



Yossi Spivak,
Musician,
Musicologist,
Educator, and
Composer

Translation:
Jan Jackson and
Benny Levy

To Cut or Not to Cut?

**Should songs be edited to fit
the desired structure of a dance?**

Editor's Note:

When Israeli folk dancing transitioned from live music (accordion, flute, etc.) to recorded music, the need arose to adapt the original songs on the records to the existing dance steps. These dances were choreographed purely to the melody, without musical transitions between the verses of the song.

Accordingly, new dances are also choreographed solely to the melody of the song itself, without the transitional sections.

Yoav Ashriel z"l, Mishael Barzilay z"l, and Yehuda Emanuel yibadel l'chaim aruchim (may he live a long life), all of whom served as organizers of the hishtalmuyot (workshops), endeavored to follow this practice.

I too, Yaron Meishar, who edited all the dances in a recording studio in the 80s and 90s, also adhered to this practice even when choreographers came to me with music for which the dance steps had not yet been finalized.

*I always advised and helped ensure that we adhered to the important principle that "**a folk dance should be danced to the melody only, and not to the transitional sections**," so that it could be danced to any recording by another singer or even to the dancers' own singing.*

Discussions and debates about this policy have accompanied us for many years. About 30 years ago, I asked Yossi Spivak, a renowned musicologist, to write an

article for "Rokdim" on this topic, and it was indeed published by us in the past.

As with many choices in life, there is no perfect option, and we must choose the lesser of two evils. Here is Yossi's explanation of the alternative that is the lesser evil.





A musical arrangement includes the melody originally written by the composer, as well as various additions that are the creation of the arranger. These additions include instrumental interludes that are not part of the original melody but are organically integrated into it.

This question arises again and again, and there is no definitive answer to it. Perhaps it's worth asking first, "Who cares?" If we answer this preliminary question, we might get to the main problem. Are the dancers even aware of this issue? Do they have a preference one way or the other?

It's doubtful whether the "average" dancer who comes to a dance session or class has taken any stance on the matter, and what about the instructors or dance leaders? Do they have a clear position regarding cuts?

It doesn't seem that they have a preference for intact or cut music. After all, they receive a finished dance from the choreographers, in which the movement – the dance steps – cannot be separated from the music. This takes us to the proper address for an answer to the "cut or not to cut" issue – the choreographers themselves.

The choreographer generally builds his or her dance from existing recorded music. In most cases, this music has not been performed specifically for the purpose of dancing to it. If we approach the problem purely from a musical perspective, the answer is "do not cut"!! A musical arrangement includes the melody originally written by the composer, as well as **various additions** that are the creation of the arranger. These additions include instrumental interludes **that are not part** of the original melody but are organically integrated into it. If there is no such integration, we would say the arrangement is bad and should not be used at all.

Cutting the music impairs the integrity of the musical work, as the instrumental interludes play an important **psychological role**: they allow the song to be repeated several times without boredom. They refresh the routine and create renewed attention with each additional repetition.

There is also an ethical problem: what right do we have to alter the work of the arranger? Are arrangers considered less prestigious than composers, and it is, therefore, permissible to damage their work? Does the fact that arrangers are less legally protected than composers allow us to cut? No and no! From a musical, ethical, and legal standpoint, **cutting is forbidden!**

How, then, can the problem be solved? For example, by recording songs intended for dance, without the arranger inserting instrumental interludes. Theoretically, this is

There is also an ethical problem: what right do we have to alter the work of the arranger? Are arrangers considered less prestigious than composers, and it is, therefore, permissible to damage their work?

possible, but in our reality, it is not. In the past, excellent recordings of folk dances were made, among them the three records released by the Mador LeRikudei Am – The Folk Dance Section of the Histadrut, two records performed by an orchestra conducted by **Yitzhak Graziani** and directed by **Yoav Ashriel**, and five records conducted by **Effi Netzer** and directed by **Yonatan Gabay**.

Some of this material has been released on new CDs and is still used for dances today.

The old dances were choreographed with the intention of establishing a treasure trove of dances that would last for many years. The new dances, like hit songs, rise and fall quickly, and there is no point in investing effort and money in recordings intended for dances which, by their nature, have a short lifespan. Today's dances are also tied to a specific musical arrangement, and if we prepare a new recording with a different arrangement, the magic of the original arrangement, and with it the dance, will be lost.



Another issue is the nature of the instrumental interlude. Usually, this interlude differs from the melody itself, as its purpose, as mentioned, is to momentarily distance the listener from the melody in order to return to it with double the pleasure. A "good" dance is built with the melody and expresses the musical-rhythmic event through movement. If there are two melodies, that is, an original melody and an interlude melody, two different dances will need to be created, since one dance will only fit part of the music. The solution is to cut the interlude melodies (which belong only to the arrangement) and leave the original melody "pure."

Certain songs are structured in a way that does not allow for the creation of a dance. Sometimes there is no symmetry between the verses, and then dancers do not know how to dance to it, because a "folk dance" is built upon a complete song, which repeats several times. If the repetitions are not identical, the dancers will not be able to perform the dance. For example, the song "Kan", by **Uzi Hitman**, begins with a first verse whose melody is repeated in the second verse. After that, the chorus appears. The third verse leads to the chorus, as does the fourth verse.

If we record a new musical version specifically for the dance, we will not have the same emotional sensation as we do with the original performance by Datz and Datza, and thus the folk dance will become a "decent" performance in terms of structure, but unable to compete with the beloved original.



From a compositional standpoint, the song's structure is: A - B - Chorus - C - Chorus - D - Chorus. The dance, however, is not choreographed according to that structure, but rather according to the musical sequence, and then the structure is: A (verse) - A (verse) - Chorus - A (verse) - Chorus - A (verse) - Chorus. The dance structure is: A (verse) - Chorus, but A (the verse) is performed twice at the beginning and only once thereafter. The lack of symmetry makes it difficult for dancers, who do not remember that the structure of the melody results in changes to the dance.

In addition, between the chorus and the fourth A (verse), a short instrumental interlude of only one measure appears, but precisely because of the minuteness of this interlude, it is not possible to choreograph movement to it, and thus the choreographer is left with a section that is "neither here nor there". How, then, can the problem be solved? Here, in my opinion, is a classic case of a necessary cut, after which only the question of repeating the A (verse) at the beginning remains.

Modern day computer software allows one to dissect a piece and reassemble it anew, without the listener sensing it. One option for solving the problem is to split the first two "A's" and insert a chorus between them, and the second option is to cut the chorus the second time so that the result will be: A - A - Chorus - A - A - Chorus. This is up to the choreographer, and, in any case, the Eurovision recording cannot be used for folk dance purposes without cutting, or, in professional terms, "editing".

If we record a new musical version specifically for the dance, we will not have the same emotional sensation as we do with the original performance by **Datz and Datza**, and thus the folk dance will become a "decent" performance in terms of structure, but unable to compete with the beloved original. Another example that illustrates this even better is **Hanna Goldberg** and **Yoni Roeh's** song "Chaverim BeKol Minei Tzva'im – Friends of All

Although at the beginning of my remarks I ruled out cutting, this rejection is a decree that the public cannot abide by.

Kinds of Colors," performed by Sarit Hadad. After A - A - Chorus, an instrumental interlude appears, which disrupts the dance's sequence. If it remains in the recording, an additional dance section will need to be choreographed that will be foreign to the original dance, due to the difference in the musical character between the original melody and the instrumental interlude. If the choreographer desires a complete organic creation, he or she will cut the instrumental interlude, and even then a problem will remain, because after the second time through the chorus another instrumental interlude appears, after which the chorus repeats again. In this case, the choreographer must cut the additional chorus or insert an additional A between the two choruses.

Another argument in favor of cuts is the contribution of folk dance to the spread of Israeli music. Many songs would have been forgotten had no dances been choreographed to them, and cutting is part of the price composers pay for their songs to become more widespread. But there is cutting and there is cutting.

Although at the beginning of my remarks I ruled out cutting, this rejection is a decree that the public cannot abide by. From a musical standpoint, there is no doubt that cutting is a transgression, but from a dance standpoint, it is a "mitzvah" – a "must"; after all, we are dealing with dance, and there is no other way.

Another argument in favor of cuts is the contribution of folk dance to the spread of Israeli music. Many songs would have been forgotten had no dances been choreographed to them, and cutting is part of the price composers pay for their songs to become more widespread. But there is cutting and there is cutting. The cutter must have musical skills and good taste, as excessive cutting produces a result that is difficult to fix. Any surgical treatment of music, including tempo changes, requires a high level of skill, and unfortunately, not all music producers have the skills for this.

In conclusion, choosing to cut is the least deleterious option, and if done correctly, that's enough for us! 

