



Iris Levitan

Translation:
Ruth Goodman
and Allen King

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Accordionist, Singer, Dance Leader, Composer, Arranger

Ami Gilad
with Lehakat HaNahal and
Lehakat Karmon
and more...



Ami Gilad was born in 1939 and was educated in Tel Aviv. As someone who came from a musical family (his mother was a singing prodigy), he was drawn from a young age to the world of music in general, to the songs of that period that he heard played on the radio, and to the world of folk dance in particular.

While a student at the city's Yesod Hama'ala elementary school, Ami began his first steps as an Israeli folk dancer as a member of the Gadna youth movement. This is how he discovered the accordion with its magical sounds and power.

To satisfy his curiosity about the wonders of the accordion, Ami learned to play with **Zvi Caspi**, an accordion teacher. At the same time, Ami danced wherever possible.

• *His professional fate is determined*

The rumor about the excellent quality of young Ami's (11-12 years old) accordion playing spread like wildfire through Tel Aviv, where at that time (the 1950s) almost everyone knew everyone else, especially in the folk dance community, and where it also reached **Yoav Ashriel**, who was the "Oracle" in the field.

"To dance, I came to **Yoav Ashriel's** group at Beit Hapoel (which no longer exists on Ussishkin Street - I.L.)," Gilad says. "Someone whispered to him that I also played the accordion. Yoav told me: 'Take it, play it.' I played it and he liked it," Gilad continues.

At the end of the short audition, Ashriel decided: "I have enough dancers; I need an accordionist." And with that, in effect, he determined young Ami's professional future as an accordion player.

• *Between dance and music*

Ami Gilad's protests didn't help: "I like to dance; I'm also willing to play, but I want to dance," he pleaded with Ashriel. "There's a shortage of accordionists," Yoav replied firmly. "And that was it. He got down to business with me immediately and taught me the speeds and rhythms that are suitable for dancing."

Hapoel Tel Aviv also had a dance troupe, whose choreographer was Yoav Ashriel. He and no one else. "You'll also play for the troupe, accompany it in rehearsals and performances," Yoav suggested to me.



With the Democratic Youth delegation at the International Dance Festival in Vienna, Austria



Lehakat HaNahal, Ami Gilad with his white accordion



With the accordion and Lehakat HaNahal

It's not hard to guess how Ami felt; he was torn between dancing, which he loved so much, and music.

- ***Both a musician and a dancer***

As their journey together continued, Ashriel, at some point, relented and finally gave in to Ami Gilad's pleas, and he was also allowed to dance. It was in the troupe "Pa'amei Machol", Ashriel's next troupe, which was formed to replace Lehakat Hapoel Tel Aviv, which had disbanded. There, for the first time, Ami Gilad took his steps as a dancer on stage. There, for the first time, he both danced and played.

- ***His name precedes him***

Word of the accordion playing of the boy prodigy, Ami Gilad, crossed the borders of Tel Aviv, the city where he was born and educated, and reached Petah Tikva.

"**Shmuel Tzemach**, the city's cultural figure, was the first person to hire me as a paid musical accompanist for dance groups," Gilad recalls. "It was a special experience, but I actually wanted to dance..."

- ***We won't stop dancing***

"I really loved dancing in the lively dance session in the courtyard of "Cafe Bustan" near Dizengoff Square," Ami recalls with a smile.

At the same time, he danced in **Mira** and **Yoav Ashriel**'s classes, which gained immense popularity, at Beit Hapoel, and at the "Ahad Ha'Am" and "Dubnov" schools.

Prior to his enlistment in the IDF, he also accompanied classes led by Mira Ashriel with his accordion at the Ayanot Agricultural School (where, incidentally, **Yonatan Karmon** was educated), and by **Tirza Hodes** at Beit Lessin in Tel Aviv.

- ***The Blossoming of the Accordion***

"In those days, there were no folk dance records yet, certainly no cassettes, nor CDs," Gilad explains. "The only musical instrument used to conduct a folk dance class, rehearsal, performance, as well as community singing, was the accordion". One can certainly identify with Ami Gilad's love for this wonderful instrument. I, too, was captivated by the magic of its sounds. For me, it was 'love at first sound'.

"In the best case," Gilad continues to describe, "there was also a darbuka. In an even better case, there was someone who played the flute or a recorder; the guitar came later. Now I remember that Yoav also held a tambourine in his hand, for the rhythm."



With Tirza Hodes

When Ami realized that his hobby, playing the accordion, had become his profession, he decided to stay in America, develop professionally, and expand his formal musical education, settling in New York.

• **The choice of the Nahal band**

When the time came for Ami to be drafted into the army, he accepted the advice of Yoav Ashriel, "my teacher and rabbi," in Gilad's words, to audition for a military band. "I'll call, I'll find out," Ashriel offered, trying with all his heart for his protégé.

The lot fell on the Nahal Band, which was the best of the many military bands operating at the time, Ami emphasizes. "The Nahal Band was the band back then. There was nothing like it," Ami recalls with shining eyes.

The band's songs played over the airwaves non-stop, as did the songs of the other military bands during Gilad's youth, but the songs of the Nahal Band were more pleasing to the young Gilad's musical ear than those of all the others.

"I really liked their vocal arrangements, and I just connected with them," said Gilad, explaining his interest and preference to serve in the Nahal military band. "Their professional level was high," continues Gilad. "They paid attention to every word, to the correct pronunciation of the words. They worked on correct diction there, so that the listener could understand every word," he explains.

• **The audition**

"I came to audition as a singer-actor. I didn't say I was an accordionist. I was given an etude (a musical exercise – I.L.). I played. But Yosef (Yosele) Oreg, who was the band's accordionist, and knew me as [an accordion] player, told Uri Zohar, who was the band's



With the Karmon Troupe in Bogota, Columbia



Ami leads dancers in Debka Rafiach



With Dov (Dubi) Seltzer and Yehoram Gaon



With Chaim Topol

Uri Zohar loved to frolic, to do pranks, but to his credit, he knew the limits. He didn't let others run wild either; he set boundaries and enforced strict discipline in the group.

leader, that I played the accordion. Uri told me: 'Take an accordion, and play.' I played 'Mul Har Sinai – Opposite Mount Sinai' like it is on the record," Ami recounts with satisfaction. Then Zohar told him, "You won't be a singer-actor in the band," because he admired his playing: "You'll be our accordionist."

Later, it turns out, his luck and talent played to Ami's advantage, and in addition to his role as accordionist in the band, he also received opportunities to lend his voice to singing, his other love, after dancing.

"I was sent with a friend to the "Garin" (social and cultural training program) for the singing and dancing course that began at Nahal 906 Base (near Karmiel). We were taught by **Gurit Kadman, Shalom Hermon, Tamar Alyagor, Yoav Ashriel, "Viki" (Shmuel) Cohen, Margalit Oved, Meir Ovadia**, and others. This was in the framework of social and professional courses to which Nahal soldiers are sent so that they will be useful in their continued service at the kibbutzim. In this course, I was both a student and also directed the musical section."

• **Rigorous rehearsals**

After completing his basic training at Machane 80, Ami joined the Nahal Band. The band's rehearsals were held in Jaffa, in the long-standing, legendary building of the Nahal Command. They were held until the wee hours of the night, with lots of love and with lots of motivation for success. "Our work process was like this," Ami details:

"The song arrangements arrived ready to go from the composers. Each member of the band learned his part. Next, we worked on staging the song. At the end of the process, the composer would come to the rehearsal in person, just as **Naomi Shemer**, the writer and composer of "Vals LeHaganat HaTzome'ach – Waltz for the Protection of All that is Growing" in the well-known music clip, came and made her comments to the tremendously talented solo performer **Yardena Arazi**, to give a final and precise polish, and then, on to the performances."

"During my time, the accordionist was responsible for the musical side. After us, they brought in a professional musical director from outside the band, such as: **Yair Rosenblum, Beni Nagari, Aryeh Levanon**. In any case, here I was also given the title of "musical director." Uri also had the authority to make his comments. And he did."

• **Uri Zohar**

"Uri was a man of the stage; he intuitively understood the essence of what a stage was. He truly schooled us", Ami compliments his revered commander, with awe which did not fade over the years. Uri's talent was then in its infancy."

"Uri loved to frolic, to do pranks, but to his credit, he knew the limits. He didn't let others run wild either; he set boundaries and enforced strict discipline in the group. Anyone who let loose received a reprimand," Gilad continues.



With Yoav Ashriel



With Yonatan Karmon

• **Memories of Naomi**

"I remember **Naomi Polani**, who worked with the troupe," Ami recalled, "as a professional but not harsh stage woman, who achieved what she wanted in her pleasant way, with a constant smile at the corners of her mouth."

• **Dance abroad**

Upon his release from the army, Ami continued to accompany dance groups on his accordion. This time, he travelled outside the State of Israel to the "Democratic Youth Festival" in Vienna with a representative national troupe of dancers from all over the country. "The festival took place every four years, each time in a different country," Ami notes. Later, he joined the legendary Karmon troupe in its performances around the world.

• **A hobby that became a profession**

After a successful performance tour with Lehakat Karmon in the United States, Gilad remained there and the troupe returned to Israel without him. When Ami realized that his hobby, playing the accordion, had become his profession, he decided to stay in America, develop professionally, and expand his formal musical education. He settled in New York, choosing the option of studying theory, conducting, and composition at the renowned Mannes College of Music.

• **The American connection**

Regarding Ami Gilad's first stay in America, it was good, and was characterized by professional flourishing and personal enrichment. This first of two stays lasted for about 11 years, during which he specialized in his field. He produced musical arrangements for folk dance records under the direction of the "Father of Israeli Folk Dance in America", **Fred Berk** (originally Fritz Berger).

Fred Berk is described on Wikipedia as a dancer, choreographer, dance teacher, and a flag bearer in the Diaspora (especially in Canada and the United States) in the study and dissemination of Israeli folk dance, also in articles such as in the magazine 'Hora' – a journal he founded and edited.

In 1962, while in New York, Fred Berk asked **Danny Uziel** to create an accessible dance for beginners. Ami composed the song, **Nehemiah Sharabi** wrote the lyrics, **Geula Zohar** sang, and Danny composed the dance steps for "At Va'Ani." The dance is still danced today and is considered a classic among folk dance circles around the world.

According to dance scholar **Judith Brin Ingber**, Fred directed an annual Festival of Israeli Folk Dance in New York from 1953 to 1978.



Radio Broadcaster on Kol HaShalom in Miami

During the intervening time between his two stays in America, Ami was privileged to participate as a musical accompanist in the productions in Israel of **Avraham Desha Pashnal (Pasha)**, who was then a household name in Israeli entertainment.



With Gadi Bitton in Miami

At the same time, Fred Berk choreographed a folk dance in a circle called "[Freilach](#)", to a melody written by Ami Gilad.

"Fred asked me to write a melody with a Hasidic tone," says Gilad. **Moshe Eskayo** also liked the bouncy, inspiring melody that Gilad composed, and choreographed "[Chanita](#)", a circle dance, to the same tune. Another aspect of Fred Berk's extensive activity in the field of dance was reflected in the dance camps he organized in America.

"I first met **Shlomo Maman** at 'Camp Blue Star,' which Fred founded in North Carolina.

Shlomo was invited as a guest artist," Gilad recalls.

• **America 2**

During his second stay in America, in the 1980s, Ami Gilad settled in Miami, Florida. There, too, he brought his musical spirit, mainly in educating the younger generation. But not only that – he also devoted his energy to musical programs as a broadcaster on local Israeli radio stations.

During the intervening time between his two stays in America, Ami was privileged to participate as a musical accompanist in the productions in Israel of **Avraham Desha Pashnal (Pasha)**, who was then a household name in Israeli entertainment:

- "Tzatz ve'Tzatzah", 1969, a musical performance based on poems by **Nathan Alterman**.
- "Shirei HaChumash – Songs of the Pentateuch", from the poems of **Itzik Manger**, written in 1935 in Warsaw.
- "Chayei Kelev – A Dog's Life", (I was present in the hall and remember the wonderful **Gadi Yagil**, who is insanely funny. – I.L.).
- "Gumbo", 1971.

Ami Gilad continued composing and continues to do so today.

His compositions include: "Sapri Li Kinneret – Speak to Me Kinneret", "Malach Katan Sheli – My Little Angel" to the words of **Nissan Friedman**, "Yevarechecha HaShem V'Yishmerecha – May G-d Bless You and Keep You" to the words of the morning prayer. Before that, he composed for military bands, such as the Northern Command, the Southern Command and the Combat Engineering Corps: "Tugah Shel Stav – Autumn Sorrow", "Shmor Li Al Mishmar HaGvul – Protect Me at the Border Guard", "Layla Bli Miklat – Night Without Shelter", "B'Sinai Mutar – In Sinai It Is Permitted", "Ma she Ratzui U'Ma she Matzui – What is Desired and What is Found".

Indeed, later, in addition to playing the accordion, Ami Gilad would also compose beautiful melodies that would be embodied in folk dances. He would also engage in the field of musical arrangement, thanks to these studies, which opened a window for him into the depths of the magical world of music.

• **Funding for recordings**

Like Ami Gilad, to put it mildly, there are certainly other people who are not satisfied with the advancement and technological dynamism in the context of folk dances. Ami's

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opinion on the subject overflows, and he asserts that, although it is generally advisable to move forward and keep up with the times, in this case, he is troubled by the current changes created in the work process.

"Once," Ami recounts somewhat gloomily, "the creators of the dances would approach me to write melodies with 'operating instructions', with special intentions regarding the style, atmosphere, and rhythm. They were also responsible for the continuation of the work process, for arranging and recording. Today, however, they prefer to use the finished product, the songs that are played everywhere, from the radio to social networks and especially YouTube, songs that are used 'as is'. These songs are ready for the choreographic creation process, while I am "stuck" with 36 melodies, which in order to hand over to the choreographers, I need to arrange and record – so that everything will be ready for them. It's very expensive. Where will I get the money?", he painfully throws rhetorically into the air.

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• **9 things you didn't know about Ami Gilad:**

- 1 Performed with "almost every living artist," in the humorous language of Ami Gilad...
- 2 Ami and **Arik Einstein** sing together in the chorus, in the song "12 Tons" by the Nahal band.
- 3 He played on the recording of Yoav Ashriel's dance session (harkada), which was broadcast on the monthly radio program "LaRokdim Heidad – For Dancers, Cheers" on Kol Yisrael. It could be that this recording was a precursor of **Avner Naim's** future instructive programs, "BeTzad Teimani – In a Yemenite Step," which became "Rokdim VeSharim – Dancing and Singing". This program was broadcast for many years with great success on Reshet Gimmel; it entered the hearts of the people and crossed borders.
- 4 He composed an additional melody for the song "Lifnot Erev – At Sunset". **Eli Ronen's** dance to the song is danced to the melody of **Sasha Argov**.
- 5 Ami also composed another melody of his own for "Ein Shirim Acherim – There Are No Other Songs," the lyrics of which were written by **Yossi Gamzu** and composed by **Moshe Wilensky**.
- 6 The dance "Shiri" created by **Shlomo Maman** is based on a melody composed by Ami Gilad with the name of his daughter **Shiri**.
- 7 He released a series of folk dance CDs together with **Avner Naim** as artistic editor, which were published by the Reuveni Brothers Company in the series "Lo Nafsik Lirkod – We Will Never Stop Dancing."
- 8 Wrote new melodies ('Dekba' and 'HaPerach V'Ani – The Flower and Me') for **Avner Naim**.
- 9 Ami led a community singing session at the opening of **Yankele Agmon's** successful radio show "Birah VeMatzav Ruach – Beer and Mood."



Ami and his accordion