictorial chronology of Teme's life, detailing her countless contributions to the world of dance, as a performer, educator, choreographer, consultant, coordinator, and director, both in North America and overseas. There was also a cutout of a large tree entitled: "In Teme's Footsteps". The names of the first choreographers were written on its roots, and Teme's name on the trunk. The spreading branches of the tree represented the many dancers Teme has trained. Along the branches, we pinned hundreds of bright green leaves, shaped like footprints, with messages of thanks to Teme from members of the dance community. Teme was astonished and moved by the tribute. An unassuming person, she has always devoted herself to helping other people shine, while rarely being properly acknowledged herself. With her characteristic modesty, she explains that she did what she did because she had to – something inside drove her. She considers herself very lucky because her career has been a labor of love. "When you like dancing so much, you just give your all, and it's wonderful!" she exclaimed.

The "Tribute to Teme" included a slideshow, a humorous skit about Teme and the origins of folk dance, written by Simon Shapiro, performances by Nirkoda and Chai, and a rendition of Teme's "Oseh Shalom" danced by a mixed group of Teme's students that included children, teenagers, adults, and seniors. During the commemorative evening, Teme was presented with a scrapbook of photos, "Temerabilia", and messages from members of the dance community that she had nurtured throughout the years. The pages were filled

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Typical Rikudiyah floor plan. Picture courtesy of the Ontario Jewish Archives



Rikudiyah. Picture courtesy of the Ontario Jewish Archives



Programme cover of the Rikudiyah, 1988, created by Cindy Wodinsky

Sofie Azen, wrote: "Teme, we go so far back that I don't know where to begin. Thank you for bringing folk dancing into my life. It has been my first passion all through the years and has gotten me past many hard times."

with descriptions of deep bonds, not just of dance but of friendship. People extolled Teme's insight, sense of humor, sensitivity, generosity of spirit, encouragement and support. They described how Teme inspired them, and brought joy, solace, and meaning to their lives. As Toronto dance leader and festival organizer, **Sofie Azen**, wrote: "Teme, we go so far back that I don't know where to begin. Thank you for bringing folk dancing into my life. It has been my first passion all through the years and has gotten me past many hard times. I have passed on the love of the land, the music and the steps and have found deep satisfaction in knowing that others are finding the same love and passion."

As Teme continues to tirelessly organize, coach, and inspire, she takes pride in knowing that her legacy will live on through her many acolytes, people she has trained who continue to spread the joy of Rikudei Am. Many of them got their start at Rikudiyah, the renowned children's Israeli dance festival which Teme founded in 1968 and led for 45 years. As Teme declared, "It is through the children that Israeli folk dance will continue..." Although the seeds were

Rikudiyah is still going strong under the direction of Ronit Weinreich. She describes “following Teme’s vision to create an event that is not competitive but inclusive for all levels to celebrate our Jewish community in Toronto.”

planted in New York, at the festivals Teme helped **Dvora Lapson** produce, Rikudiyah was Teme’s own creation and a product of her philosophy. At Lapson’s festivals, the children from some schools were arrayed in spectacular costumes, well beyond the means of the children at the small school where Teme taught. As a result, Teme resolved that, for Rikudiyah, everyone would wear simple dark bottoms and white tops to create a look of uniformity on the dance floor. She reduced the performance pressure in several other ways as well. Teachers were allowed to modify the choreography to accommodate the particular abilities of the participants in their own groups. In addition, Teme had all the groups perform simultaneously in their own individual circles, led by a demonstrator in the center of each circle. Lastly, instead of being isolated on a raised stage, the dancers filled a huge gym while the audience sat on the bleachers. The result was a mind-blowing experience – hundreds of children dancing together, not for show, but for pure pleasure. Teme describes meeting children, now grown, who recognize her (she hasn’t changed much!) and who reminisce fondly about Rikudiyah. Recently, she was surprised to be told by the podiatrist examining her: “By the way, I was in your dance festival!”



Rikudiyah 1988. Picture courtesy of the Ontario Jewish Archives

Teme explains that, although children often drift away from Israeli dancing during their teen years, down the road, the positive foundational experience of Rikudiyah usually draws them back to dancing. She stated, “Rikudiyah is my way of keeping Israeli folk dance alive for me, for this city, and for Israel.” She emphasized that hidden within [Rikudiyah] are profound educational values,” because the words, music and movement reflect the Israeli culture, history, and heritage. As **Annie Petroff** recounted when introducing the 30th Rikudiyah, “[Teme] helped us break barriers as we linked arms to dance and [to] feel that, “Anachnu am echad – We are one people.” Rikudiyah is a unifying force in another respect as well: four generations of dancers, aged 8 to 80, take to the dance floor at the same event. As Teme put it, [Dance] “is the universal language of the feet, and it’s intergenerational.”


Rikudiyah is still going strong under the direction of **Ronit Weinreich**. She describes “following Teme’s vision to create an event that is not competitive but inclusive for all levels to celebrate our Jewish community in Toronto.” Weinreich stressed how hard it was

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for Teme to introduce Rikudiyah into the Jewish school system all those years ago. Teme had to enlist the help of the Executive Director of Toronto's Board of Jewish Education, **Rabbi Irwin Witty**, and of the parents, many of whom danced with her, to overcome the opposition of the principals. Fortunately, she succeeded. In fact, Teme's highly successful model has been duplicated as far away as Mexico City. Weinreich praised Teme's “amazing work”, calling her “an inspiration” to whom participants pay homage each year at Rikudiyah.

Though arthritis has cruelly robbed Teme of her ability to dance, she continues to give the gift of movement and music to others. Upon discovering that one of the employees at the extended care facility where she currently resides is a gifted opera singer, Teme arranged for her to give a concert. Teme also instituted a popular weekly “adapted dance” program, run by one of her dancers, **Riki Adivi**, and brought in the Kishke klezmer band and Nirkoda dance troupe to do a show for the delighted audience. The event was so successful that it left the audience members clamoring for a repeat performance. Since Teme serves on a four-person events committee at the assisted living facility, the fortunate residents can look forward to many more such enriching experiences.

In 2007, when asked about the future of Israeli folk dance, Teme expressed concern about the proliferation of new dances, but likened Israeli folk dance to “a plant that is always growing and developing, so the nature of the dances also changes.” While Teme continues to believe that “the older dances have more meat”, she admits that “doing only old dances would not be interesting enough”. “Choreographers need to continue creating, and you need new material to keep the crowds coming,” she says. At the same time, she acknowledges that it's not possible to keep up with the number of new dances being produced. Nevertheless, she remains convinced that the most popular new dances will survive, along with the classics which, luckily, are kept alive by nostalgia sessions. In this way, geographically disparate groups will have at least some repertoire in common. “Ultimately”, says Teme, “it's up to the teachers to choose which dances to bring to their sessions”. She is optimistic about the long-term future of Israeli folk dance, proclaiming emphatically: “Israeli dance will live forever. It's part of our heritage – of who we are!” Teme's motto: “To dance is to live” is more important than ever during these trying times. Tonight, as on so many other nights, across the city and beyond, hundreds of people will join the circle to celebrate life by dancing, thanks, in no small part, to Teme Kernerman! 

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