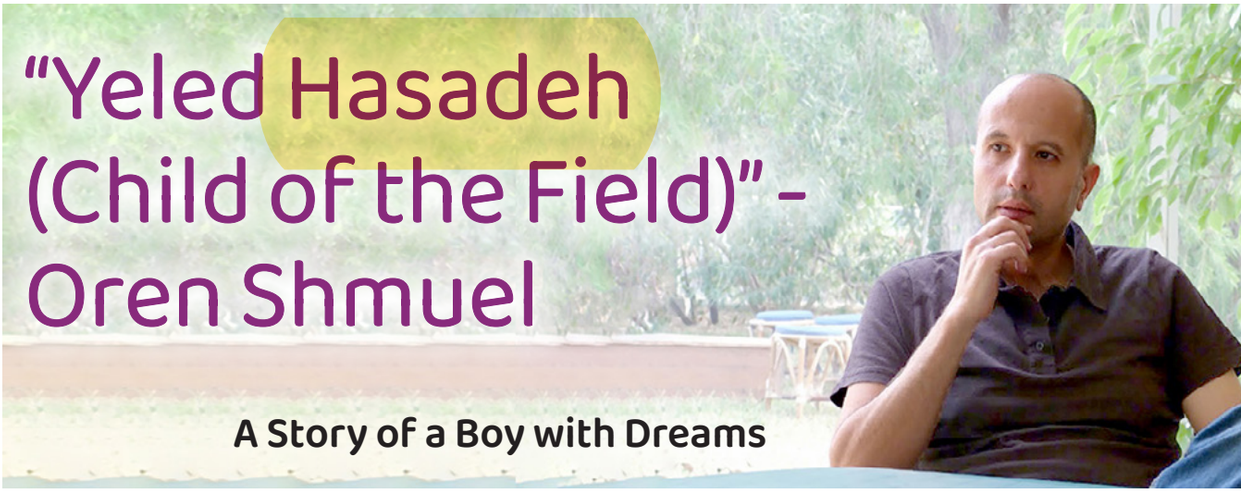
Heli Livneh
Translation:
Jan Jackson

"Yeled Hasadeh (Child of the Field)" - Oren Shmuel

A Story of a Boy with Dreams



When I first met the dance leader and choreographer, **Oren Shmuel**, I was really excited. "Amen Lamilim", "Kesem Chalili", " Ahuv Sheli", "Re'ach Shel Yasmin" – these dances and many other great ones, which we all dance on the dance floors in Israel and around the world, belong to the choreographer and dance leader, Oren Shmuel. These beautiful dances move on the circle line with a wonderful flow and provide us with great pleasure. These dances reflect our roots and bear emotional depth; we have been dancing them for decades and they are here to stay forever.

"Hello, nice to meet you", Oren said to me almost in a whisper and shook my hand. He looked at me for a brief moment and immediately looked away. It was easy for me to recognize that he was a modest and polite guy, gentle and well-mannered. "The pleasure is mine", I smiled back at him.

I met with the choreographer, Oren Shmuel, because I wanted to write about him. Oren has intrigued me as a choreographer for a long time. He was just a young boy who had the courage to begin the process of choreographing his own dances and to enter the world of great choreographers in the field of folk dance.

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> **It was a beautiful period when the entire people of Israel danced folk dances, and the veteran choreographers were very prolific and choreographed dances that never lost their appeal. And yet, Oren's path was not easy.**

You won't see Oren trying to stand out in all sorts of ways on social media, for example. Oren has spread his dances in the past in ways that are unique to him, even when the environment didn't always allow it.

Oren Shmuel was born in Nahariya in 1970 to two parents who immigrated from Baghdad, Iraq, and he has four brothers and sisters.

Oren is a folk dance instructor, choreographer, and dancer with a unique style. At the beginning of his career in the world of dance, he was the lead dancer in the "Hora Nahariya" dance troupe and successfully completed his studies at the Folk Dance Instructors Seminar in Haifa in 1992. His instructor and spiritual teacher at the seminar was the choreographer, Yonatan Gabay, z"l.

– Tell us about your childhood.

I was born and raised in Nahariya. All my childhood memories are rooted and preserved in the city of Nahariya, dear to my heart. On Rechov HaGa'aton in Nahariya, under the large eucalyptus trees, we would carve hearts with the names of all the girls we loved on the tree trunks - an innocent way to convey a message to the girl I loved.

Ashdodance, 2025

I remember the narrow passage between the sea and the municipal pool. We had to pass through a "corridor" of faucets that sprayed water in all directions to clean the sand left on our bodies from the sea. It was impossible to avoid, so we would just run through that same "corridor" and burst out laughing the whole way. These were small childhood moments, full of movement, freedom, joy and connection, and I think that in a way, this child remains in me to this day as a dancer and a choreographer, in the way I choreograph dances and in the way I connect with the dance community.

When I think about my childhood, I remember a warm and happy home in Nahariya, alongside a reality of wars and Katyusha rockets. I remember small things that left a significant mark on me - the spice shop that had a strong smell of ground coffee, the transparent sugar candies that I loved, the pastry shop with the beautiful cake that had a leaf-like decoration on top, and the kiosk on the corner of the street. These were simple moments, but filled with taste, smell, and memory that have remained with me to this day.

Over the years, I felt that I wanted to develop professionally, and in adulthood I decided to move to Jerusalem following a job offer I received. The city of Jerusalem is indeed different and far from Nahariya, but I can say that I chose it over moving to another city, because I saw in my mind's eye commonalities between the warm people I grew up with in Nahariya and the people living in Jerusalem. The similarities were clear to me.

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תרבות

מזרית קושניר-ספרומצה

זכה באירוויזיון של המחול

השחקנים, מחלטרים והצופים סובלים

"אלגבי 46", ערך ניסיון אינוראקטיבי של החינוכיות

Press, 1996

25 11.6.93

רוקד עם זאבים

Press, 1993

I am the youngest son of my dear parents: **Gerrita** and **Ezra Shmuel**. I received the love of music and of interesting and unique sounds at home and the people closest to me had a significant influence upon me. As a child in an Iraqi home, I heard **Abd al-Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash, Umm Kulthum, Amr Diab** and other artists of this level. All my life I have followed this music and I love it.

I was always close to my mother, and to this day she and I have a special bond. I was a "Mama's boy", perhaps also due to the fact that I am the child of older parents. I was closer to her as a child than anyone else.

This child remains in me to this day as a dancer and a choreographer, in the way I choreograph dances and in the way I connect with the dance community

My father fell ill and passed away when he was only 66 years old. My father z"l was a hard worker. His word was his bond, but he had many other facets. My father was kind-hearted and an exemplary family man. He was a man of values, caring and protective, who taught us children what hard work and stability were, and even gave us childhood experiences – a lot of time at the sea, fishing and nature. We spent a lot of time on the beaches of Achziv, where I learned to swim, to fish, and to love the simple connection between nature and people.

Lead dancer, Hora Nahariya Dance Company

We, the children, and Mom were his whole world. I had a good relationship with my father, but everything was within the boundaries he set for his relatives and for himself in his life. My father didn't want me to grow in the field of dance. He didn't believe in this field. He wanted me to have a respectable profession like a bank employee, to have a regular and stable job. One day he said to me: "Oren, I spoke to the bank manager, and he said he would agree to hire you, but on the condition that you no longer work as a dance leader". I immediately refused this offer, even though it was a respectable position, because I was not willing under any circumstances to give up my love – dancing.

At the age of 17, I discovered the world of dance quite by accident. While reading a local newspaper, I saw that they were looking for dancers for the local troupe, "Hora Nahariya". I auditioned and was accepted as a dancer, and later, I became a solo dancer in several ensembles.

One day, my father suddenly had a change of heart. It happened after he saw my work over a long period of time and realized that I probably wouldn't give up on dance and that it was truly what I loved to do most.

One day he went on his own initiative and bought me big, expensive speakers so I could run dance sessions properly. I will never forget that day. I was so happy. That's how I turned my love into a more serious source of income. My father accepted dancing... and me.

My mother, on the other hand, accepted my desire to dance from the very beginning. We used to dance together, she and I, in the living room. Music was a significant part of our home, mainly because of my mother, who listened to the sounds of the oud and qanun from the Iraqi tradition.

These sounds, together with the atmosphere at home, had a profound effect on me, long before I knew they would become an integral part of my creative work.

My mother was my full partner in the field. She used to look for interesting melodies for me to choreograph dances to. One day she came home from the Ramle-Lod market, where she used to shop, and said to me: "Take this", and she handed me a CD: "There's a song here that you have to hear and choreograph a dance to it. It was playing at the market just now, so I bought you the CD," she continued passionately.

This is how the dance "Ahuv Sheli - My Love" was born; it was sung by the same singer, **Amr Diab**. It was the first time I had heard the song, and I fell in love with it immediately. Thanks to my mother, the dance was born and it is danced everywhere in Israel and the world.

I used to show my mother the movements I incorporated into my dances, ask her opinion and share the process with her, and she enjoyed it and was happy to be a part of this world of mine.

I have three sisters and a brother. I am married and have two sons, ages 9 and 11. My wife is from Jerusalem, and I met her in Jerusalem. My two children imitate my movements, and I can already see that they have beautiful movements. My children are very proud of me, of who I am. I tell them about the world of folk dance, and they enjoy listening to my stories. Although my main occupation today is specializing in information systems, which allows me the ability to earn a decent living for me and my family, my heart is always in the world of dance.

– What kind of child were you?

From a very young age I loved to sing. At my Bar Mitzvah I sang in front of everyone. As is typical of a child of older parents, I was a somewhat spoiled child, a happy and mischievous child. I have fond memories of time with my grandfather, may his memory be a blessing. On Friday evenings, he would return from synagogue with fragrant leaves in his hands, the smell of which I remember well. My grandfather was the cantor in the

Iraqi synagogue in the neighborhood where I grew up in Nahariya. He would make kiddush (recite the blessings over the wine) for us every Friday evening at my parents' house. My grandfather and I had a special bond. I inherited the ability to sing and the love of singing from him.

I grew up in the Yoseftal neighborhood in Nahariya, a magical neighborhood, a beloved childhood. We would go downstairs to play games with gogo'im (apricot fruit buds). I remember the large chrysanthemum field that I loved to walk through and get lost in 'just like that' in the middle of the day. I have many images that flash through my head from time to time. For Purim, my mother would sew all the costumes for all of us. Everything was so simple and innocent.

– Tell us about your beginnings in the world of dance.

My mother has influenced me a lot in various fields. She has a discerning, professional eye. My mother is very artistic, and her creative spirit could be seen in her sewing, which was always very precise and beautiful.

As a professional seamstress, my mother knew how to look at a garment in a shop window, take it apart in her imagination, and create a pattern herself with impressive precision. Looking back, I think part of my ability to see an idea, imagine it, and create something new from it was born in the house where I grew up. Creativity has been a part of our family for years.

> **The education I received was also like that – discerning, critiquing, everything to shape the person I have become, and along with that, I absorbed from my mother the love for creation, for precision, and for attention to the smallest details. I am very proud of my parents.**

Today it is important to me to make sure to visit my mother in Nahariya regularly despite the great distance from my home in Jerusalem. My relationship with my mother has always been, and still is, a deep and good one, and I am careful to maintain it.

There was always rhythm and singing at home. I heard a lot of music in a variety of styles. I studied at the Amal School in Nahariya, graduated from high school, and then served in the army, in the Air Force. Before I enlisted, there was an ad in the newspaper that dancers were needed in Nahariya. I had never danced before. I went to audition and was accepted into the troupe. There I advanced quickly, from a beginning dancer to "a little more senior" and even a solo dancer.

I enlisted in the Air Force, in the technical wing. One day when I was in the course, I was walking around the base with a friend, and suddenly, I saw people dancing together, holding hands. I didn't know what they were dancing, even though I danced in a dance troupe, and it was the first time I saw folk dances being danced in a circle. I approached them, gathered my courage, and went in to dance with them. I immediately fell in love with the steps, the songs, and the movements. I saw them doing beautiful turns. That was the turning point in my life. From that moment on, my life went in one direction – folk dancing. I was so excited! I don't know how to explain it in words. It was like a dream. The course at the Air Force base lasted about three months, during which I danced the whole time in that circle I saw at the base. At the same time, I continued to

it was the first time I saw folk dances being danced in a circle. I approached them, gathered my courage, and went in to dance with them. I immediately fell in love with the steps, the songs, and the movements. I saw them doing beautiful turns. That was the turning point in my life

dance in the "Hora Nahariya" troupe, and slowly I expanded my scope and began to dance at the various dance sessions in the area.

I had a great passion for dance. I had dreams of taking a formal course to become a choreographer and folk dance instructor myself. When I was dancing in the dance troupe and progressing there, the troupe decided that we would go perform abroad, and this happened in the framework of my military service. When I went to my commander to ask him for permission and days off to travel abroad, he told me that he also participates in folk dance. He was very happy for me and gave me permission to travel with the troupe. I was thrilled. We performed in Holland, Belgium, Germany, and France.

I began to lead evening dance sessions, which included night swimming in the pool. It was an amazing time. People came to dance with me from all over the area: the youth of Nahariya, from the Western Galilee, from Goren, Granot, Shomera and even Haifa.

In Germany, as part of that trip, we attended a very large festival. Different troupes from all kinds of countries danced there, and so I was exposed to beautiful movements that I had never seen before. It enriched me, I learned a lot, and I gained an even greater passion for choreography and dancing.

As my discharge from the IDF approached, I enrolled in a course for folk dance instructors in Haifa run by **Yonatan Gabay**, z"l. Yonatan was a special person, both personally and professionally. I learned many techniques in the field from him and received so much from him. My confidence grew and I began to lead evening dance sessions, which included night swimming in the pool. It was an amazing time. People came to dance with me from all over the area: the youth of Nahariya, from the Western Galilee, from Goren, Granot, Shomera and even Haifa. Nahariya was the focus, and in fact, the entire Western Galilee.

At the beginning of my journey as a folk dance instructor, I was the youngest in the country, only 22 years old, so I felt the need to prove myself more than anyone else. As time passed and I gained experience, I was approached by various communities with a desire to join my dance sessions. The leaders of the Ethiopian community approached me to bring the new immigrants closer to the Hebrew language and the movement. During periods of military operations and wars, I was invited to instruct in many dance sessions in the northern region.

Oren Shmuel, 4.5.2019

In the early 1990s, I began instructing and leading classes and dance sessions in the north of the country. The transition from a young dancer to a choreographer was natural for me. In 1993, I founded the "Noar 93" dance troupe in the village of Shlomi, where I worked as a choreographer and artistic director. At that point, I realized that this was my calling – not only to teach dance, but also to create a culture of movement that speaks to people. It was only when I had my own troupe that I was able to gain perspective on the entire field of dance. We performed at all of Shlomi's events, and I taught dancing in all of the elementary schools in the area. In addition, I had three major dance sessions in the north. I was a choreographer, a creator, and a dance leader. I knew how to approach the dance leaders to show them my dances.

When I was the soloist in the "Hora Nahariya" troupe, I had a strong need to express myself through steps. I wanted to tell my stories through movement. I taught dance at my sessions and this was the final year in which I danced with the "Hora Nahariya" troupe. After that, I founded the troupe in Shlomi.

For my troupe's performances in Shlomi, I put dancers up on stage. I observed from this that there was a one-way connection with the audience. The dancers dance on the stage and do their part, the audience watches and applauds, but I did not experience direct closeness between them. On the other hand

I started choreographing new dances of my own. I preferred the direct connection as a leader with my dancers, but I had a problem. I was not in contact with the dance sessions in the center of the country and the south. I remember that in order to present a new dance that I had choreographed, I had to travel long distances to dance workshops that were held in the center of the country. I traveled by public transportation, and it took me many hours.

Sometimes I wanted to edit some music for a dance I had choreographed, and I looked for a place to spend the night in the center of the country for this purpose. I gladly accepted critiques if there were any. The only thing that frustrated me was that, after traveling for hours back and forth between dance workshops and home, they might tell me that I should change a certain step in the dance. And so, I would return home, change what was needed, and only at the next opportunity, travel back to the center with the revised dance. The institutions related to folk dance in the center were limited. Each dance workshop organizer had his own center.

When I choreographed a dance, I promoted it in the north of the country, and that's mainly how I publicized my dances. I figured that if my dance were interesting enough, it would also be discovered in other parts of the country.

When I choreographed a dance, I promoted it in the north of the country, and that's mainly how I publicized my dances. I figured that if my dance were interesting enough, it would also be discovered in other parts of the country. But in order to promote my dances, I traveled to dance sessions all over the country and taught them. Many times before arriving at the different dance workshops to present the same dances, I concluded that the way for me to get exposure and succeed was, above all, to promote them myself.

I also decided to expand the range of my choreography. I contacted composers. I paid a lot of money, and they composed beautiful melodies for me that were intended only for me. I said to myself: this is my path. I have full reign of the North, I don't live in the center. And from the North, everything will come.

– Have you also worked as a choreographer abroad?

Over the years I have had extensive international activity. I have been invited to present the dances I have choreographed in many countries. I have taught my dances at many camps, seminars and festivals around the world:

- In 1995 I went on a teaching trip to England that included 13 cities, universities, schools and kindergartens.
- In 1997 I participated as a dance leader in the international "Machol Europa" seminar in the UK.
- In 1998 I was invited to lead a folk dance seminar in Minsk and Bobruisk in Belarus as part of the events marking the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel.
- Over the years I have been invited to additional camps and seminars in Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

During my years as a choreographer, I have choreographed over eighty dances. For me, choreographing a dance means first and foremost touching my own emotions without fear, acknowledging my national identity, connecting with the people here

and with Israeli-ness. This is a link to tradition and Judaism. What has always guided me is my connection with the dance community. When I choreograph, it is important to me that the dance be accessible and not complicated to dance. I see myself as a choreographer for a transitional generation. I received all the tradition, Judaism and the strict adherence to the steps from the older generation of folk dances, and I myself have taken steps towards the younger generation. There is a transition here between periods, between styles.

I think what is most important to me in this whole world that I have entered is that I have brought meaning and contributed of myself to the beautiful path that the world of folk dance has taken since then and to this day. I continue to choreograph both today and always, thinking ahead to the next generation. I express this thinking in my choreography through the smallest details.

I have a vision and a hope that my dances and choreographies will continue to live on the dance floors and be part of the heritage of the field of folk dance, and that future generations will find in my choreographies the values and meaning that I have tried to convey throughout the years, so that I will have the privilege to continue to choreograph dances with meaning and emotion in the future as well.

Taanugot (Delights) dance performance on the Rokdim website

In order to present a new dance that I had choreographed, I had to travel long distances to dance workshops that were held in the center of the country. I traveled by public transportation, and it took me many hours.

I have traveled a long and beautiful journey, which began from the North and the periphery (Nahariya and Shlomi), into the world of folk dance throughout the country and the world. I think this is one of the most meaningful stories in my career: the fact that I operated far from the centers of power in the field, and yet I succeeded in promoting the dances, establishing a troupe, leading dance sessions, teaching, and reaching dance communities everywhere.

– What do you think about when you choreograph?

First, it's important to me to choreograph a dance for a specific reason. I make sure that it has some kind of innovative movement that is also accessible. Everyone wants the dance they choreograph to remain on the dance floor for years to come, but I make sure to check it. After I choreograph a dance, I consult with the dance community, asking for their opinion. For me, the dance communities are the ones who shaped and guided me throughout my creative years. In addition, I developed a certain intuition as to the question: Will the dance community wish to dance my dance or not. In every dance that I choreographed – there is a story that I told.

– What is important to you to pass on?

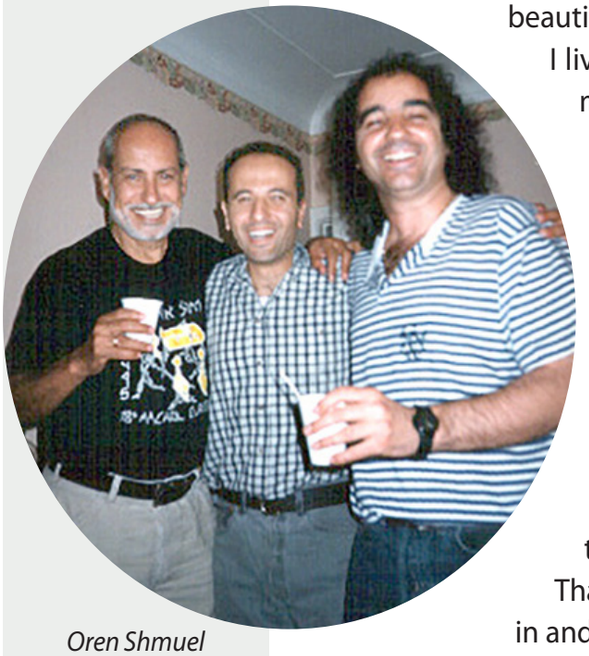
Today, it is important to me to preserve the folk dance movement, what we have built here throughout the years, so that it does not disappear. And this danger exists. The

course of action is important to me. I think that it's necessary to give more space to young choreographers and not close the door to them in advance. After all, every important choreographer took his first steps somewhere. The young choreographers are the future of our field. I don't think that the quality of the choreography has declined, but there are other influences: there is a lot of supply and less demand, so there is a greater natural filtering. It is impossible to include everything. In my opinion, the problem is not the flood in the quantity of dances, because in the end, what is not good enough will not remain, but every choreographer should strive to choreograph quality dances, those that have their own emotion and heart in them, that have meaning and a story behind them, and most importantly – that are accessible and clear to the groups of dancers.

– Tell us a little about some of the dances you have choreographed.

For the dances I choreographed, I received a lot of inspiration from my mother. She exposed me to songs she heard on the radio or anywhere else. She would listen with particular attention to understand what might be suitable for a dance that I could choreograph. My mother was very drawn to the music she grew up with and raised us with: songs with a deeply-rooted ethnic tone, which have stayed with me in my work throughout the years, for example: "Hora Nahariya" and "Ahuv Sheli".

Sometimes I design the dance steps and only then look for the music that will "suit" them, and sometimes it's the other way around; I first hear a beautiful song and think to myself, "what movements can fit into it"? Much of that inspiration comes from the nature that surrounded me as a child, from the silence and spaces of the beautiful North. It is especially from the views of Kibbutz Kabri, where I lived for about a decade; it greatly influenced my sensitivity for movement.



Oren Shmuel with Shlomo Maman and Moshiko Halevi

A choreographer's movement should flow. It should not stand still. It doesn't matter if you move to the right or left. You can't leave the dancer standing still; he himself wants to flow with the movement.

I choreographed the dance "Yeled Hasadeh – Child of the Field" in 1998. I choreographed it while I was living on Kibbutz Kabri and was directly influenced by the beautiful Galilee surroundings where I lived during those years. When I began to construct the dance, I imagined myself as a child running through the fields, with a small, winding stream flowing nearby. That flow is the same winding movement that I put into the dance, in and out; in my imagination it was like an endless flow.

I also choreographed the dance "Rea'ch Shel Yasmin – The Scent of Jasmine" (2003) on Kibbutz Kabri. I remember the scents of the grass and trees that I loved there, and it was from there that the inspiration for the dance came to me. When I walked around in nature and those same scents enveloped me like a new perfume I had opened, my heart opened and so did the choreography that burned within me.

The poet **Leah Goldberg**, z"l, excelled at composing wonderful lyrics, and I immediately understood that it must be a dance which has delicate movements that would match the words of the song:

"And only the sun bears the scent of jasmine
And only the stone bears the voice of a beating heart
And only the evening bears the color of orange
And only the sand possesses lips that kiss."

"VeRak LaShemesh Rei'ach Shel Yasmin
VeRak La'even kol shel lev po'em
VeRak La'Erev tzeva shel tapuz
Verak Lachol Sefatayim Menashkot."

"Amen Lamilim – Amen to the Words" (1998) is a dance that I choreographed as a sign of gratitude to God for all that He has given us in this land. The lyrics of the song touched me so much: "Amen to the words and intentions, Amen to the songs and dreams". What drove me was the great desire for our children to return safely from the wars.

"Ba'aretz Hazot – In This Land" (2000): I really love this song, and I connected with it in that no matter whether I agree with everything that is said or happens in this country, I will always continue to live here on this land that I love so much and raise my children here. We all defended it as soldiers and later, we built it and we continue to do so. From this place I choreographed the dance. It came from my gut.

The dance "Hora Nahariya" (1994) was the first circle dance I choreographed, and I received inspiration from my mother. I remember coming home and hearing the melody and immediately falling in love with it. It illustrated for me my love for the ethnic style of music. I wanted to dedicate a dance from me to my hometown of Nahariya, the city that I love so much, the city where I grew up as a child.

The dance "Hineh Shanah Overet – Here a Year Passes" (2002) was born from my thoughts about the passing of time, about the cycle of the year that never stops turning. The pleasant voices of of the duos: "HaDuda'im" and "HaParvarim" together filled me with an intense thirst to choreograph this delicate and special dance. Some of the movements remind me of a farewell and others remind me of a welcome for a new beginning, for a new year.

I moved to live in Jerusalem. The move to the Holy City was a dream come true for me. I moved to the city and started a family there, and we live there to this day.

At the time I choreographed the dance "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav – Jerusalem of Gold" (2000), I was living in the North, but I had a kind of ongoing longing and yearning for the city of Jerusalem. These longings are expressed in the movements I choreographed for the dance. I heard a silent prayer in my ears and I had a desire to see the beauty of the city. Indeed, a few years later, I moved to live in Jerusalem. The move to the Holy City was a dream come true for me. I moved to the city and started a family there, and we live there to this day.

During four decades of choreography, I choreographed over eighty Israeli folk dances, some of which have become an integral part of the dance repertoire in Israel and around the world. The early 2000s were a significant breakthrough for me. The dance "Tfilat Adam – Prayer of Man" won first place in the Karmiel Folk Dance Competition that same year.

Dances like "Amen Lamilim – Amen to the Words" and "Kesem Chalili – The Magic of the Flute" are still danced today in Israel and around the world. "Kesem Chalili" won first place in the Gadi Bitton dance competition at Tel Aviv University in 2003 and was also the audience favorite at the Karmiel Festival in 2003. The first time I heard the dance tune "Kesem Chalili", I was reminded of elements from dances by folk dance troupes in Europe (Hungary, Ireland), which I watched on one of my trips to a festival in Germany together with the troupe I danced with.

Other dances of mine that have been brought to many dance sessions at various places in Israel and abroad: "Hineh Shana Overet – Here a Year Passes", "Ta'anugot – Pleasures", "Ahuv Sheli – My Beloved", "Yeled Hasadeh – Child of the Field", "Shoshanat Plai'm – Rose of Wonders", "Re'ach Shel Yasmin – Smell of Jasmine", "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav – Jerusalem of Gold", "Ba'aretz Hazot – In This Land", "Hora Nahariya", "Dam Dam", "Roni Li – Sing to Me", "Farahtini – You Made Me Happy (Arabic)", "Ima Adama – Mother Earth", "Simchat Yomi – The Joy of My Day", "Bo'i – Come", "Joanna", "Elohim Natan Lecha BeMatanah – God Gave You as a Gift", "Be'Eretz Ahavati HaShaked Pore'ach – In the Land of My Love The Almond Blossoms", "Barchenu – Bless Us", "Miss Music", "Elohim Sheli – My God", "Otcha – You", "Alecha VeAlay – About You and Me", and others.

Over the years, I have choreographed more circle dances than partner dances. This was a conscious choice that expresses my social perception, which claims that dance should allow for broad participation of dancers, even those who do not have a dance partner.

Some of my partner dances such as: "Bo'i", "Alecha VeAlay" and "Otcha" I choreographed without a partner. During the choreography I thought of them as I would a circle dance, and only later did I include someone to check how the dance would feel when the partner did the movements symmetrically.

The road has not been easy for me. I am somewhat shy and don't approach others easily, and in the past, it was not easy for me to check with other dance leaders around the country if they were interested in teaching my dances.

– Tell me about your journey.

The road has not been easy for me. I am somewhat shy and don't approach others easily, and in the past, it was not easy for me to check with other dance leaders around the country if they were interested in teaching my dances. I quickly understood that only through the dance community was it possible to spread the dances that I choreographed. The conclusion I came to is that the long path I took, while I traveled between the many dance sessions and taught, paid off for me. My dances are still danced today, decades after I choreographed them.

As a young dance leader, I had to go through various bumps. At the beginning of the journey, you have to develop "muscles". At the beginning of my journey, I led dancing on the beach in Nahariya. My father and brother came to help me. During the first dance session, another dance leader suddenly appeared, brought his speakers, placed them in front of my speakers, and started to lead dancing at the exact same spot where I was already leading my dance session. My father had to approach the other dance leader and ask him to stop doing it and allow me to continue with my dance session, which had been duly approved in advance. Over time, I expanded this dance session, and it was amazing and joyful. I regret that I don't have any photographic materials from those beautiful days of all my work. There were no cell phones to document it as easily as there are today.

I believe that one must grow from the bottom up. I think the first steps should be through the dance community. Over the years, I have organized many dance sessions in the

Western and Upper Galilee, in cities, on kibbutzim, and on the beaches of Nahariya. I have organized events that have swept up dancers from all over the country to the North. I have worked in educational settings, including projects I have done with youth and immigrant communities from Ethiopia. In addition, I have been invited to teach in workshops and to lead international seminars in many countries and at various dance festivals.

– What do you think about the future of the field?

I have a goal today, and it is to document the path I have taken and will continue to take, both choreographing new dances based on the path I have followed to this day, as well as trying to instill in the next generation the values that the field of folk dance holds: the love for the homeland and the art of choreography through hard work without shortcuts.

In my opinion, a young choreographer like me at the beginning of my journey can break through geographical and social barriers and influence the field through determination, connection to the dancers, and creative thinking.

Professional recognition is important, but it will only come after the dancers have already embraced the choreographer's dances and his path. My dances, such as "Amen Lamilim – Amen to the Words" and "Kesem Chalili – The Magic of the Flute", broke through first to the dancers and only later received an official stamp of approval in competitions and professional settings.

Over the years, I have had periods when the pace of my choreography changed, became slower. I got married. I started a family and I have children, I changed my place of residence and work. I am at peace with everything I have built in my life. I have gone through major changes, in my surroundings and personally. But choreography is always with me in my heart. The love of choreographing something new and the connection to the dancers has always been and will always be there. I had the time to mature and develop within my soul. I have looked much more within myself also into the field that I love so much and the changes it has undergone in all this time. I feel like I am constantly refining my path as a choreographer.

Those who believe in themselves will succeed. There are beautiful moments that I have created that have brought me great happiness during my years in the field.

Today I continue to choreograph, but in a slightly different way. Today it happens out of accumulated experience and a deeper understanding of my path, with a true desire to bring quality and meaning, both in the dances themselves and in the way I approach them.

Oren Shmuel's dance list as it appears on the association's website