

# Dance Today

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Special issue with articles based on papers, performance and panels from the International Conference "Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World," Arizona State University, October 12-15, 2018.





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# Acknowledgements

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We thank Liz Lerman and Naomi Jackson for co-directing the international conference of “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” at Arizona State University (ASU) and we acknowledge that Naomi Jackson encouraged Judith Brin Ingber and Ruth Eshel to realize this Issue no. 36 of *Mahol Akhshav* (Dance Today). It was Eshel who originated the idea that Issue no. 36 should all be in English, devoted to papers, panels, performance and presentations from the international ASU conference transformed into the essays in this issue (Usually the magazine appears with only a few English essays, two times a year).

We thank each of the authors for their originality, research, writing and gifting us with their essays. The authors include Miriam Berger with Joanna Gewertz Harris, Marsha Permuter Kalina and Johanna Climenko; Judith Chazin-Bennahum; Rima Farber; Jennifer Fisher; Laure Guilbert; Yehuda Hyman; Judith Brin Ingber; Marilyn Jackson; Marion Kant; Elizabeth McPherson; Alexander H. Schwan; Silvina

Szperling; Joanne Tucker; Jacqueline Waltz; Diane Wawrejko. We thank Roger Beck for his flawless copy editing. We also thank Lynn Garafola; Judy Libman; Dana K. Kassel; and regarding photos we thank The Museum of the City of New York; the Museum of Tolerance; Yad VaShem; Libby Smigel of the Library of Congress; Andrea Amort and her staff at the Theater Museum of Vienna; Primavera Boman-Behram; Judith Chazin-Bennahum; Sonya Everett; Michael Hunold; Thomas Kunz; Kate Rys for family photos; Wilhelm Willinger; and other individual photographers each credited within the different articles. Regarding translations, some of the authors provided their own, especially Judith Chazin-Bennahum from the French to English; Marion Kant from the German; Laure Guilbert, from both German and French. Alexander H. Schwan from German to English and Jacqueline Waltz from German to English; Silvina Szperling from Spanish to English; other translators were Blanka Brichta from Czech to English; Helen Elazar from Hebrew to English; Tamara Thomasson and Eric Newton from Russian to English.



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Left to right: Ruth Eshel, Giora Manor, Judith Brin Ingber, Israel 1993.

# Thoughts from Editor-in-Chief

## Ruth Eshel

When I received the program for the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” international conference to take place in October 2018 at the University of Arizona, I realized that we here in Israel know very little about the Diaspora Jews’ prodigious activity in the field of dance, nor of the genres and concerns that occupy them. These were the sparks that gave rise to the decision to devote Issue no. 36 of *Mahol Akhshav* (Dance Today) with chosen articles from the conference. Also, I wanted to strengthen the connection between dance scholars in Israel with those from around the world who focus on the subject of Jews and Jewishness in dance.

After receiving permission from the Dance Department of the Ministry of Education, which supports the publication, to bring out an extraordinary issue wholly in English and dedicated not to dance in Israel but to Jewish dance abroad, I turned to Naomi Jackson (who co-directed the conference with Liz Lerman); she was enthusiastic about the idea.

I also invited Judith Brin Ingber to be the guest editor of this issue, and I’m delighted that she agreed. Without her knowledge, her faith in the project’s importance, and the vast amount of work she put into it, this issue would not have been published. She and Giora Manor had put out the first two issues of *Shnaton Mahol belsrael* (The Israel Dance Annual - 1975, 1976), and after Judith returned to the US, Giora edited the annual by himself with Judith still contributing valuable articles, and kept up to date with dance made in Israel.

Giora had two “daughters”, Judith in the US, and myself in Israel. Once he had decided that the time had come for the annual to become a quarterly, he established with me the *Revon Mahol belsrael* (the Israel Dance Quarterly – 1993-99), and after this closed I founded *Mahol Akhshav* in 2000. Accordingly, *Mahol Akhshav* is the “grandchild” of the *Israel Dance Annual* so that the invitation to Judith, and her acceptance to edit, have closed a historic circle.

We dedicate this issue to Giora, who wrote his own dance articles in Hebrew, English, Czech and German – he would relish all the different voices of the authors from so many different places considering a subject he often pondered: Jewishness in the dance world.

The Annual, the Quarterly and *Mahol Akhshav* may be found at <https://www.israeldance-diaries.co.il>. The titles and portions of the articles are translated into English (see website <https://www.israeldance-diaries.co.il/en/>).

Usually I don't post the latest two issues of *Mahol Akhshav* on to the website so as not to pre-empt their sales of the printed magazines in Israel. In this case, however, Issue no.36 will be posted on the website as soon as it is published (see website <https://www.israeldance-diaries.co.il/en/>).

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# Preface

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Naomi Jackson

On a recent trip to Israel in May 2019, I had the pleasure of experiencing the booming dance scene. From the socially conscious work happening in dance and theatre at Western Galilee College, to the multiple activities of the Kibbutz Dance Village and Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, and the innovative dance program for religious women at Orot College of Education, I was impressed at the high quality and passionate commitment by those involved from administrators to teachers and choreographers to dancers.

My trip was inspired by a contingent of wonderful Israelis I met at the conference I co-organized with the renowned choreographer Liz Lerman in October 2018 at Arizona State University (ASU). Our vision for that international conference was to assemble individuals interested in collectively investigating and celebrating connections between Jews and dance across historical periods, dance styles, disciplinary boundaries, religious differences and geographic locations. The result was an event that featured over 100 presenters from eight countries (Israel, Canada, Argentina, France, Germany, Austria, England, and the United States) in forty or so activities, including an evening of screendance, live performance curated by Liz Lerman and Wendy Perron, and a library exhibition.

What I found interesting to hear from the Israeli presenters at ASU was how little interest within Israel did a topic that related Jews and dancing garner. While I continue to reflect on the reasons for this, it seems that it has to do with: 1) it being taken for granted that much dance in Israel is by and for Jews, so why discuss it; 2) that anything that relates “Jews” and “dance” brings to mind dance either along religious lines or addressing recognizably Jewish themes, and these are not considered particularly relevant to the larger purposes of dance as an art form being pursued by many dance supporters in Israel, and 3) that the very terms “Jewish” and “Jewishness” evoke a diasporic Jewish existence that is not only foreign but anathema to an underlying Zionist ideology, with its focus on Hebraic identity and Israeliness.

However, it is around this very question of how Jewishness is constructed differently through the body, movement and dance, both in the Diaspora *and* in Israel, at different times and places, that is proving a fertile field of investigation. In recent years there has been a flourishing of new scholarship attempting to answer this query by authors including Ninotchka Bennahum, Hannah Kosstrin, Hannah Schwadron, and Nina Spiegel. The following articles in this special issue contribute to this recent wave, demonstrating the evolution of the field away from a narrow and limiting concept of “Jewish dance” to what Rebecca Rossen has

conceptualized as “dancing Jewish”—a fluid, shifting notion that is increasingly addressed in an intersectional manner referencing gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, race, religious orientation and nationality.

Perhaps one of the most interesting lessons to be learned from this conceptual shift is that modern Jews have enacted their Jewishness by being some of the most prominent producers of culture through the arts and in so doing, embodied the many, varied and often conflicted feelings they have regarding their identities as Jews (<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox>). This is something that Marion Kant observes when writing about the prominent German Jew, Heinrich Heine, and *Giselle* in her essay in this collection, demonstrating that it was through the ballet that he embodied his desire for an identity free of the trappings of Judeo-Christian religion and rigid social conventions.



*Whatever Begins....also Ends* (1990) by Pola Nirenska. Photo by Sonya Everett

That Jews have created dancing and dances for the stage, screen or broader community, that either obviously or implicitly reveal something profound about the Jewish experience, and that have had a major impact on societies as a whole, is something I hope readers will find fascinating and compelling. Congratulations to Ruth Eshel and Judith Brin Ingber for having the vision and commitment to bringing this issue to fruition. It promises to be a significant means of not only documenting and disseminating material presented at the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” conference, but of leading to an even greater appreciation for scholarship in dance on this important issue.

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# Guest Editor’s Introduction to *Mahol Akhshav* (Dance Today) 36

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Judith Brin Ingber

Extraordinary was the word describing Arizona State University’s (ASU) international research conference<sup>1</sup> “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World,” October 13-15, 2008 in Tempe, Arizona, USA. The conference celebrated and examined the impact of Jewish artists and scholars and the Jewish experience in the dance field and broader communities. As editors of this issue, we continue the inclusivity that was so remarkable at ASU, presenting no exact definition or finality on Judaism, Jews or Jewishness and dance but continuing the dialogue and interactions with the articles we present in this issue. The authors (living in Israel, the United States, Germany, France, England and Argentina) explore a multitude of ideas and aspects of Judaism, as well as individual dancers, some of whom may be introduced for the first time and others who may be well known to readers. Tangentially readers can learn about some of the differences and similarities in the Jewish communities<sup>2</sup> of the Diaspora and Israel (in some of the articles you will read different terms used before Israel’s independence in 1948. The *Yishuv*, British Mandate Palestine and *Eretz* Israel basically refer to the same area). Author biographies follow each article and include each author’s email because they have agreed to be available should you be interested in contacting them.

In “An Israeli Reflects on the Series of Articles on the Subject of Diaspora Jews and Jewishness in Dance,” the Editor-in-Chief, **Ruth Eshel**, considers differences in dance and outlooks between *Klal Yisrael* (or one nationhood of Israel), the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and in Israel regarding ideas she hadn’t considered before attending the ASU conference. **Naomi Jackson**, after her travel to Israel following the ASU conference, writes in her preface about the even wider definitions she discovered in interpreting Jewish identity, especially as it relates to the dance world.

What is our responsibility as dance researchers, writers and editors to the Jewish dancers and the *Shoah* (Holocaust) to remember and to record what happened? It turns out that half of the articles in this issue delve into these questions, reflecting on the Nazification of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its horrid continuity into our time. In **Marion Kant’s** keynote address at ASU and her article, “Then in What Sense Are You Jewish?”, she considers the past centuries and modernity leading up to the Nazi era as it affected individual Jewish artists, including a unique look at the well-known ballet *Giselle* with its Jewish story writer. **Laure Guilbert’s** “Dancers Under Duress: The Forgotten Resistance of Fireflies” paints a picture of the European continent in turmoil with examples of Jewish dance artists and their creativity escaping the Nazis but, if unsuccessful, Guilbert writes

of the ruses developed by the artists against their tormentors to maintain the imprisoned’s inner freedom even in the death camps. **Judith Brin Ingber’s** “Correcting a Published Error: ‘Kamila Rosenbaumová, the Choreographer of Theresienstadt’s *Broučci* and *Brundibár* died in Auschwitz’ and Other Quandaries” writes of the challenges over many years researching through many archives for facts about the Czech choreographer Kamila Rosenbaumová (who actually survived several camps including Auschwitz). **Yehuda Hyman’s** realization that the specter of *Kristallnacht* (Or the Night of Broken Glass, Nov. 9, 1938 when German synagogues, homes, schools and businesses were torched) continues to foul the air in the central square of Freiburg, Germany on the site of its destroyed synagogue. The score for Yehuda Hyman’s “Jew in the Pool” site performance piece is reproduced as text for readers to reimagine his touching ASU performance. Two essays trace the burden and the horror of surviving the *Shoah*. **Rima Faber’s** “Ghosts of the Past: The Creation of Pola Nirenska’s *Holocaust Tetralogy*” describes the poignant choreographic suite by the dancer who had been dropped from Wigman’s final company as a Jew, fled Europe, and received refuge in the US but was irreparably haunted that everyone else in her large family had been murdered by the Nazis. The Viennese Hilde Holger, on the other hand, found refuge far off in India and then thrived in London as a teacher and therapist, illustrated in **Jacqueline Waltz’s** “Hilde Holger: Legacy of an Expressionist, Emigrant, Innovator.” The portrait by **Judith Chazin-Bennahum**, “Ida Rubinstein Faded into Oblivion, Why? (1883-1960)” bridges countries and eras including the Nazi period in analyzing the damning effect of anti-Semitism on Rubinstein’s career.

Five articles feature individual dancers in both North and South America, considering the overt or covert effect of their Jewishness. In **Elizabeth McPherson’s** and **JoAnne Tucker’s** “An Exploration of the Life and Work of Helen Tamiris (1902-1966)”, readers can consider the role of Tamiris’s Jewishness in her color-blind casting on Broadway and her choreographic fervor showing the plight of minorities.

We read about David Allan’s choice to choreograph a Jewish subject ballet for the National Ballet of Canada and its successes including the positive effects on Jewish and Gentile cast members and audiences in **Jennifer Fisher’s** “The Case of David Allan’s 1987 Ballet *Masada*: Did it Matter that the Topic was Jewish?”. In **Diane Wawrejko’s** article “Daniel Nagrin: On ‘This and That’ and Choreographic Methods as Jewishness” the author shows Nagrin’s choreographic output to have been misunderstood, and by using





Vertigo Dance Company, *Mana* (2009) by Noa Wertheim, dancer: Rina Wertheim. Photo by Gadi Dagon

interpretations of *tikkun olam* brings him to a newly valued place amongst the dance modernists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Merilyn Jackson's** "Is All that Jazzy Modern Dance Jewish?" takes us from modern day Israel to Philadelphia in tracing the career of Rami Koresh, not shirking from differences he feels as a *Mizrahi* Yemenite Jew in Israel making his way in the US. In Argentina, dancer/choreographers are not only innovators, but Jews, surprising author **Silvina Sziperling** in her "Jewish Argentine Princess (The Sequel)"; A Possible Point of View about Jewish Choreographers and Dance Teachers in Argentina" spotlighting Ana Itelman, Renata Schottelius and Ana Kamien.

Two articles offer historical perspectives. Firstly, **Alexander H. Schwan** "Theologies of Modern Dance" analyzes how religiousness (and the more general term spirituality) in both Christianity and Judaism affected dance aesthetics and choreographers in Europe, the United States and the *Yishuv* in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, to heal individuals in their families and communities is implicit in the discussion "Dance as Therapy: A Jewish Perspective" emphasizing *tikkun olam* as a driving force for the writers **Miriam Roskin Berger**, **Joanna Gewertz Harris**, **Masha Perlmutter Kalina** and **Johanna Climenko**.

We close pointing up the Kabbalistic coincidence of this issue of *Mahol Akhshav* or *Dance Today's* Number 36. It is said that the world rests on 36 righteous souls, anonymous in the world, but necessary for its existence. We wonder which 36 dancers might the readers consider, especially after reading the biographies of such special choreographers and performers? We also reflect on 36 through Jewish numerology which assigns each Hebrew letter a mathematical equivalent. The Hebrew word for life is spelled with two Hebrew letters equaling 18 (the Hebrew letter *het*, equivalent to the number 8, followed by *yod*, the equivalent of the number 10). We find this issue of the magazine assuredly lively, filled with daring and perseverance despite the *Shoah*, bringing history to life and meaning in today's world, doubling the enchanting Hebrew number of 18 for an even stronger, vital 36. Enjoy this dynamic issue of *Mahol Akhshav* or *Dance Today* Number 36.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Co-creators of the Arizona State University (ASU) conference were **Naomi Jackson** and **Liz Lerman**. Naomi Jackson was its lead organizer; she is Associate Professor in ASU's School of Film, Dance and Theatre and has written several books including: *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion* (co-edited with Toni Shapiro-Phim, Scarecrow Press) and *Converging Movements: Modern Dance and Jewish Culture at the 92nd Street Y* (Wesleyan University Press) as well as articles in such publications as *Dance Research Journal* and *Dance Chronicle*. In the spring, she presented the keynote address at the Conney Conference on Jewish Arts at the 92Y, New York City. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Od-hTMmeWI> (accessed June 30, 2019). Naomi.Jackson@asu.edu. Liz Lerman, choreographer, performer, writer of three published books, and the recipient of numerous honors, including a 2002 MacArthur Genius Grant is ASU's first Institute Professor at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, making an on-line resource, the Atlas of Creative Tools, for people in all fields seeking creative solutions in their work. She is also a member of Temple Micah in Washington, DC where she has collaborated with the congregation and its rabbis over the past several decades. As part of Synagogue 2000 she introduced dance for congregational life throughout the United States and also ran a program called Moving Jewish Communities that brought Jewish dance artists together for shared learning.

<sup>2</sup> To understand differences and history of Jewish communities in the Diaspora and in Israel, see the essay by Judith Brin Ingber in the ASU program, pages 76-78 <https://jewishstudies.clas.asu.edu/jewishdance-about> (accessed June 25, 2019).



Photos taken by Marion Kant of an open air exhibition in Philadelphia, 2019

## Then in What Sense Are You Jewish?

### Marion Kant

*PRIMO LEVI: I had an argument with a believer ...*  
*FERDINANDO CAMON: You're not a believer?*  
*LEVI: No, I never have been. I'd like to be, but I don't succeed.*  
*CAMON: Then in what sense are you Jewish?*  
*LEVI: A simple matter of culture. If it hadn't been for the racial laws and the concentration camp, I'd probably no longer be a Jew, except for my last name. Instead, this dual experience, the racial laws and the concentration camp, stamped me the way you stamp a steel plate. At this point I'm a Jew, they've sewn the star of David on me and not only on my clothes.*  
*CAMON: With whom did you have that argument?*  
*LEVI: ... he's the one mentioned as "the assistant" in the "Potassium" story... he came to see me after my release to tell me I was clearly one of the elect, since I'd been chosen to survive in order for me to write "Survival in Auschwitz" (the autobiographical book Levi wrote in 1947). And this, I must confess, seemed to me a blasphemy, that God should grant privileges, saving one person and condemning someone else...*  
*CAMON: Meaning that Auschwitz is proof of the nonexistence of God?*  
*LEVI: There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God... (Levi 2003, 51).*

This short exchange summarizes the tensions around the conceptions of being Jewish. These tensions are not new. Today, as we are facing a further deterioration of values and instability of identity on the one hand and a quest to secure our individual and communal identities on the other, we should confront, as Levi did, the question of 'being Jewish'.

Levi's summary points to three of the main themes in question regarding modern Jewish existence: religion versus the secular,

the national versus the individual and election, that is, belonging to a "chosen people" whose existence and identities are justified with religious, national or secular rationalizations. These dynamics between religious, secular and national identities emerged in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. For 200 years, from 1789 to 1989, we, the people in European and Western countries, have lived in the Age of Enlightenment, with ideas in practice which have been defined by the principles of the French Revolution: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality and brotherhood); they are also the ideas articulated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776. We have lived in the age of reason, with the assumption that progress marked the future of civilized society; that facts, the sciences, proof, evidence and reasonable argumentation guided human existence rather than irrational beliefs, blind devotion, or popular superstition; we relied on legal frames and rational jurisdiction. The Enlightenment brought us the concept of emancipation of individuals, the concepts of the rights of man, the rights of the citizen – it brought us the "Jewish Question" and the "Women's Question". The "Jewish Question" and the "Women's Question" are the names given to the debates that ran through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and that stand for problems concerning the status and place of Jews and women in society. These questions were condensations of social issues put into striking formulations; the names circumscribe those two groups that would demand emancipatory rights for themselves after the promise of liberty and equality. As a direct consequence of taking rights for individuals seriously and of abolishing the rights of the corporate bodies of the ancient regimes, particularly those of religious institutions, Jews and women began to test just how much equality and liberty could be bestowed on them and how a society

facing radical change would be able to cope with the extension of civil, social and political rights.

As a result of the possibility to claim a new civil status for groups heretofore ignored, two more major ideologies emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century alongside the liberalism of the republic: Marxism with its vision of liberating the oppressed working people, the proletariat, and nationalism with its racial theory that saw its chance in liberating the forgotten and suppressed national entities in Europe. Both ideologies emerged as reactions to the rationalism of the enlightenment; both were extensions of revolution as well as counter-revolution and they projected their grand visions of future societies onto a dynamic and explosive social reality. (In addition, both can substitute for conventional religions). They integrated scientific methods into their philosophies and politics and managed to justify their utopian visions in such a way that both could be turned into mass movements. They both also were built on the interpretation of rights: Marxism on the right of economic justice as well as opposition to social and economic inequality and nationalism on the right of national self-determination and the recognition of difference rather than a blanket statement of sameness. Both also integrated the “Jewish Question” into their projections: if Jews were prepared to understand their class status and work towards the abolition of economic inequality, then they too would be liberated and be equal in a society striving towards total equality. As one of several results, many Jews became attracted to this ideal of social justice in action as it offered them that public space that they had not been able to gain. They would no longer be condemned to be second or third-class citizens of the bourgeois world; they could articulate their own liberation. Many became engaged, the Bundist movement is one example, the early Zionist movement in its socialist incarnation another. Social democracy, socialism and communism had such a high proportion of Jews involved in their theoretical articulation and practical realization because a restricting and restrictive Judaism could be left behind.

Nationalist ideologies, on the other hand, never made such promises; they are built on exclusion. Jews were the people without land and without roots; they could never become part of the pure and true people of a specific geographical area. They could never ‘belong’; blood and soil let culture blossom and Jews had no soil, thus no culture of their own. They would have to remain separate and therefore without the same rights as those who could claim ancient and original roots. Nationalism’s romantic background, just as the origins of the independent, autonomous self that acts on the assumption of agency and free will, grew from that set of “negative dialectics”, as Adorno and Horkheimer called them, that turned enlightened universalism and universal equality into their opposites. But socialist as well as nationalist identities were corporate - they were group, i.e. class or community bound. Liberal ideologies, on the other hand, emphasised opportunities to be taken by the individual.

The promises of the Enlightenment did not lead to the harmonious and free world that was envisioned in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Regardless of all the rights that were acquired over the past 200 years, we never reached that ideal state of human harmonic interaction and

equilibrium that would end war, want and wretchedness. Instead of social and economic equality, inequality and corruption have spread. In fact, the “negative dialectics” brought about the culmination of nationalism and racism in Nazi Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the elevation of the most extreme inequality imaginable to state doctrine and as its result, the extermination of European Jewry. Religion and nationalism have returned with a vengeance.

In one way the “Jewish Question” seemed solved in that Jews in 1945 were either murdered or destined to withdraw from the project of assimilation, acculturation and integration into the societies of European modern, industrialized countries. The choices that Emancipation had forced upon the new citizens of Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries became a plague again: self-identity as well as publicly imposed or communal, corporate identities and the attempt to navigate between extremes. That was particularly relevant for those Jews who took the promise of Emancipation seriously as well as for the art of movement: Emancipation offered the Jewish self a new body that could move, that had to move differently in social spaces, metaphorically as well as literally, physically. But dialectically and paradoxically, the multi-dimensional self would henceforth feel the urge to condense itself into a core identity, a struggle, that of course can only bring about a clash of identity imaginations – not clarity but quest. External and communal pressures to conform would be matched by internal desires to freely choose one’s concept of self. And just as much as self-identification in relation to publicly imposed identity clashed, the identity of the self also entered into a tension-laden relationship to that of the group. For Jews, this was a threefold tense negotiation: the internalized self-struggling to become intelligible, the self in opposition to the harmony within the group to which the self supposedly belonged and the perception of characteristics externally imposed or expected from self and group. These tensions, in the end, were insoluble, and these tensions are haunting us today ever more.

The emancipated Jewish body was forced to react and appropriate social spaces and needed to coordinate internal, private self-conception with its public, that is its political and social experiences and the perceived identities it was supposed to have or display. In the beginning of this process of “freedom from self-incurred tutelage” (Kant, 1784) the Jewish body had to negotiate between the pull back to religious adherence, to the corporate conception of Jews legitimately Jewish only within the rabbinic interpretation of life, or the move towards the freedom to leave the ghetto that had held the body within a confined, separate social space. But the ghetto too produced a specific mentality and resided within the body as mental power; the ghetto could become the symbol of the conservation of security and tradition rather than freedom. This Jewish body [initially and primarily the male Jewish body] thus had to constantly choose: it had to confront the problem of social or external versus self-perceived or internal identity and conceptions of being Jewish.

The Jewish body would have to prove itself as Jewish human being as well as citizen of a state or a nation or, in Kantian terms, as a private and public Jew. That would apply to the Jewish artist as well. This apposition of private and public has entered our language and

our consciousness; it has helped us to articulate the boundaries of the self and the boundaries of the modern condition. A Jew would have to observe Mosaic religious principles – privately, at home in the private sphere – yet also, and at the same time, be the democratically minded citizen of a state and publicly conceal those markers of religious adherence that are also markers of difference and distinction.

It is within this juxtaposition of public and private that we see one of the first serious problems emerging for the Jews after enlightened thought was institutionalized in the *Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in August 1789 through the French Revolution. Jews now entered into double loyalties: to their religious communities with their customs and habits as well as to the states or republics within which they lived. Immediately, species/universal human being and public/private perceptions began to clash. Jews found themselves newly imprisoned by precisely those conditions that were supposed to guarantee freedom. With the strengthening of the nation state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of, for instance, France, Germany and Italy, another layer of identity added itself to the already complicated relationship of allegiance to the state. Nationality and extreme nationalism with their tendencies toward ethnogenesis made Jewish integration into the European nation states more difficult as the Jews, perceived as an always alien nation would never be able to fulfill concepts of purity of roots, origin and belonging that nationalists postulated within racial ideologies. Marxism, an economic determinist social model, attracted so many Jews in the later 19th c, particularly in Eastern Europe, because “it eliminated racial or national distinctions and argued that international class struggle defined modern human existence.” Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish Jewish woman, could therefore lead the German communist movement and envision a socialist future for Russian or French workers.

Judaism, as all religions, is based on corporate identity that the religious observer has to internalize and as such it reduces the individual to the believer and member of the religious community – religious laws and the corporate form of religious organization demand the whole human being and do not allow the private/public separation that the modern state mandates. The modern individual as citizen is required to deny the corporate nature of religion and subvert or hide identifiers of religious loyalties. These identifiers are usually attached to the body and are material representations of ideas and principles such as the Christian cross, the monk’s or nun’s habit, the *chador* or *burqa* [enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions], the Jewish *yarmelka* or *kippa* [skull cap] and the orthodox Jewish women’s *sheitel* [wig], etc. The contemporary debate on wearing the *burqa* is merely one example of how this debate plays out today. The *burqa* is not a fashion choice, it is a requirement for Muslim women to wear as a sign of religious adherence, just as Jewish orthodox men or women have to indicate adherence to their religion through clothing. The emphasis of individual rights in the revolutionary context of 1789 made this tension between the citizen and the corporation manifest and it asserted its own rights over it.

Religious identity can never be only a personal, individual matter; religious organization requires corporate, communal frameworks.

The demand to make the practice of religion a private activity lead to the insoluble paradox that religion can never be entirely private and always calls for the extension of the private into the public sphere. Yet demonstration of religious observance is supposed to be confined to the private sphere and not intrude into the public sphere of state institutions. That, of course, also necessitates the perpetual re-definition and drawing of boundaries of private, public and state spheres.

The arts were immensely important agents in the interpretation of Emancipation. Ballet, as part of the performance arts, was a social intervention that allowed the articulation of the new, bourgeois self as well as its refutation. It is hardly surprising that the theatrical European stage was conquered by Jews, who recognised that it was the perfect space to discuss all matters relating to Emancipation and liberation – to the point that Leopold Jessner in the 1920s asked whether the German theatre was a Jewish invention and had been completely ‘Jewified’ (Jessner, 1923). The theatre, and ballet in particular, as a public institution became an ideal place to challenge the boundaries of being ‘Jewish’.

The ballet *Giselle*, first performed in Paris in 1841 might not be a work most will associate with Jewishness or Jews. Yet the story of a dancing young woman who dies because she is betrayed by her beloved was written by one of the most prominent German Jews: Heinrich Heine, who embodied the difficulty of Jewish Emancipation like no other writer. The story of *Giselle* is about a fatal attraction, about Emancipation gone wrong and a society that could not tolerate a woman articulating and liberating herself through dance.

Heine analyzed religions, new and old, so that he could understand the choices that the new age enforced: “Yes, I repeat the words...: freedom is a new religion, the religion of our age. If Christ is not the God of this religion, he is still one of its high-priests, and his name shines consolingly in the hearts of its children. But the French are the chosen people of the new religion, the first gospels and dogmas were penned in their language. Paris is the New Jerusalem, and the Rhine is the Jordan which separates the land of Freedom from the land of the Philistines” (Heine, 1887, 79).

Heine explored the Christian and Mosaic religions but also pagan belief systems, and their legacies. He examined the process of blending these belief strands together and demanded that humanity abandon Judeo-Christian asceticism and the cult of suffering, pain and redemption through denial of the physical, and return to a more liberated, hedonistic, body-orientated culture that remembered Greco-Roman pleasures. He developed these ideas in his literary works, but above all in his ballet libretti, among them the tale of the *wilis*, the abandoned brides who are punished for refusing to submit to social norms.

Heine was the author who made his audiences aware of the ‘Jewish Question’ – because he was a Jew, and the ‘Women’s Question’ – because he recognised the similarities and social dynamite that both social problems contained. He examined Emancipation through his writings on movement and the moving body which contained a most important insight: emancipation was only then



complete when it liberated body as well as mind. His fascination with the physicality of Emancipation could therefore find in ballet and movement an ideal art form. Heine’s movement aesthetic was not specifically Jewish, it was the postulation of freedom for those who had not acquired it yet and it was conceived by a deeply conflicted German Jew, battling over the meaning of Jewish Emancipation. Giselle, therefore, is as much Jewish as she is not Jewish at all.

This discourse on Emancipation, full of hatred and animosity, found its expression in the anti-Semitic interpretation of the argument of the people without land and without an authentic culture that composer Richard Wagner advanced (Wagner, 1850/1869). For him and nationalist Germans like him, Jews could never be creative and were condemned to borrow, steal and imitate. The German-Jewish dispute of the 1850s played out directly between artists: Heinrich Heine, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Richard Wagner: Jews by their religious, and according to Wagner, their innate biological nature as well, had betrayed art and therefore had to be deprived of German nationality – and the ability to create art.

Many of these arguments still haunt us. We are caught ever more between the fracturing that individualization as process of modernization brought about and the pull towards a secure return to a communal fold, be that a national, religious or ethnic community setting. But can you be both at the same time – a highly authentic individual and part of a religious, i.e. corporate community held together by corporate principles? The individual versus the community, the individual as private as well as public being: these are the insoluble contradictions of modernity. We cannot escape them, just as Heine or Levi could not. But the art of movement can embody the cultural and political conditions of a society rather than only reflect individual desires. It can take political responsibility, act as contemplative agent and explore positions and solutions.

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# Dancers Under Duress: The Forgotten Resistance of Fireflies

Laure Guilbert

*“The dance of the fireflies, this moment of grace that resists the world of terror, is the most ephemeral, the most fragile thing that exists”.*

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2009).

**The “Unknown Dancer”**

In the past years, I have undertaken many archival trips in Europe and to Australia, searching for traces of the life of the German-speaking dancers and choreographers who fled the Third Reich and occupied Europe. During that time, it became clear to me that much work also needs to be undertaken so that we might gain a deeper understanding of the tragedy: those dancers, choreographers and dance producers who were trapped in ghettos and deported to extermination camps. In this paper I outline several fields of reflection that have enabled me to begin tracing the plight of those artists caught up in Nazi totalitarianism.

Certainly not all escaped the eye of the storm, not the least being René Blum, director of the renowned Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, which he inherited upon the death of Serge Diaghilev. Like his brother Léon Blum, the former French Prime Minister of the “Front Populaire”, René Blum refused to desert his country. He was captured in Paris in December 1941 in the very first round-up of French notables organized by the French and German police. He was transferred to the Nazi transit camp of Compiègne-Royallieu and then to the French transit camps of Pithiviers and Drancy, located near Paris. From Drancy, which was the main hub for Jews rounded up in occupied France, René Blum was deported in September 1942 to Auschwitz, where he was tortured and murdered not long after his arrival.

Then there is the tragic case of those who succeeded in escaping the Nazis more than once. The Latvian modern dancer, Tatjana Barbakoff (born Cilly Edelberg) was one. She had a successful career in Germany as an independent solo performer in cabarets and theaters. Many painters and sculptors portrayed her in her exotic Chinese and Russian stage costumes. She began her escape with her costume trunk under the pretext of a tour, arriving in Paris in 1933 with her companion, Gert H. Wollheim, painter of the Düsseldorf avant-garde. In May 1940, when the “enemy aliens” law (instigated after the German invasion in France by the Daladier government) was applied to foreign women, Tatjana Barbakoff had to spend several weeks in the Gurs internment camp in the Pyrénées. She was released after the Armistice of June 1940 and was able to hide during part of the war with her companion the help of a peasant woman near Lourdes in the so-called “Free Zone” governed by the Vichy Regime. But when she went to Nizza, looking for a safer place, she was captured in January 1944 by the Gestapo.

She was sent to Drancy, deported from there to Auschwitz, and was gassed upon her arrival.

Apart from these tragic cases, which have been detailed by other researchers, I made a discovery that left me speechless while reading *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* by the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim from Vienna. In his book, Bettelheim analyzes the resources he managed to mobilize for surviving his own internment from 1938-1939 in the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, and Buchenwald, near Weimar. Bettelheim at one point describes an event that takes place in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. He sets the scene at the entrance to a gas chamber, and describes a naked woman ordered to dance by an SS officer who had learned she was a dancer. Instead, as if dancing towards the man, she surprises him, seizing his gun and shooting him to death, before being killed herself by other SS officers. Bettelheim concludes his narrative considering that the dancer’s reaction had been that of an individual who had recovered her free will in the last seconds of her life. This story had a profound effect upon me.

What stunned me? First of all, I could in no way conceive *a priori* that any danced movement could be expressed by an enslaved body in such a place. A dancer dancing in this site, representing the ultimate attack on humanity, seemed to be both derisory and miraculous. But especially, this narrative appeared to come out of a deep oblivion and to float outside of any defined historiographical landscape. How can one contextualize the singularity of this explosion of violence in the middle of Hell? It is, on the one hand, a desperate dance, condemned within the territorial and temporal abnormality of an extermination camp. And at the same time, it is a dance that represents an ultimate resistance, foiling both its Nazi oppressors and the Auschwitz system.

For Bettelheim this tragedy serves as a metaphor for his own reflection on survival, rather than being the subject of a detailed historical analysis of an event which happened in this specific place (Bettelheim gives no reference for his sources of this story). It would undeniably need to be crossed-referenced with other sources in order to understand the way this story has circulated in both oral transmission and written testimonies. But this first reading opened my own need to research this astonishing story and to look more deeply at dance in the camps. As particular as this episode first appears, it has rich significance and meaning in its general over-



view. The voice of the SS officer who gave the order to dance and the ensuing “contra-dance” by the condemned woman are symbols and expressions of two opposite worlds, each one carrying its own cultural systems of belonging: the world of the SS executioners and the world of the Jewish victims.

In this sense, the “archive of the body” at the heart of Bettelheim’s description needs to be rescued from oblivion and re-connected to a global socio-political history of bodies under duress in the 20th century, a history that encompasses dancing bodies. Also, it is a history that chooses as its new center the naming of the forgotten victims and gives them back their rightful voice and place. It is not a matter of building a memorial, but of approaching the modes of writing about contemporary history with a critical outlook. The Israeli historian Kobi Kabalek also uses this approach, which takes a detour to unexplored margins of history and of historiography. As a specialist in the history of memory, he tells us: “Peripheral perspectives can introduce unusual ways of seeing our relationship with the past and of raising questions about the forms and functions of centers.” With this perspective in mind, five fields of reflection emerge for future in-depth exploration.

**1) The SS Worldview**

The cross referencing of several testimonies of Auschwitz survivors and “*Sonderkommando*” survivors, as well as of SS officials of that camp, attest indeed to the tragedy described by Bettelheim. It took place on 23 October 1943, in the so-called “Sauna” (changing room of the “showers”) of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Crematorium II, just after the arrival of a transport. The woman in question was Franciszka Mannova, who had been a talented and famous dancer on the Warsaw stage during the interwar years. The SS man was Sergeant Josef Schillinger, at his post in Auschwitz from October 1942. He was renowned for his cruelty, underlined during the Eichmann trial in 1961. Early accounts of the event describe the speed with which the news circulated in the camp, highlighting the hope that Franciska Mannova’s reaction had inspired among the prisoners. The re-telling of the event made such a lasting impression on them that some will mention it in their post-war testimonies, even though they have not been direct witnesses to what had happened. But the sheer number and diversity of survivor narratives confirms that the dancer’s murder took on a mythic status, irrespective of the actual facts surrounding the event. This process of transformation of reality also extends to Bettelheim’s text itself. But rather than focusing in this article on this specific case, which deserves its own article, it is useful to re-connect this event to other forms of violence through dance perpetuated by the SS themselves in the camps. Effectively, the order given by this SS sergeant inserted itself in what one could call a “SS gesture”. That is to say, a gesture that is an act of domination structured by the *NS-Weltanschauung* (National-Socialist worldview). Such a gesture, which gave the right to life or death over another, was embodied as a norm within the SS elite. Its epic vision showed who should be included or excluded from the new millennial Aryan Empire.

All over Nazi Europe, in ghettos, transit camps and concentration camps, forced labor and extermination camps, one finds scattered and tiny traces of various forms of humiliation and torture

through body movement imposed on deportees, whether professional dancers or not. Depending on the functions assigned to each camp, these took, among others, the form of orders given to one or more inmates to dance during a “Nazi action” in front of a pit, or a gas chamber or also on the occasion of a visiting dignitary. Many extermination camps had their orchestra of inmates who were also, among others, forced to perform as their companions were being marched to their deaths. Singers were also required to perform. But, with the exception of the Westerbork transit camp located in the north of the Netherlands (which had an official cabaret troupe with dancers), it seems as if the forced dance practices have been more dependent on arbitrary decisions of the SS officers. However, through these persecutions meted out on the Jewish body (and also on the Roma body), the SS elite were proclaiming their supposed superiority – their status as *Kulturschaffender* (creators of culture) - whose self-appointed role was to create a “New Man” and to save the world from the “impurity” of the “sub-human”. During these specific moments, the body of those who danced became the place of destruction of the so-considered Jewish *Gegenvolk* (“sub-human people”). Their bodies became the target and the place where the hatred of the persecutors inscribed itself.

Although practiced in the secret confines of the Reich, these assaults on the “impure” body can be mapped against the larger and older geography of anti-Semitic attacks. This would include the tradition of caricatures deriding the Jewish body, as well as the emergence of nationalist conceptions of art developed from the 19th century. Although not deterministic, this historical process found its most extreme form in the Nazi industrial production system based on the racial Aryan utopia, initiated by the political leaders of the Third Reich and conceived as a radical eugenic project of reshaping a whole population by the means of ideology and technology. In this way, while German artists were encouraged to create a so-called new Germanic art, German-Jewish artists, who had played a central role in the German cultural space, were excluded. This chain of violence, intertwining engaged art and racial exclusion, took place also in the choreographic world, at the hands of a majority of “Aryan” modern and ballet artists whose fame lingers today, including, among others, Rudolf von Laban, Harald Kreutzberg, Dorothee Günther (choreographic collaborator to the composer Carl Orff), Gret Palucca and Mary Wigman in Germany; Rosalia Chladek in Austria; or the Russian dancer Serge Lifar in France, director of the Paris Opera Ballet.

**2) Dance as a Mode of Survival for the Deportees**

A second field of reflection concerns the “body techniques” and the forms of creativity put into play by the deportees themselves in order to survive. The traces left in various forms by writers, musicians, actors and painters attest, as for dance, that artistic practices have been a mode of survival. The latter responded to several needs: the struggle for preserving one’s identity as a person and to resist or circumvent the continuous humiliations, as well as the need for recreating moments of community.

Bettelheim explains that the “cleavage of personality” was an unavoidable way to survive this type of totalitarian society. In such a

society everything was done to rob the individual of one’s dignity and disconnect the person from any symbolic activity or family roots and social life. Here, one must try at the same time to adjust to Nazi arbitrariness to preserve one’s life, and to try to preserve a tiny space of inner life to keep one’s integrity as a person. For some, as for the French Communist writer Charlotte Delbo, the “ruse” consisted of silently reciting poetry during roll call. For others, take the example of the modern dancer Helena Katz (the future Helen Lewis), from Trutnov in Bohemia, who was deported to the nearby ghetto of Theresienstadt, then to the extermination camps of Auschwitz and of Stutthof, near Danzig. She met the challenge in the way she cared for her body, trying to maintain a daily ritual of washing herself even with only a very small amount of water, despite the scarcity of water, the cold and her state of extreme exhaustion and starvation. These almost intangible gestures helped some to preserve their capacity to recoil against the perverse logic of the extermination camps. This is what the French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman calls “a slight tear in despair,” in order to create “a place despite everything, a parcel of humanity” in which to retreat.

Other ruses were invented to try to bear and circumvent the strategies used by the SS men. Among these was a so-called “sport competition” at the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, near Berlin. Here the inmates were forced to perform an exhausting “Indian dance”, with movements of crouching and of getting up, with incessant turns. At each rotation, the Polish anti-fascist musician and composer Aleksander Kulisiewicz fixed his gaze on the camp door in order to keep his balance. This improvised technique, close to the ballet technique of spotting or staring at a fixed spot during pirouettes, helped him to avoid the dizziness the SS guards were expecting.

A third ruse consisted of skirting the incessant controls and the perverted and fragmented social relations purposely caused by a camp’s daily work demands by reinventing small forms of dialogue and solidarity in the barracks before curfew. In her first testimony of 1946, Krystina Zywulska (who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto and survived Auschwitz as a political prisoner, having hidden her Jewish identity), describes furtive exchange of readings, recitation of poems written by the prisoners, but also sometimes, for the religious holidays, brief dance or singing moments despite the prohibitions. They were often at the initiative of prisoners more resilient than others. Thus, the young Hungarian Judith Schischa-Halevy (the future Yehudit Arnon) offered movements and miming entertainments for her Auschwitz comrades by doing splits between the slabs used for beds, and pulling imaginary boats. The Hungarian Eva Fahidi-Pusztai, a lover of healing gymnastics since her youth, also described in her testimony the small shows and dance evenings she took part in with her fellow inmates *in Münchmühle*, a labor annex camp of Buchenwald, near Weimar.

These strategies also extended to helping imprisoned children. In the ghettos, it was usually forbidden to teach the children. Even though this was also the case in the Theresienstadt ghetto near Prague, from time to time children were taken by adult dancers onto the ramparts in order to secretly exercise and dance. It would be likely that Kamila Rosenbaumova, a dancer from Prague, would have been at the origin of this initiative. Helena Katz also was introduced to a group of dancers from the first day of her arrival. In Theresienstadt, the prisoners “benefited” from a particular self-administration that allowed them to develop various cultural and artistic activities. Rosenbaumova was able, for example, to choreograph two children’s operas, *Broučci*, [The Little Boy Firefly Named Broučci] and *Brundibar* [the Wicked Barrel-Organ Player] which were performed a large number of times for prisoners between 1942 to 1945.



Tatjana Barbakoff, 1927, photo: Wilhelm Willinger (private collection G.G.)

Another ruse lay in the SS command performances themselves. In the extermination camp of Stutthof, Helena Katz, on the verge of death, had been included in the preparation of an official show, at the initiative of an inmate who knew Helena Katz was a dancer. The show, supervised by SS guards, included theatre, music, songs and dances and was to be performed for the whole camp for Christmas. Being included in this type of activity made it possible for a while to escape the threat of the gas chambers. The inmates could even occasionally be excused from work during the duration of rehearsals, and would receive a slightly larger ration of food. At her first rehearsal, Helen Katz recognized the ballet music of *Coppélia*, in which she had danced in her former life. She choreographed a waltz helping her fellow performers who had been having trouble learning what to do to the music. At the end of the rehearsal, the prisoners were so impressed by her involvement that they asked her to dance for them. To her own surprise and despite her frozen feet, her body reacted instinctively to a South American musical piece played by an accordionist inmate and her improvised dance arose. The admiring circle of inmates suddenly formed around her, building up another kind of space despite the camp, a momentary space of a communal performing group united by the joy of dance and music. This unexpected moment had also the effect of protecting the group from the eyes of the SS woman guard.

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In the same way, the Viennese Alma Rose, conductor and violinist at Auschwitz, said herself that she played with closed eyelids in official concerts refusing to look at the SS officers so as to avoid stirring up their hatred, expressed in their faces. The French-Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has theorized this question. For him, the gaze and the visage symbolize humanity, and are a place where transcendence is concretized and revealed: “The encounter of the visage, the meeting of the eyes should be what prohibits the murder.”

### 3) Poetics of Memory

A third field of reflection focuses on the forms taken by the poet-ics of memory in the post-Holocaust world of the second part of the 20th century. Here again, it is a question of linking the paths opened by the “survivor’s dance” to those initiated by the other arts, in particular, the art of writing.

In *The Story of a Life*, the Romanian Israeli writer Aharon Appelfeld, who experienced ghetto, camp and hidden life in Ukrainian forests, recalled the profound corporeality of memory, and the difficulty of associating words with the ebb and flow of traumatic memory. He wrote, “These images are sometimes as violent as a shot, then disappear as if they refused to be revealed...” For his part, Primo Levi wrote in his memoirs of the almost impossibility in which language found itself to express a reality that exceeded the limits of representation, “Reason, art, poetry do not help us to decipher the place from which they have been banished.”

Yet, if writers struggled with the fallibility of words in expressing the destruction of humanity, other forms of expression may have offered comfort to survivors. Hamburg-born Paula Padani, performed through the first Joint Distribution Committee’s artistic touring program in manifold Displaced Person (DP) camps within the American occupation zone. In order to help survivors regain hope when they were held sometimes for years in DP camps, she presented her solo programs inspired by the beauty of the Near East landscape and by the ancestral traditions of Jewish life, including her dance *Horah* (sic) based on the dance brought from the Balkans and Romania to Palestine, as a new symbol of Zionist life. Paula Padani started her career as a dancer and a dance teacher only after she had arrived in Palestine following her escape from Europe. She had completed her dance studies at the Wigman School in Dresden in 1935 shortly before her exile. Her route as she fled took her from Germany to Switzerland, to Italy, and for a short time to Athens where her sister lived and where Padani gave a few dance classes. She then continued to Damascus, where an acquaintance, a professor at the *Lycée Français*, helped her to enter Palestine illegally via the town of Metullah by passing her off as his children’s governess. After World War II, she returned to Europe to tour the DP camps, performing first in 1946 and again in 1948. During those tours, however, she avoided visiting her master teacher, Mary Wigman, who she knew had been involved until the last days in the choreographic life of the Third Reich.

According to Alexis Nouss, a specialist in the work of Paul Celan, the French-Romanian poet deported to a forced labor camp in Moldavia, survivors needed time to let their traumatic memories transform into a “medium of the lived”. This slow acceptance would allow them to access a form of poetics having a value of creative ethics.

For several survivors educated in dance and body culture in their youth, it seems that movement preceded the writing of their testimony in their post-Holocaust life, as if it were first necessary to heal the body before finding the words to articulate their “ghost memory.” Such is the case of Helena Katz Lewis who only took up the pen when she was elderly. She accomplished much before that. Following her liberation, she married a childhood friend, Harry Lew-

is, in Prague, moved to Ireland, had two children, and started to teach dance. In 1962, she founded the first modern dance group in Belfast, which gave a decisive impulse to the development of modern dance and choreography in Northern Ireland. The love of her family and her choreographic involvement with young generations helped her to find a path of resilience. Her book *A time to Speak*, published in 1992, attests to the remarkable maturity of a woman who has been able to look back to her past from a reconstructed and accomplished present. The vital inspiration of dance radiates at the very heart of her sober writing. Her book is at the same time that of a dancer who has been able to draw the strength from her body to go through the ordeal of the camps, and that of a survivor who found in dance the means of reinventing her life after the destruction of the *Shoah*.

The Hungarian Eva Fahidi-Pusztai also waited for decades before she felt able to write about the murder of her entire family during the massive deportation of the Hungarian Jews in the summer 1944. She herself was among the very few to be selected for forced labor on arrival in Auschwitz (rather than for the crematoria). She was sent to *Münchmühle*, in Germany, where she worked for the armaments industry. At the age of 90 in October 2015, she created *Sea Lavender – or the Euphoria of Being*, a dance and theatre performance in Budapest with the young dancer Emese Cuhorka. They have toured Europe tirelessly ever since. For Eva Fahidi-Pusztai “With gestures and movements, you can be freer than with words”. Writing and dancing in her old age helped her to overcome the past, to unburden herself from the weight of hate against her tormentors and from the guilt of surviving her family: “I am alive and I love life.”

For her part after the War, far from Europe, in Israel, Yehudit Arnon had come to terms with her traumatic experience by studying and teaching dance. She transmitted something from her own survivor experience many years later by creating the Kibbutz Dance Company at Kibbutz Ga’aton in 1970. Her remarkable and well-known story shows how deeply she understood the need for poetry and the exercise of freedom through dance. This understanding was directly rooted in her experience during the Holocaust. She had indeed promised herself in Auschwitz-Birkenau that she would dedicate her life to dance if she survived the humiliations and tortures of her persecutors. She kept her promise and gave her company in the Galilee an international stature by inviting European choreographers to create for its repertory. Her former student, Rami Be’er, a Sabra child born in the kibbutz to Holocaust survivors, became the artistic director of the company in 1996 and continues to transmit the ethical message of Yehudit Arnon. In 2009, he was one of the first Israeli born choreographers to create a work about the *Shoah* called *Aide Mémoire*.

Through their lives shaped by the struggle to survive, their commitment to remembrance and the quest for meaning, these survivors showed how creativity was and remains a central motor for the desire to be alive. They found answers for themselves rooted in their bodily emotions, with ways to transmit their experiences to others. Their existential path intersected with the research of survivor therapists, such as the Viennese psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who put the search for meaning at the center of his method of “logothera-

py”, which he conceived of as helping people to overcome grief and their most painful experiences.

Others, however, have not been able to overcome the collective trauma of the loss of their loved ones and the weight of the resulting void. This is the case of the dancer and choreographer Pola Nirenska, one of the few survivors of a large family, who, like Primo Levi, ended up committing suicide despite a resilient life. She had been trained at the Wigman school and started her stage career as a member of the Wigman group in 1930. She participated in three successive Wigman groups, the last touring America in 1932-33, Wigman’s last company during the Weimar Period. Because the company disbanded, Pola Nirenska returned to her native Warsaw and taught at the Conservatory. But by 1935, observing a growing anti-Semitism during her artistic tours to Austria and Italy, she fled to England. There, she gave dance recitals and choreographed during the war for the British Army and the Home Front. Impoverished, she nonetheless reached the United States in 1949, restarted a blossoming career in dance; she also married Jan Karski, the Polish resistant fighter. Karski had reported in 1942 to the Polish government-in-exile and the Western Allies about the unfolding of the Holocaust which he had witnessed in Poland. Years later, in 1978, Karski was interviewed by the French filmmaker and writer Claude Lanzmann in preparation for his film *Shoah* (which premiered seven years later). For the interview, Karski agreed to immerse himself in his traumatic memories of the war and to describe his unsuccessful attempt to alert President Roosevelt to the plight of Jews in Europe. This interview changed his agreement with his wife that they not speak about the Holocaust either privately or publicly. This change also stimulated Pola Nirenska to delve into her memories and in 1980 she began her major dance work on the *Shoah* called *Holocaust Tetralogy*. Over a ten years period, she created several independent sections, the first called *In Memory of Those ... Who Are No More*, followed by *Whatever Begins also Ends*, *Shout* and *The Train*. But the process of remembering the loss of her family and of creating works based on the disappeared triggered depression that led during this time to hospitalizations.

opened. Until today, it leaves in a still undisputed cultural centrality, a number of celebrities who had openly supported the cultural policy and state anti-Semitism of the Third Reich.

Consequently, the resistance and resilience of exiles and survivors cannot land on the shore of a shared collective history. Historical works initiated in the 1990s by a few rare researchers who started to unearth the taboos and examine the complexity of the dance history of the Third Reich, remain isolated in the academic and artistic worlds. Thus, the fate of the disappeared German-Jewish choreographic culture of Central Europe continues silently to mourn and to shed tears from its state of oblivion.

lar to that one carried by the survivors of the camps and, at the same time, struggled with the desperate “helplessness” of language to face a world that had lost its unity.

### 4) The Constructions of Oblivion

A fourth field of reflection focuses on the question of the reception by the post-Holocaust world. The French literary theorist George Steiner meditates in *Language and Silence* about the price paid by the German language itself over the long term for its “flirtation” with Nazism. Steiner estimates that the language has been deeply ruined by its perverse uses of the Nazi ideology. So, he writes: the Nazis have degraded “the dignity of human language at the level of screaming wolves ... Words – these guardians of meaning – suffer like men. ... Some can survive, others are incurable.”



Paula Padani dancing her Horah in a DP camp in the American Occupation Zone, during the first artistic tour organized in Germany by the Joint Distribution Committee in 1946. Photo courtesy of Gabrielle de Gail (private collection)

Over time, German literature has been able to do justice to exiled and deported writers, such as in the critical analysis of the *Lingua Tertii Imperii* [“The Language of the Third Reich”] by the Romance language scholar Victor Klemperer, who had survived in Dresden thanks to his non-Jewish wife.

But what about the dancers who shared the monumental ambitions of Hitler and their willingness to embody his dance policy? The mistaken canonical tendencies by Western dance histography in the second half of the 20th century, its avoidance strategies to deconstruct and to analyze the relationships between dance and politics under the Third Reich, have resulted in an incapacity to face the continuities of Nazism in the European post-war choreographic networks. This resistance to reality shows the struggles to keep this Pandora’s box from being

opened. Until today, it leaves in a still undisputed cultural centrality, a number of celebrities who had openly supported the cultural policy and state anti-Semitism of the Third Reich.

Consequently, the resistance and resilience of exiles and survivors cannot land on the shore of a shared collective history. Historical works initiated in the 1990s by a few rare researchers who started to unearth the taboos and examine the complexity of the dance history of the Third Reich, remain isolated in the academic and artistic worlds. Thus, the fate of the disappeared German-Jewish choreographic culture of Central Europe continues silently to mourn and to shed tears from its state of oblivion.

### 5) Transmigrations of Dance

A fifth area of research concerns the issues of intergenerational transmissions and the unpredictable circulation of exile and the



trauma of the Holocaust. The visual arts attest to the importance of this phenomenon among subsequent generations. In the choreographic milieu these concerns arose, too, but in a more scattered way. Here the need started among young Jewish and non-Jewish artists to follow in the footsteps of the erased names in the history of Central European dance, such as the exiles who survived including Gertrud Bodenwieser, Julia Marcus, Renate Schottelius, Paula Padani, and many others.

Almost by chance, Oxana Chi, a contemporary dancer with multicultural roots, discovered Tatjana Babakoff's story in Berlin through photographs. She sought to tell Barbakoff's story through an explorative round-trip between today and yesterday, making a choreography and a film in which she intertwined Barbakoff's trajectory in the interwar period with Chi's own artistic path in the 21st century. By this means, in looking at the way Tatjana Barbakoff reconciled survival and creativity in her own life, Oxana Chi looked for her own answers to the issues of the present world.

Another contemporary dancer touched by German *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance) is Thomas Kampe who studied dance with Hilde Holger in London, and continues to transmit her vision of creative democratic bodies. Originally a Viennese avant-garde choreographer, Hilde Holger escaped in 1939 to India, saving herself from the fate of a major part of her family lost in the Holocaust. She married a Parsi doctor in Bombay, and opened a multicultural dance school for Indian, Parsi and Jewish pupils. In 1947, fleeing the partition of India and Pakistan, she settled with her family in London, where she taught and choreographed intensively in her own studio for the rest of her life. (See "Hilde Holger: Legacy of an Expressionist, Emigrant, Innovator" by Jacqueline Waltz elsewhere in this collection). Thomas Kampe, referring himself to Adorno's ethical position in his essay on *Education after Auschwitz*, created many collective dance projects inspired by Hilde Holger. He explored the notion of self-examination and empathy, and is searching for new paths of awareness in the education of a non-authoritarian body.

These initiatives of the Jewish and non-Jewish generation of "post-memory" manifest themselves like so many breakthroughs on the silences of collective memory. Because they look for answers to the present, they feel the need to scrutinize the past. And because they listen to the way history leaves its marks on body consciousness and on the material of dance movement, they are able to pose questions to the contemporary world. They have understood in a sensitive way how much the Holocaust history is henceforth part of universal consciousness. They feel the need to position themselves in the world in relation to what has become an essential reference.

### The After-lives of Fireflies

Cartography could play a helpful role in highlighting the schismatic movements provoked by the Third Reich in contemporary societies. Like an earthquake, the gulfs, holes and fractures it has caused have transformed irreversibly the world landscape, and also the artistic world. While avoiding the danger of essentialism, one would be tempted to visualize in the long term the synchronic and diachronic effects of the Nazi body politic on the interwar avant-garde dancers.

If one takes a macro-perspective, one observes that since 1933 there is a gradual transformation into a kind of double helix, simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal. On the one hand, there is the image of the multiform dynamics of an exiled dance linking itself to world cultures and on the other hand, there is another image of pro-Nazi artists which is closed off by its own taboos. But, at the same time, if one tries somehow to situate a space corresponding to the German-Jewish Central European dance, one observes instead an irreversible phenomenon of disappearance. Like an Atlantis, this unique artistic culture has been immersed, progressively silenced.

However, in this long "space-time", if one places oneself in a micro-perspective, one distinguishes a few glimmers kindled by those who resisted the destructive rays of Nazism and embodied the desire for life despite the inhuman condition they experienced. In his essay, *Survival of the Fireflies*, Georges Didi-Huberman, looks for those vulnerable parcels of humanity preserved despite the sinking of humanism described since the beginning of the 20th century by the thinkers of modernity (Walter Benjamin among others). For Didi-Huberman, those "fireflies", comparable to small dancing lights and able to survive in dark times, continue today to be the symbol of those who, at every period, try to escape all kinds of dictatorships and seek to keep the universal dimension in being human.

With this perspective, like the little *Broučci*, the dances that have been embodied by inmates in camps, are also the symbols of those fireflies. They give an insight into the intrinsic freedom and irreducible humanity of their interpreters. Just as there has been a literature, a music, a painting and a theatre of the camps, there has also been a dance of survival in the camps. As I have shown here, despite the oblivion of this phenomena in the historiography of the period, the latter will nevertheless continue to send us its light coming from the depths of life. And it will continue over time to radiate at the center of our embodied consciousness and question the ways of how we write history.

With special thanks to Judith Brin Ingber and Mark Carroll.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Léon Blum himself spent the war as a Vichy political prisoner in the Pyrénées, before being deported to Buchenwald as a "prominent war prisoner" of the Nazis. He did survive the war.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Chazin-Bennahum, *René Blum and The Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Gert H. Wollheim shared his studio in Düsseldorf with Otto Dix. Later, in France from 1939 to 1942, he was detained as an "enemy alien" in camps at Vierzon, Ruchard, Gurs and Septfonds. He was able to escape and to hide with Tatjana Barbakoff in the village of Nay, in the Pyrénées. After the war, in 1947, he emigrated to New York.

<sup>4</sup> Klara Drenker-Nagels, Hildegard Reinhardt, Günter Goebbels, Anja Hellhammer, eds., *Tatjana Barbakoff. Tänzerin und Muse*, Bonn: Verein August Macke Haus Bonn, 2002. Günter Goebbels, *Tatjana Barbakoff. Eine vergesene Tänzerin in Bildern und Dokumenten*, Düsseldorf: Kulturbahnhof Eller eV, 2009. Patrizia Veroli, "Tatjana Barbakoff," in *Jewish Women's Encyclopedia*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/barbakoff-tatjana> (accessed June 28, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1960. The posthumous debates about Bettelheim's controversial psychological theories and practices concern his work on autism and not his research on survival.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Brin Ingber has published the first surveys: "Vilified or Glorified? Nazi Versus Zionist Views of the Jewish Body," Judith Brin Ingber, ed., *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011; "Dancing Despite the Scourge: Jewish Dancers During the Holocaust" presented at the Association of Jewish Studies annual conference, Washington, D.C., 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Kobi Kabalek, "Memory and Periphery: An Introduction," Reut Reina Bendrihem, Kobi Kabalek, Mori Ram, eds., *Hagar, Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities*, Special Issue "Memory and Periphery," Volume 12, Winter 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Only a few survivors' paths have been chosen for this article.

<sup>9</sup> Isaia Eiger, *Sky Tinged Red: A Chronicle of Two and a Half Years in Auschwitz*, Edina: Beaver's Bond Press, 2014, 252.

<sup>10</sup> The cast of the official cabaret troupe of Westerbork was never stable due to deportations of the prisoner-performers to Auschwitz.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the official dance policy and those behind it, see the following publications: Marion Kant, *Tanz unterm Hakenkreuz: eine Dokumentation*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1996, [Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich], New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003, 2004. Laure Guilbert, *Danser avec le Troisième Reich. Les danseurs modernes sous le nazisme*, [Dancing with the Third Reich. Modern Dancers under Nazism]. Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2000 (ed., André Versaille Editeur, 2011). Susan Manning, "Modern Dance in the Third Reich," in Rebekah J. Kowal, Gerald Siegmund, Randy Martin, eds., *Oxford Handbook on Dance and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017; Mark Franco, *"Serge Lifar et la question de la collaboration avec les autorités allemandes sous l'Occupation"* ["Serge Lifar and the Question of Collaborating with the German Authorities during The Occupation"], in *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2016, no.132.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Lewis, *A Time to Speak*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1994. (Paul Hermann, her first husband, died on a forced march in 1945; she remarried after the war and took her new husband's name, Lewis).

<sup>13</sup> Judith Brin Ingber: "Dancing Despite the Scourge: Jewish Dancers during the Holocaust," paper delivered at the Association of Jewish Studies, annual conference, Washington, D.C., 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des Lucioles*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2009, (University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Aleksander Kulisiewicz composed the song "*Moja Brama*" (My Gate) after his liberation in memory of what he describes as an indelible experience of his life in the camps.

<sup>16</sup> Krystina Zywulska, *I Survived Auschwitz*, Warsaw: tCHu, 2004. Judith Brin Ingber, "If I Survive: Yehudit Arnon's Story", in Naomi Jackson, Toni Shapiro-Phim, eds., *Dance, Human Rights and Social Justice; Dignity in Motion*, Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Eva Fahidi-Pusztai, *Die Seele der Dinge*, Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> *Brouci*, based on the popular 19th century children's book by that name by Jan Karafia was adapted for the stage by 4 imprisoned artists in Theresienstadt. It was conceived and choreographed by Kamila Rosenbaumova; the music was composed by the cabaret musician Karel Švenk based on Czech folk songs taught to the

children; the costumes and sets were designed by the Bauhaus trained artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis; and it was directed by Nava Shean. *Brouci* was performed over 30 times by children in an attic theatre from 1943 through 1945. *Brundibar* had been re-orchestrated in 1943 in Theresienstadt by its composer Hans Krása (who took the sets with him from Prague into the ghetto), and staged by the architect and set designer František Zelenka. The Nazis used the representations of *Brundibar* for their propaganda film on Theresienstadt. Most of the children and artists of both productions had been sent to Auschwitz and murdered (though Hans Krása, Nava Shean and Kamila Rosenbaumova survived).

<sup>19</sup> Emanuel Levinas, *Ethique et inifni. Dialogues d'Emmanuel Levinas et Philippe Nemo*, Paris: Fayard, 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Aaron Appelfeld, *The Story of A Life: A Memoir*, New York, London: Penguin, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Primo Levi, *Se questo e un uomo*, Turin: F. de Silva, 1947.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews by the author with Paula Padani in Paris in the 1990s. For a more detailed biography of Padani by Laure Guilbert, see the online *Jewish Women's Encyclopedia*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/padani-paula> (accessed June 28, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Alexis Nouss, *Paul Celan, les lieux d'un déplacement*, Lormont: Editions Le Bord De L'Eau, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Interview by the author with Yehudit Arnon in October 1993 at the kibbutz Ga'aton. The complexe story of Yehudit Arnon's deportation in different camps of the occupied Poland and her traumatic memory of this time will be detailed by Yonat Rotman in her future book: *The Seed and the Shell - The Story of the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company*, Haifa: Yad Yaari, December 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Dancer Rima Faber has been heir to much of the artistic legacy of Pola Nirenska. See her essay "Ghosts of the Past: The Creation of Pola Nirenska's *Holocaust Tetralogy*" elsewhere in this collection.

<sup>26</sup> Georges Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, New York: Atheneum, 1967.

<sup>27</sup> Viktor Klemperer, *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii*, Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1947.

<sup>28</sup> Oxana Chi, *Durch Gärten tanzen/ Dancing through Gardens*, Berlin: Li: Chi Movie, 2014 (DVD).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Kampe, "Moving after Auschwitz: The Feldenkrais Method as a Soma-critique," paper delivered at the Korean Society for Dance Documentation, October 2013, conference proceedings in [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu).

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# Correcting a Published Error: “Kamila Rosenbaumová, the Choreographer of Theresienstadt’s *Broučci* and *Brundibár* died in Auschwitz” and Other Quandaries

Judith Brin Ingber<sup>1</sup>

## Why Terezin/ Theresienstadt?

I first heard about Theresienstadt in the late ‘60s along with the term Terezin. I read the shocking and so powerful book ...*I Never Saw Another Butterfly...Children’s Drawings and Poems from Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, 1942-1944*. Throughout I’ll use the Nazi name for what was the site of an Austro-Hungarian garrison town called Terezin, founded by Emperor Joseph II of Austria who named it after his mother, Maria Theresa. Originally, the town included the soldiers’ army barracks and homes for the soldiers’ families, taverns, a post office, bank and brewery enclosed by twelve ramparts in the shape of a star. Surrounding the town were meadows, and farmlands, fruit trees and tall poplars, a train ride from Prague, the closest city.

I came across all this and more when I read the beguiling book which at first glance could be misunderstood as a children’s book. It was filled with colorful drawings by children, but created as the result of a terrible situation<sup>2</sup>. A time-line published in the epilogue explained that mass deportation of Jews from Prague to the ghetto began on Sept. 27, 1941 and soon all the Jews of Moravia and Bohemia were deported there, and then Jews were brought by train from all over Europe to what at first was considered a spa town but turned out to be a work camp and hub for further deportations. By August 23, 1942 the average work week lasted from 80-100 hours including children from the age of 14, subject to the same compulsory labor as the adults. Approximately 150 people died every day. By war’s end some 15,000 children had gone through Theresienstadt, staying in children’s “barracks,” divided by gender. How many children survived varies, but the general number is used only 150. Theresienstadt was liberated on May 7, 1945 by the Soviet Russian army.

I also read that in the book about “this place of famine and of fear,” where the “children saw everything that the grown-ups saw, the executions, the funeral carts, the speeches, the shouts of the SS-men at roll call,” but the poems and colorful paintings reproduced in the book were arresting and not all were bleak. Nowhere in the book did it explain WHO encouraged the children to paint and draw, only that “the instructors permitted the children to draw whatever they wanted to”.

I was moved to create a dance solo to Pavel Friedman’s title poem, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* which I premiered in 1970. I couldn’t stop thinking about the place and determined I wanted to see it for myself. The following year, in the summer of 1971, I convinced my new husband that we should include Prague on our honeymoon and also visit Theresienstadt. We were able to get visas to Communist Czechoslovakia but no information about how to get to Theresienstadt. Surprisingly, through a family friend, Ed Grosmann, in Minneapolis, we were given a letter of introduction to his friend Dr. Karl Lagus in Prague. When we arrived in Prague and located him, Lagus helped us plan our trip in the city, but only on the last day, did he agree to take us to Theresienstadt.

To our amazement, it turned out Lagus was the director of the Theresienstadt/Terezin site. We discovered that the government wanted no tourists to see what was left of the ghetto nor apparently did the government want any evidence of the crimes committed there to be known. No sign announced the name of the town, and no signage explaining anything that had happened there - many buildings were still reduced to rubble, and there seemed to be no repairs in progress. It was only 26 years after the liberation of Theresienstadt which in the overall scheme of things wasn’t so long. We learned Theresienstadt served as a “settlement,” and a concentration camp, with recognizable features of both ghettos and concentration camps. It also was unique in its function as a tool of Nazi deception, maniacally posing as a spa town for families<sup>3</sup>.

Lagus gave us a thorough tour, walking us around what seemed like a dreary town<sup>4</sup>, stopping at the main square and then on to what he called the barracks. Many looked like they’d recently been abandoned, and one could still see wide wooden slats one above the other, used for beds, he told us. Lagus also told us the eerie fact that he had been imprisoned there and now sat in what had been the office of the Nazi Commandant of Theresienstadt. Lagus took us, too, to see the ramparts, which were the old fortified walls, wide enough on top to have grass and the illusion of a play area, with views of the surrounding farm country and the train tracks. Hidden from view was the small crematorium near the tracks, but we saw it and its hideous smoke stack. The daily death rate was terrible and

apparently bodies were burned rather than buried. One of Lagus’s aims, he told us, was to build a museum with paintings by some of the artists who had been imprisoned and perished.

It took me years to learn about performances presented in Theresienstadt, and years to piece together who were some of the imprisoned artists and what did they succeed in doing before they were deported. How did they keep up their honest creativity in the face of such Nazi dishonesty? In particular, I searched for information about a choreographer named Kamila Rosenbaumová.

## First Encounter with Kamila Rosenbaumová

I first encountered the name of the choreographer Kamilla Rosenbaumová at the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles in 2001. I read her name in a caption placed below two watercolors by an artist named Friedl Dicker-Brandeis.



Pavel Rosenbaum, Ivo and Kamila before WWII. Photo courtesy of Kate Rys

I thought it so incongruous, so unlikely, that someone sketched costume designs for two dances to be performed in a Nazi camp. Why? How? Who was the choreographer Kamila Rosenbaumová, making two dances in such a context? In looking at the watercolors, I could see the dancers were sketched as if they were dancing, already “wearing” their costumes as they moved in big unison movements that were familiar to me from mid-century modern dance forms. The dancers’ arms made angular shapes and their legs (in long skirts) were nonetheless striding out and lunging, as if bringing the dances to life. I kept wondering who was Kamila Rosenbaumová? It took several research trips over many years to eke out the very little I did learn about Kamila Rosenbaumová and her career. At first, I gathered she and painter Friedl Dicker-Brandeis had worked together on artistic projects in Theresienstadt. Nothing could

change the fact that the choreographer and her costume designer were both deported to Auschwitz, and at the museum exhibition I learned Auschwitz was where Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was murdered. I wrongly assumed that Kamila was also murdered there. The Museum of Tolerance archivist Adaire Klein couldn’t give me any information about Rosenbaumová but I was given permission to include the image of the two watercolors when I lectured and eventually I was given permission to use them in my book, *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*. Images of the two watercolors were prominently placed, with the caption “for a dance choreographed by fellow prisoner Kamila Rosenbaumová and performed by inmates.” I searched briefly for more information but came up short.

As noted, I learned that the choreographer was deported from Terezin to Auschwitz around the same time as the painter Friedl Dicker-Brandeis where she was murdered. I assumed the same fate happened to Kamila Rosenbaumová but I only discovered my assumption was totally wrong after my article “Vilified or Glorified? Nazi Versus Zionist Views of the Jewish Body” had been published. It wasn’t possible to correct the published error<sup>5</sup>. This new article is my attempt to make amends and share the steps in my search to learn more about Kamila Rosenbaumová. I continue to write about her, speak about her and even through an extraordinary experience at the Czech and Slovak Sokol organization of Minnesota restage her children’s musical *Broučci*, trying to bring her work back to life.<sup>6</sup>

## Researching at Yad Vashem

In the 1990s, I began my first research about dancers in the Holocaust at *Yad Vashem* (“A Monument and A Name,” Israel’s official memorial in Jerusalem to the victims of the Holocaust. It includes several museums and archives). My friend Yehudit Shendar, who was director of the art museum at *Yad Vashem*, encouraged me to study in the archives to find out about the history of Jewish dancers during the *Shoa* (Holocaust) period, admonishing me to spend time in the archives; she said I couldn’t leave out this period within the Jewish dance experience just because I found it difficult. So, I began a new chapter in my dance research with many visits to the *Yad Vashem* archives. What first caught my eye were photos of theatre productions in the Warsaw Ghetto which clearly showed trained dancers participating. I found photos of children folk dancing in the Lodz Ghetto, including a creative dance around a barrel of soup someone had choreographed; I read stories about how adults kept Jewish identity alive through holiday celebrations with dance; I learned about transit camps with performances, as in Westerbork with its weekly Monday performances directed by famous Berlin directors so excellent Nazi officers would come to be entertained, though deportations on Tuesdays to Auschwitz might include the performers. I saw the scrap books of Zami (Sami) Shmuel Sajnwel Feder who was a trained theater director before WWII. Along with many Jews from Bendin, Sami was deported in May of 1941 to a succession of 12 forced labor and concentration camps, ending in Bergen-Belsen. He was liberated in ‘45 but had to stay as a Displaced Person until the summer of 1947 in the same DP Camp established by the British occupiers. There he established a successful theatre company with other survivors, so good they toured to other DP camps throughout Europe. One photo from his pro-



ductions in the *Yad Vashem* archives really caught my attention, two women dressed incongruously like Hasids, clearly dancing, kicking up their feet, in front of a city scape backdrop.



Zami Feder Bergen-Belzen production. Photo courtesy of *Yad Vashem*

At *Yad Vashem* I couldn't concentrate only on dancers, and I studied about other artists also in Theresienstadt, especially Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. I discovered it was her children's art classes which produced the incredible paintings and poetry of the children I had found so inspiring when I read the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. Many artists went unnamed and unrecognized; I was so sad she received no attributions in the edition of the book I had read. I learned she had been trained at the Bauhaus, had her own atelier in Vienna and then Prague, and was also a child art therapist. She and her husband had hoped to find a safer place away from the Nazis in the Czech countryside but to no avail. It made perfect sense she was the heroine responsible for the outpouring of child sketches and painting in Theresienstadt where she also lectured the adults about her aims for children and for the worth of art in society. She considered the art work with the children a way to learn tools to cope with where they were and to work together. She even managed to have art exhibits including a secret one in the basement of children's barrack L417 (for it was totally illegal to teach children, or exhibit their art. Many adults also volunteered to teach children surreptitiously on a variety of subjects after work hours).

What really struck me was that when Dicker-Brandeis knew she would be deported to Theresienstadt, she took her allotted two suitcases and packed them full of art supplies for children. The most surprising objects she carried with her were her bedsheets which she had dyed green. She brought them in case she would create productions for and with children. She reasoned the green sheets could help the children to imagine being part of a forest

or all kinds of lovely green growing things. Most probably those sheets were used when she designed the set and costumes for the future productions of *Broučci* (Fireflies), but more on that later. During Dicker-Brandeis 's incarceration she managed to bribe some guards to continue to bring in art supplies for the children. When she knew she would be deported from Theresienstadt, one of the older boys who had been her student, Willy Groh, helped her to pack her same two suitcases full of as many of the children's drawings and poems that they could. Then they hid them in the rafters. <sup>7</sup>

I read the autobiography of actress and director Nava Shean at *Yad Vashem*. In Theresienstadt she was known as Vava Schönová, a trained actress. She reports that her first work with children was a puppet show. Then she claims ownership for the idea for *Broučci* (Fireflies). "My second project for the children was a dramatization of stories about fireflies. Jan Karafiát's (Czech) collection of stories on fireflies is part and parcel of Czech classics. Every Czech child then and today was brought up on stories about the lives of the fireflies...This children's book was brought to Terezin of course."<sup>8</sup> In fact, there were probably quite a few copies in the camp. Perhaps this was my first inkling about this children's musical and about the guts necessary to do creative work. Shean continues that "*Firelfies* was performed several times. During one show, an S.S. officer entered the room, watched the performance and left. The following day I was summoned to his office.

'Are you in charge of the show I saw yesterday?'

'Yes'

"Did you select and direct the play?'

'Yes'

'Why did you choose something so Czech and not something Jewish, like Hanukah?'

'How do you know about Hanukah?'

"I lived several years in Palestine and studied at the University in Jerusalem.'

'And this is how you arrived at the conclusion that the Jewish people should be destroyed?'

'Yes.'

"I admit I had the courage to talk back like that only because he approached me as if I was a theater director, not a prisoner."

#### ***Back at Yad Vashem, perhaps in 2013***

Much of my dance research at *Yad Vashem* went into the dance book I edited and was published in 2011. Tangentially, I had learned that Nava Shean, noted theatre director and actress in Tel Aviv, was one and the same as Vava Schönová, who had survived Theresienstadt and World War II, emigrating to Israel. I've mentioned reading her autobiography. But it was in 2013 at *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem where I discovered the catalogue about Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and her work, the catalogue that originally accompanied the exhibition I'd seen years before in the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. Somehow, I hadn't seen the catalogue which included a small head shot portrait of Rosenbaumová and a caption: "The portrait was from 1960".<sup>9</sup> The caption confirmed that I had been mistaken, assuming that Rosenbaumová had been murdered at Auschwitz.

However, in this visit to *Yad Vashem* I still learned nothing further

about Kamila Rosenbaumová – because there was apparently nothing about her in the archives. Instead, I learned Dicker-Brandeis was involved in two children's theater productions, too. And I studied the art catalogue,<sup>10</sup> seeing the careful curriculum she decided to impart to her students, how to teach concentration, how to do breathing exercises before starting art class, all kinds of preparations to help the whole child where he or she was living.

#### ***Returning to Prague, 2014***

I made my second visit to Prague and Theresienstadt in December, 2014, when I was invited to teach at the Academy of Performing Arts, as well as to give a lecture at the Jewish Museum - an overview about how Jews who knew traditional dances such as at weddings, Jews who knew the new Israeli folk dances from the kibbutzim as they developed in the *Yishuv* and professional dancers all got caught up in the *Shoa*. At least I could tell the audience I was looking for more information about a choreographer at Theresienstadt, Kamila Rosenbaumová and correcting my misunderstanding that she had been deported to Auschwitz in 1944 and murdered there.

After my lecture at the Jewish Museum, I went to visit the famous Sephardic Synagogue in the old Jewish Ghetto of Prague, which contains a permanent exhibit about Czech Jews. What did I find in a dark corner inside a badly lit glass vitrine?

#### ***First Glimpse***

I spied a single page, typed document, decorated with charming little flowers, ghosts and firefly/children holding little lanterns. I used my phone camera so I could study the page afterwards and get help with the German. I later found out this was an announcement explaining the three act performance of *Broučci* (fireflies); by then I knew the "Play based on a fairy tale by J. Karafiát" had been choreographed by Kamila Rosenbaumová but the page announced it was "adapted for the stage by Vlasta Schoen, (sic)" whose name

I also knew to be Vava Schönová. I was able to get the gist of the musical: the first scene would show the firefly family awakening from its winter slumber with their little firefly boy named Brouček running wild in the house. In the interlude, he is taken outside to fly for the first time. He hides between large flowers in the meadow, admiring the dancing fireflies (including the one he will later marry), but one carelessly hits him and he falls to the ground. He is resuscitated by his friends and brought to his mother. In the second act, we see Brouček convalescing and receiving many presents from his friends. His mother sings him a lullaby and reads to him; he dreams ghosts are hovering around him and he is scared but he recovers from his bad dream and his injury. In the final act we see his happy engagement and his wedding, complete with dances. This was an allegory about survival, getting through the winter which was a metaphor

for the war and the camp, so to speak, and it was encouragement to the imprisoned children that they would be cared for and would get food in the future, even gifts, too. Brouček was an energetic happy boy and those in the play and in the audience could identify with him. I was determined to find out more about the production but it took much longer than I ever imagined.

#### ***Researching performances in Theresienstadt***

In 1971, our original guide in Theresienstadt had been Dr. Karl Lagus. He was no longer living when I returned, but through Czech connections, I was able to locate his daughter, Dr. Helena Lagus Illnerová, a prominent Czech scientist and professor. She was gracious when we met; she and her husband drove me to Theresienstadt where she made arrangements to visit the archives there. The archivist showed us binder after binder of hand painted and hand lettered placards or advertisement posters meant to publicize cabaret revues and performances in Theresienstadt. As we looked through the binders, Illnerová helped me to read the cast lists and names of the creators; I discovered how often Rosenbaumová's name appeared on the different posters, sometimes listing her as choreographer and sometimes as dancer. Unfortunately, there was no kind of explanatory material about the productions and nothing about the creators.

Probably the most well-known production advertised that we looked at was for *Brundibár*, the children's opera in two acts. The ad featured a charming drawing of a three-sided wooden fence, as if it belonged in a children's book. Children peered over the fence top, some of the girls in pigtails with bows, and one of the boys in his knickers at the edge of the fence. They were all focused on the space in the middle of the page surrounded by the fence with the list of names of all who were credited with the production. I immediately noted the choreography was by Rosenbaumová. Of all the poster ads in the archives, this is the only one I saw that is available on the internet.<sup>11</sup>

The plot of *Brundibár* involved a brother and a sister and their friends (including a dog, a cat and a sparrow) who all outwitted an evil organ grinder named Brundibár. Those who watched the opera were filled with hope because it was clear that the organ grinder represented the wicked Hitler, mustache and all. In the opera, the character of Brundibár was an unsuccessful failure, outwitted by the children. Kamila Rosenbaumová co-staged and choreographed the 55 performances of *Brundibár*. A sheet advertising a play called *Esther* caught my eye. I was surprised to see that even the assimilated Jewish artists had an idea of using a beloved Biblical story, though it was entwined with a Czech folk tale for the performance. Two columns of old-style hand writing included the names of two dancers: Trauta Lachová, and Rosenbaumová. Maybe it was to be perfor-



Poster of *Brundibár*



med sometime in March when the Jewish holiday of Purim would fall, celebrating the heroine Esther? But it's impossible to know because none of the poster advertisements had any dates on them. My translator Blanca Brichta wrote that: "One could say here that the play as written would be like any other play depicting biblical stories, which used to be re-enacted and staged in churches first for the nobility then for the people in the church courtyards on Sundays. In the program it says that *Ester* is by Vucedálek, František (who lived in late 18th century). He also wrote other Biblical plays, based on King David, Moses and plays about Christian saints such as St Peter and Paul. These dramas played an important role in the development of Czech theater."

In another poster advertising a drama about Francois Villon, we see Rosenbaumová's name appears coupled with the word "*choreograife*" (or choreographer). There are black outlines of an old town with a tall man in a Medieval-looking costume, playing a mandolin-like instrument. A scroll announcing a drama about Villon opens as if to reveal the names of all involved including Rosenbaumová. A group of four dancers are featured: her and Lantschová Picková, Kirschnerová. I note that in the *Esther* play, there is a dancer named Trauta Lachová. Here it's spelled Lantschová. If it is the same person, why the discrepancy in last name spellings?<sup>12</sup> It is apparently a sign of the polyglot community in Theresienstadt.

Several ads mentioned the composer Karl Švenk who I knew had composed the music for *Broučci*. He was often a producer, and sometimes he created his own cabarets known as the *Švenkův kabare* (Švenk Cabarets). The ads included *tance nastudovala* (another word for choreography) by Kamila Rosenbaumová. It's impressive to look at the amount of shows that included Rosenbaumová, especially the program about Frances Villon, about Queen Esther, and in the cabarets.

Another of the *Švenkův kabaret* was advertised with a big black grand piano drawn on the page; above the piano a flood of water poured from a barrel with the bold words proclaiming *Večer kabaretní retrospektivy* (an evening of cabaret retrospective) to be performed *totěž ale jinak* (the same but differently). The evening would include *hraje, zpívá, tančí* or acting, singing, dancing. The names listed on the ad included our by now familiar trio of Rosenbaumová, Schönová, and Švenk as choreographer, director and composer.

Another Švenk Cabaret was advertised with only lettering and no illustration; it also includes Vava Schönová, and Rosenbaumová among a cast of 15. They all must have felt camaraderie and solidarity but so far there's no way to know anything about what exactly transpired in the plays or the cabarets. All that is left are the poster advertisements and in the memories of the survivors one might somehow locate. Occasional tag lines on the penned ads only whet one's appetite to understand more about the spirit of the artists such as "Long Live Life or Dance Around the Skeleton". I had so hoped that Lisa Peschel's book, *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape; Cabarets and Plays from the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto* could lead me to some answers. She covered a variety of productions including *Laugh With Us*, an original Czech Cabaret produced in the ghetto; Hans Hofer's Cabarets, and other revues.

But not a one coordinated with any of the creations by Švenk, Rosenbaumová and Schönová. On the other hand, Peschel's important book is a tribute to the artistic creativity in the ghetto, which could be considered resistance to the Nazi erasure of self and murder not only of the Jews, but of the very meaning of arts, culture and community. Peschel writes "defiance toward their captors was just one element in a whole range of strategies the authors (of the plays) used to confront the unprecedented crisis they faced. If we widen our definition of resistance to encompass all the forms of opposition to powerlessness that they exercised within the symbolic space of performance, we become true witnesses to these authors and to all the Terezin/Theresienstadt prisoners who engaged so intensely with theatrical performance in the ghetto."<sup>13</sup>

### ***Broučci, A Musical in Three Scenes***

Researching facts about the stage director of *Broučci* turned out to be easier than finding information about the choreographer. I had already read the autobiography of the director of the production, Vava Schönová which I found in the *Yad Vashem* archives. She claims that though she was only twenty years old in Theresienstadt, she got the idea for *Broučci* (fireflies), based on the well-known and beloved Czech children's book by Jan Karafiát.

Like other artists in the ghetto, she had chosen to work with children in their "children's houses" which were really barracks where children all lived in one room, separated by gender, where they slept and ate and "played." Vava Schönová wrote that she began working on the musical in 1943 because she noticed that many of the children who came to Terezin brought with them their favorite story book. It's true she wrote that as a child she also loved the children's book *Broučci* and she also loved dancing. She wrote in her autobiography that starting at age 6 she had begun her dance training in Prague with a student of Isadora Duncan's. She also became a child actress, encouraged by her mother. "In Terezin (sic) when people discovered I was an actress, I was asked to contribute something, to declaim, to entertain in the evenings; so I began to travel around (the ghetto) after work doing solo recitations either from dramas or poetry. I don't think it was the desire to escape from reality but rather it's more accurate to say that the cultural activity provided a genuine expression for the desire to prolong our internal life and not let the external conditions affect was the wish not to surrender to the sub-human conditions". Vava began a plan to dramatize the classic Czech book about fireflies. "Everyone was brought up on these stories," she wrote, "about the daily routine of fireflies and how they would awake in the summer and sleep in the winter under the snow, how they learn to fly at night and light up the world for humans."

The advertisement for *Broučci* in the archives showed the names of those involved with *Broučci* in addition to "Vasja" (also known as Vlasta and Vava) Schönová (in Israel, Nava Shean). In a small section of her book she mentions *Broučci*<sup>14</sup> was performed in Barracks L417 (where most of the girls were forced to live); some said that the girls' children's barracks was where the first series of *Broučci* performances took place. Maybe there were up to 35 shows. I learned much from Vera Meisels, the child survivor who had participa-

ted in *Broučci* and I had the privilege of interviewing in Tel Aviv. She told me the later 1945 series of performances took place in an attic theatre, a different venue than the children's barracks. Other performances of several different cabarets and theatre productions also took place there. The second series of *Broučci* performances in the attic theatre took place after all the founding creators were deported except for Schönová.

Originally, according to her autobiography, it was Schönová who turned to other artists she'd met in the ghetto to help her with the production: Karel Švenk contributed the music and Kamila Rosenbaumová was chosen for the choreography. Eventually, I began to suspect that it was Rosenbaumová (who arrived in Theresienstadt with her husband Pavel Rosenbaum and their son Ivo) who might have played a more important part in the making of the piece in addition to providing the choreography for *Broučci*. A more careful reading of Shean's autobiography makes one wonder, was this a case of Rosenbaumová being overlooked for the credit due her? Shean continued, "One of the counselors in the children's house was Camilla Rosenbaum (sic) who before arriving at the camp was a professional dancer. She told the stories of the fireflies to the children in her group and taught them to dance according to the text in the book. Once the children could happily perform the dances of spring, winter, snowflakes and sun rays, Camilla decided to put together a show for all the children in the camp. She asked me if I would recite the text to accompany the children's dancing. I agreed. I could see immediately there was groundwork for developing something bigger....I adapted the book into a play...I adapted the play to Camilla's dances...thus a show was created for scores of participants...they had a sense of success". These two paragraphs turned out to be basically all I knew about *Broučci* for a long time.

A great deal of information existed about Friedl Dicker-Brandeis who I learned had created the sets and costumes for *Broučci*. I already mentioned that Dicker-Brandeis brought her dyed sheets to Terezin, but only now did I begin to understand the importance of the green-dyed sheets for the *Broučci* set. Schönová or Shean reported that she rehearsed the play with girls from barracks L410 who are even credited in a colorful ad for *Broučci* that was posted throughout the ghetto. Barracks L410 was where both Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and Kamila Rosenbaumová also taught the girls.

### ***A Rare Source***

How did I learn that there were actually two waves of *Broučci* performances, the first in 1943 had some 31 performances and the second set in 1945 with new artist collaborators? By the time of the second wave of performances, Dicker-Brandeis, Rosenbaumová, with her son Ivo and husband Pavel, and Švenk had all been deported to Auschwitz. Švenk apparently was sent from Auschwitz near the end of the war on a death march where he died going to Mauthausen. I never learned the story of how Rosenbaumová kept going. She was the only survivor in her family, and along with Schönová, the two of the original *Broučci* creators to endure and outlast the *Shoa*.

The second series of *Broučci* productions, performed in 1945, were described to me by Vera Meisels, one of the rare performers to survive. I had learned about Vera from Lauren McConnell, theatre professor at Central Michigan University who was also staging *Broučci*

with her college students at that University, in 2013. Vera Meisels was flown from Tel Aviv to Central Michigan University to participate as the role of narrator, sitting on stage. I interviewed Vera in Tel Aviv in 2014 and learned that she was eight years old during the performances and had a lead role as the girlfriend of firefly *Brouček*.<sup>15</sup>

Vera remembered, "As a child we had many rehearsals and we all rehearsed many parts. We were assigned several because we never knew who would be present for the next rehearsal or for the performances because there was illness, and so many fell sick and were absent. Or gone because there were deportations all the time (to Auschwitz). One never knew who would be missing". Vera demonstrated gestures so enthusiastically and sang me Czech folk songs she recalled were part of the performance. "I remember the loving gestures of opening your arms, the optimism - we sang about the coming of spring, and we opened our arms so wide to the sides, as if we could encompass the sky".

Vera remembered one performance when they came to watch the show. The SS officers had removed their helmets and placed them on the edge of the little attic stage, the insignia of the Nazi skull and crossbones facing the stage and leering at Vera and the other children. Were the skull and crossbones a warning for what the SS officers would do to them after the show? It's all she could think about. Finally, the end of the performance came, the men took their helmets off the edge of the stage, put them back atop their heads and



Friedl Dicker-Brandeis watercolor costumes design for Rosenbaumová. Photo courtesy of Museum of Tolerance archives



left. Vera Meisels was amazed. She has written poetry books based on her childhood memories of Theresienstadt. *Threshold of Pain* is her latest book.

After my interviews with Meisels, she sent me to visit the Museum Beit Theresienstadt (House of Theresienstadt) at Kibbutz Givat Haim, including a special section on the children in Terezin. Meisels has been one of the docents in this museum which contains information by some of the 15,000 children who went through the ghetto camp including testimonies of some of the approximately 150 children who survived. Drawings and poems created in Friedl Dicker-Brandeis's classes hang on the walls. The archives also include an electronic database with details about the 160,000 Jews interned in the ghetto camp. I was able to glean two things from my museum visit: I purchased my own copy of Vava Shean's autobiography and I received the name and email address of another child survivor, Jana Urbanova who had been a performer in the second wave of *Broučci* performances.

Unfortunately, I could find nothing in Beit Theresienstadt that give me any information about Rosenbaumová.

***The Most Invaluable Resource***

In 2015, through my contacts at the Jewish Museum in Prague, I was told about Rosenbaumová's daughter, Kate Rys with an email address. I wrote to her in England with anticipation, relieved I could express myself in English as I discovered she wrote in both Czech and English. We have been corresponding ever since. Through Kate Rys I could finally learn the outlines of her mother's life.

Throughout her years as a working dancer and choreographer whether before, during or after World War II, Rosenbaumová worked with the best and most interesting Czech artists. For me, that is the ultimate measure of her own exceptional worth artistically. Perhaps before WWII, Rosenbaumová already worked as a choreographer. She surely worked for the important Czech theatre director F. Burian and his D34 theatre company, a Czech equivalent to Bertolt Brecht's ensemble. They did productions expressing Burian's communist ideas about the nobleness of the worker, and the need to support workers and show solidarity with them. "Mum was a staunch communist, just like Friedl (Dicker-Brandeis), having grown up in a poor family, having been ostracized or made to feel ashamed as a young girl...I believe she was inspired a lot by other dancers and choreographers while she danced at F. Burian's Theatre D34 and later at Voskovec & Werich's 'Liberated Theatre' before the war, especially by Saša Machov" (Jan. 2, 2016 email).

In Prague at the Arts Academy, I happened to address the class of Dopřta Gremlicová. She gave me a book in which a paper of hers appeared called *Traditional Dance as a Phenomenon inside The Czech Modernism*;<sup>16</sup> she makes a very significant point about the meaning of using a folktale like *Broučci* to work with: "The significant personalities in Czech modernist arts were dancer Jarmila Kroschlová (*Ausdruckstanz*), theatrical director Emil F. Burian, choreographer Saša Machov and the linguist Petr Bogatyrev. Their artistic opinions were based on values which they found also in the folk arts...as a complex structure potentially able to address the modern people thanks to metaphorical ways of expression, imaginative playfulness, the con-

tact with the everyday life combined with the free fantasy, critical, burlesque view of the world. For the stage, it necessitated complex knowledge of the material and the context, understanding of the ethos of folk culture." It seemed to me that perfectly explained the use of folk songs by the composer and the elements of simple folk dance woven together by Rosenbaumová, combined with her own dance ideas for the children to express the scenes in the folk tale so beloved by adults and children alike.

In other correspondence with Kys, I learned that Rosenbaumová's first marriage was to Pavel Rosenbaum. After they met, she discovered they had a love of music in common. "He played the violin very well, and Mum played the piano and they often played together. He and Kamila had their son Ivo, born in 1933."

They lived in Prague. Kate knew her mother was born in Vienna in 1908 to a Czech couple, who moved back to Prague... Pavel's family in Peruc. They were deported from there to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1940.

***Rosenbaumová's Message***

Kate's letters and article provide the only real information about Kamila Rosenbaumová. In all of her decades working in dance - before, during and after World War II - she had several goals. She wanted children to stay engaged and healthy, she wanted to help adults and children to experience the excitement of creation, whether professionally or as amateurs (using the true meaning of the word, for love of something). As a working choreographer she knew that a story could be expressed through movement, and that dance wasn't just something decorous or auxiliary. It was a way to enhance and illuminate a story and move the narrative forward through movement. She knew how to carry on the idea of the importance of collaboration and the collective - she knew participating together would benefit the individual but also it would benefit the group and even society. It is ironic that the translation of the Czech word for choreography, *Taneční spolupráce* which appears on the *Brundibár* poster coupled with her name literally means "dance cooperation". Kamila Rosenbaumová's very being seemed invested in the idea of finding cooperation in every situation especially children creating together. In the case of *Broučci* it meant creating together an ideal society for the children to experience. In rehearsal and in performance, they could believe in the reality of what they created together.

Sometimes the society she worked to improve was urban life of Prague, and sometimes it was resisting the authority of the Nazis, banding children and adults together for the benefit of the ghetto, showing that they would live on through the humor of cabaret productions, through delight and imagination. She took the message of *Broučci* quite seriously, and through an imaginative, enchanting children's story, she found a metaphoric way with the other artists, to show the children a path, to continue and to light the way. Ultimately at the end of every *Broučci* performance, the children were strong and free, frolicking in the springtime they had created, despite what might be lurking offstage. Onstage, they were playing and loving and marrying in a grand wedding celebrated in dance and song. I have not read anything that Kamila Rosenbaumová wrote in

**Kate knew little about the war years growing up**

On Dec. 5, 2015 Kate wrote to me that "I found Friedl's beautiful costume sketches for dance on the internet some years ago, when I started searching for information about my mum, as I knew very little about her previous life, especially about her time in Terezin. Mum didn't talk about her past much."

Later, when discussing dance styles including expressionism, Kate wrote to me (January 2 2016), "I must have seen mum dancing when I was little, but don't remember it at all and when I was older, mum had already stopped dancing - she was born in 1908 and dance isn't like other art, it can only be practiced for limited years.

...I agree with you that if you wish to stage *Broučci* with references to Terezin, it does sound right to incorporate expressive dance movements into the performance. After all, Mum did that with other performances too, e.g. in *Brundibár* where she taught Ela Weissberger (then Stein) who played the cat, not only how to move as a cat on the stage, but also how to dance waltz."

Her mother not only choreographed in L410 girls' *heim* or home but she also lived there. Pavel lived elsewhere and Ivo was in a home for young children. In Kate's article called "Remembering Our Mum Kamila" printed in the *Terezin Initiative Newsletter No. 82*, in 2016, she wrote that, "Pavel Rosenbaum was deported from Terezin to Auschwitz in September 1944 allegedly 'for work', but he perished in the gas chamber straight after his arrival. The following month my mum, together with her son Ivo and a girl named Eva Wollsteiner (aged 13) whom she informally adopted in Terezin ...were transported to Auschwitz as well. Immediately after their arrival they were separated and both Ivo and Eva perished shortly afterwards. After several days in Auschwitz, my mum was sent to a labor camp in Oederan, Germany together with girls she used to take care of in a girls' home in Terezin. Towards the end of the war they ended up by chance back in Terezin." Kate specified on August 30, 2019, "haggard prisoners from concentration camps started to arrive to Terezin from other camps. Mum hoped that Ivo and Pavel would return...After she was liberated (by the Russians) and returned to Prague, her

search for her beloved son and her husband continued through a 'repatriation office.' Later she met her second husband Ing Otto Guth.

***Rosenbaumova Remarried***

Kate continues in her article, "Mum did not want to remain paralyzed by the tragic past and wanted to have children again; my sister and I appeared, me in 1946, Mariana two years later. Mum continued dancing for several years and later on she returned to choreography, for example for the City Youth Theatre and in the *Rural Theater Vesnické divadlo*. In 1955 Mum started teaching gymnastics, ballet and dance in our local school. My sister and I scurried enthusiastically round the stage during Mum's school performance of *Fireflies* having no notion of its connection with the performance in Terezin. Later on, Mum worked for the local authority, organizing various public courses including 'ballroom for young adults' (a tradition which introduces dancing as well as social etiquette to teenagers)."

Kate wrote me (Jan. 2, 2016) that she had visited Israel in 2006 "and met some of the Terezin girls' my mum looked after in the girls' *heim* L410." As was the case for me, too, when I visited the touching museum to Theresienstadt called Beit Terezin outside of Tel Aviv, she wrote "I also spent a short time at Beit Terezin but did not find much there about my mum."

In the same email she wrote that "I know that some years after the war she taught stage movement to actors, but don't know more details. I only know because once, while watching a performance in a theatre together, she made a proud remark about having taught the leading actor how to move on stage."

I wrote to ask Kate when did her mother die? The answer came in Kate's July 10, 2019 email: Kamila Rosenbaumová died, sadly due to cancer, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1988 in Prague. She had lived 80 very full years, not the Nazi's maniacal plan to cut her off at 36 by murdering her- hers was an optimistically productive life investing in children and in fellow professional artists, always focused on improving the community where she found herself, whether in Terezin or in Prague as a loving woman and a creative dancer.

her own hand, so her ideas come to us through her expressionist sweep of dance movements and through the relationships she had and creations she made - notated so briefly on valiantly colored one page ads saved in the archives of Theresienstadt. In trying to bring back her potent ideas to help articulate what she created, before Terezin, during her years when she was captive, and after 1945 I've been sad about the paucity of information. I unwittingly added to the situation by publishing a mistaken fact about her fate in Auschwitz. To counteract this, I continue to speak out about Kamila Rosenbaumová as often as I can, I create dance programs and was moved to recreate *Broučci* at the Sokol Czech Slovak Center in St. Paul, Minnesota; in the Milwaukee JCC program I presented for *Yom Hashoa*, the Holocaust Commemoration in conjunction with the Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center, in May of 2016; I did an exhibition with photos and information about Rosenbaumová and her three fellow creators of *Broučci* when I recreated the musical at the Czech Slovak Center in St. Paul, MN with 32 children; I spoke about her at a week of dance teaching in Weimar, Germany in 2017 when I taught at the Yiddish Summer Weimar.

### Coda

Now, with this article, I can say how vital was Kamila Rosenbaumová's artistic and humanistic contributions, giving children and audiences joy through movement, expressing a charming story of childhood friendship. Rosenbaumová's creative forces helped her to outlast her tormentors; she could create despite the destruction she lived through, despite the horror of losing her young son, her husband, friends, and the community as she knew it, both the mundane and the artistic.

Only recently did I think to write to Rosenbaumová's daughter to ask what was her the date of her death? The answer came in Kate's July 13, 2019 email. Kamila Rosenbaumová died on July 26, 1988, felled by cancer in the city she considered home. She was in Prague where she had established two different households, one before WWII and one after, each with a family, each a place she also left from to choreograph or to teach.

After all these years trying to trace Rosenbaumová's biography and learn about her aesthetics and her ideas, I am still left with only the outlines of her life. But I understand that foremost, I deeply admire Rosenbaumová and I know her to be extraordinary. I am committed to acclaim her incredibly creative accomplishments in the worst of situations, surrounded by illness and starvation and death, bringing beauty and joy and humor to children and adults alike. I also know she worked with optimism to contribute to make a better world as she envisioned. Now I have the true information that she lived 80 years and not the 36 years that the Nazis had plotted for her. I surely will continue to correct the basic flawed information I published in my original story and I will speak about her as often as possible. At the least, we are now able to write Kamila Rosenbaumová more fully back into the list of the living.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Czech to English are by Blanka Brichta.

<sup>2</sup> ...*I Never Saw Another Butterfly...Children's Drawings and Poems from Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, 1942-1944*, edited by Hana

Volavkova, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962, with the slight information that the "documents collected in this publication have been chosen from the archives of the State Jewish Museum in Prague". The book was translated into English, German, Swedish, Spanish and Yiddish.

<sup>3</sup> I originally created the solo for myself for the first *Young Choreographers Evening*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, in 1971. For newest rendition of the solo danced by Megan McClellan, see website [www.jbriningber.com](http://www.jbriningber.com). Past Projects 2017, link down to RUN of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (accessed June, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt> (accessed July 1, 2019). "Succumbing to pressure following the deportation of Danish Jews to Theresienstadt, the Germans permitted the International Red Cross to visit in June 1944. It was all an elaborate hoax. The Germans intensified deportations from the ghetto shortly before the visit, and the ghetto itself was "beautified." Gardens were planted, "houses painted, and barracks renovated. The Nazis staged social and cultural events for the visiting dignitaries and a film was made. Once the visit was over, the Germans resumed deportations from Theresienstadt..."

<sup>5</sup> For the Red Cross visit to see the "town", Lagus told us, stores had been set up on the town square with produce temporarily placed in the "stores", providing the illusion that the prisoners could buy food and goods in their "model town." The film by the Nazis, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*, included part of a performance of the musical *Brundibár*. In 2019 I chanced upon an internet entry about Karel Švenk which mentioned him and Rosenbaumová in a different film: "In the autumn of 1942 he appeared in passing in the propaganda film *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*, standing with the puppeteer Otto Neumann and the dancer Kamila Rosenbaumová." See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karel\\_Švenk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karel_Švenk) (accessed in May, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> "Rosenbaumová was deported from there and killed at Auschwitz in 1944" appears in Judith Brin Ingber's "Vilified or Glorified? Nazi Versus Zionist Views of the Jewish Body", ed., Judith Brin Ingber, *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, 264.

<sup>7</sup> I was invited by the Czech and Slovak Sokol Minnesota organization to recreate *Broučci*. The children's five months of rehearsals culminated in two performances on Sunday May 15, 2016 and a week later at the Sholom Home for the Jewish aged in St. Paul, Minnesota. See sidebar for more information.

<sup>8</sup> Willy Groh survived the war, returned to Theresienstadt to recover the treasure and donated the drawings and poems to the Prague Jewish Museum. Others are also credited with saving children's art works, including Mrs. A. Flachová of Brno whose husband had been a teacher in the L417 children's home, as well as individuals who were able to save single items.

<sup>9</sup> Nava Shean, *To Be an Actress*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>11</sup> Makarova, Elena, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944; The Artist Who Inspired the Children's Drawings of Terezin*, Los Angeles: Tallfellow/Every Picture Press, 2001, 33. On this catalogue page there are three images: a large reproduction of a poster of *Broučci*, a small photo of Karel Švenk, circa 1940, and the all important small head shot portrait of Kamila Rosen with the simple caption "Kamila Rosenbaumová circa 1960."

<sup>12</sup> The Czech translation for the Children's opera in two acts *Dětská*

## Brin Ingber's MN

### Production of *Broučci*

I recreated *Broučci* at the Czech and Slovak Sokol Minnesota organization (CSPS), May 15, 2016 with 44 children ranging from the ages of 4 through their late teens. We created a new production with Czech and Slovak folk dances which I interwove with my imaginative movement and also Jewish *Ashkenazi* wedding dance *freylichs* for the final scene, Czech folk songs, and prose from stories based on the original 1876 favorite Czech children's book *Broučci*, and a Hebrew translation by Vera Meisels. Information from interviews with child survivor Vera Meisels, who had been a child performer in Terezin; letters from another child performer Jana Urbanova (born Klacer) whose father also had staged *Broučci* Czechoslovakia after WWII; discussion and studio work with Czech dancer Blanka Brichta plus conversations and studio time with Craig Harris (the musician who had also worked on reconstructing a Theresienstadt revue called *Why We Laugh*) all helped me to create the production. The children in the cast and their families learned much about Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto in age appropriate auxiliary and interactive talks especially by Tim Lauer whose parents had been interred in Theresienstadt, his mother in charge of the over-all life of the children, plus age appropriate books made available during the rehearsal process from September through May. One of the older boys, for example, asked to borrow my copy of *The Diary of Ann Frank*. I could see him avidly reading while he waited during rehearsals for his part on stage. When he finished reading, he asked me if I thought Vera Meisels (the child in Theresienstadt) had met Ann Frank? It was heartbreaking for me to try to explain briefly how that wouldn't have been possible. In some cases, the background information about *Broucci* was the families' first experience learning about Czech Holocaust history and what happened to Jewish Czech and Slovak families, their citizenship and rights totally abrogated during the war. Families at the Czech and Slovak Sokol organization include those who are relatively newly arrived in Minnesota, the parents working in one of the multi-national MN firms or at the Univ. of MN. Other families represent Czech or Slovak descendants who have lived in MN for several generations.

The rehearsals and performance at Sokol took place at the historic CSPS Hall, 383 Michigan St, St. Paul, MN, the first proscenium stage in the state, according to historic records, with a fly loft including many hand drawn canvas backdrops of the Czech countryside. This added authentic looking aspects to the stage picture. I designed the costumes coordinating colors with the backdrop; a committee of mothers sewed for the production and a committee of parents added props for the firefly house, and giant flowers for the night scene with the little child animals hiding under the flowers. By the end of the rehearsal process, the children and the adults could almost personalize their connection with the four original artists who had created the musical in Theresienstadt/Terezin ghetto.

The sold-out audiences gathered at the historic Sokol Hall (visited by Dvorak when he was composing and teaching for a year in near-by Iowa), plus there was an added performance nearby which some also attended, at the Sholom Senior Housing and Assisted Living, also in St Paul, MN. The Sholom home performance, also with the adult choir, with Harris's playing on a grand piano, the narration declaimed by a senior high school student in the cast, plus speaking by the cast occasionally in Czech and singing by the children to augment the choir, was a command performance for the late Walter Schwartz, survivor from Czechoslovakia and Rumania.

Further aid in the rehearsals and performances came from Lenka Bragg, coordinator of the Czech and Slovak School for the Twin Cities Theater Program; Louise Wessinger, director of Czech and Slovak folk dance groups for Sokol MN; Don Haselbauer, director of the Sokol MN Singers; and Craig Harris, the pianist and composer (Harris extended the few known jazz fragments composed by Švenk with Czech children's folk songs, and Harris's own music to accompany all the scenes). Also, cookies and strudels were prepared in the Sokol kitchen by volunteer chefs following recipes in the cookbook *In Memories Kitchen: A Legacy of the Women from Terezin*. These desserts were made available after the performances.

At both sites there was an exhibition I co-produced with Blanka Brichta including objects, photos, pod-casts, maps and informational signage plus books about the Theresienstadt/Terezin Ghetto. Recorded stories with photos featuring Czech and Slovak Jewish families who had survived and resettled in MN were featured. We were aided in preparing the exhibit by the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS) at the University of Minnesota. One of the podcasts showed Walter Schwartz interviewed by the CHGS telling his story about living through the *Shoah* as his portrait was being painted. A photo of the painting, in the CHGS collection, was also in the exhibition. In the exhibition, there were also photographs of Kamila Rosenbaumová and her family (sent by her daughter Kate Rys) along with information about her and the three other artists who created the original *Broučci*.

See link to the whole project at [www.jbriningber.com](http://www.jbriningber.com), click on "Past Projects", scrolling down from heading 2017. This section includes a short film by Nancy Mason Hauser, compiled from the performances.



Border of the 2016 performances from original flyer for *Broučci*, courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague



*Opera ‘o’ 2 Obrazech*, showing order of importance of creators after the overall director, Hans Krása. *Hudebně nastudoval* (Musical staging) by Rudolf Freudernfeld; *Režie a scéna* (Stage Director): Fr. Zelenka; *Taneční spolupráce* (Choreography) by Kamila Rosenbaumová. It says ironically that the place of performance will be *Děti Terezínkých Dětských Útulků* or the Children’s Refuge of Theresienstadt, clearly necessary for public consumption.

<sup>13</sup> The translator notes: “the spelling of names can be a challenge - because sometimes they are written in German, sometimes only "Germanized" or "Czech-ized”, or sometimes spelled only in Czech but those are the same ladies - with the same names. For example, in German the name would be Lantsch, but in Czecho-German version would be Lantschová (as it appears here), but in other advertisements it was also written in pure Czech spelling, making it Lančova or Lančová.” Brin Ingber has chosen to refer to the artists throughout this article with the Czech spellings of the artists’ names.

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Peschel, ed., *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape; Cabarets and Plays from the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Dorota Gremlicova, “Traditional Dance as a Phenomenon Inside the Czech Modernism”, 243-244.

<sup>16</sup> Without Rosenbaumová during the second run, the performances must have been a little different though the spirit was the same. Her daughter wrote to the author on Jan. 2, 2016 that “Mariana Smeralova who was also a dancer and mum’s close friend before the war and in Terezin she helped to choreograph Broučci in 1945 after Mum’s deportation to Auschwitz.” In Nava Shean’s book she writes that years later, “in 1985, at a reunion of Terezin survivors in Israel, an attractive middle-aged woman approached me and introduced herself: “I am a firefly.” A few days later she sent me a letter. ‘I approached you during the reunion because I owe you my childhood. My entire childhood up to age 6 was totally erased from my memory because of the trauma of the Holocaust. When I was your ‘firefly’ then eight years old, after two years of anxiety, fear and everything that each Jew experienced... this became my best childhood memory: to run around the stage and sing *The Spring will come* (a well-known Czech folk song). For me it was more than you can imagine. You created there, under the difficult conditions, great moments for the children, and fulfilled a significant positive role within the hidden corners of our souls,” 34.

<sup>17</sup> Gremlicova wrote in her chapter about dance artists in World War II that the dancer Nina Jirsiková was in Machov’s dance group working with Burian in his Theatre D34. We know Rosenbaumová was also part of this constellation of artists. The author wrote on page 244: “Together with Burian, Jirsiková was arrested by the Nazis and she spent several years in the concentration camp.” I realized I should have understood that Jirsiková was a Jew; I was told she was an important avant garde Jewish dancer who eventually escaped to Israel. Here is another figure I know nothing about.

<sup>18</sup> Vera Meisels showed me a large reproduction of a child’s drawing of a flower in the exhibition in Beit Theresienstadt. I realized Vera had drawn it and signed it in a very legible hand. Vera’s childhood drawing had turned up in one of the collections of saved paintings from Friedl Dicker-Brandeis’s classes that Vera must have participated in. It has joined other drawings in the museum to the children of Theresienstadt at Kibbutz Givat Haim Ihud, Emek Hefer, Israel.

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**Judith Brin Ingber** is a dancer and independent scholar. She was a dance composition student of Bessie Schoenberg's and graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in New York. In the 1970s she lived in Israel where she taught for Batsheva and Bat Dor and assisted Sara Levi-Tanai at Inbal Dance Theatre. Judith appears in the bio-pic *Mr.Gaga* speaking about Ohad Naharin’s student days. She also co-founded the *Israeli Dance Annual* with Giora Manor in 1975. In the US she taught in the Dept. of Theatre Arts and Dance at the University of Minnesota, co-founded the chamber performing group Voices of Sepharad and continues to return often to Israel to research and to teach at the Western Galilee College in Henia Rottenberg’s dance program. She continues to present programs and papers about Jewish dance (especially at the Conney Conference for Jewish arts (<https://conneyproject.wisc.edu/>) and to write about topics in Jewish dance studies. [www.jbriningber.com](http://www.jbriningber.com). [briningber@gmail.com](mailto:briningber@gmail.com)



Yehuda Hyman in his dance action, *Jew in the Pool*. Adults encouraging their children to play in the Holocaust memorial pool in Freiburg, Germany makes a mockery of the main synagogue destroyed there. Photo by Thomas Kunz

# Jew in the Pool

## Presented by Yehuda Hyman

<i>The presentation begins with Yehuda Hyman addressing the audience.</i> <i>Hyphens in the text indicate a slowing of Yehuda's speaking, sometimes with added movements.</i>	high above the pool of memory <i>Gedenkbrunnen</i>
Stage action descriptions are blocked in grey.	I grabbed the side of the <i>tallis</i> with 6 fingers and it streamed up into the air behind me like a magic carpet. And I began to walk
YEHUDA: I bring this to you from Freiburg, Germany. Some images.	Nature is the best choreographer
<b>PART 1 - Fabric/Body/Air</b> A wind came up in the bright bleach sunlight and it blew my Jerusalem <i>Tallis</i> with its broad black stripes away from my body	This composition of fabric, body and the speed of air felt correct Just so Inevitable
The inside of my arm pressed the end of the fringed shawl against my torso and then the other side flew up into the sky	If you dance outside long enough something will happen  I had entered the pool at 12 o'clock and by the time I pulled my Swatch Watch out of my



damp pocket it was 2:15 and I was very tired  
and hot  
I allowed the fingers of my right hand to burn and sparkle  
and began to turn

*He revolves slowly to show the audience the large yellow Jewish Star  
hand-painted on the back of his white shirt.*

the torso twisting  
turning round  
Theater in the Round  
But this is not a performance  
This is an Excavation.

I am standing in a pool of memory  
and I am the Jew in the pool  
and I am excavating what happened here.  
Do you know what happened here?  
*Wissen Sie was hier geschehen ist?*

**PART 2**

I wrote the words down on August 7th, 2018 after my dance actions in Freiburg so that I would remember what my body did. This was the second summer in a row that I was doing this dance action. I hadn't meant to come back and do it a second time but the work wasn't finished. Today, I am primarily going to talk about the first summer.

Freiburg, if you don't know, is a city in Southwest Germany. It is a big university city. It is in the *Schwarzwald*: the beautiful black forest region of Germany. It's heavily touristy. It is known as the "green city of Germany" - The *Freiburgers* are very proud of their ecological awareness and it is the warmest city in Germany. What was I doing there? I was on vacation. I was visiting my friends, Eva-Maria Berg and her husband. Eva Maria is a wonderful poet who I met in 2008 at an Artists' Colony in Spain and she invited me to come visit her in the *Schwarzwald*. She and her husband live in the town of Waldkirch. It's about 30 minutes from Freiburg and I've been to visit them eight times. It's my summer vacation.

So, in August 2017, I arrive at the Freiburg train station and my friends pick me up and they drive me to Waldkirch and we have a lovely lunch and then they say, "We have to tell you something. It's not very nice but something happened last week in Freiburg and we want you to know and we'd like to know what *you* think about it. " And by "what *you* think" they mean "*you* as a Jew."

When I come to Freiburg it's usually fun. It's vacation. We laugh and we talk and we look at the shooting stars. We drink lots of very good wine (they live in the wine-growing region) and we also share our experiences - commonalities and differences. Eva and her husband were born in Germany after the war. I was born in Hollywood after the war. They were the German generation that inherited what had happened in the war: the shame, the guilt, the darkness. I inherited the silence of my father. My father was a Polish Jew from *Ratno*. He was lucky to get out in 1938 just before they sealed the border. He left Poland from the port of Gdynia. He was on one of the last boats that a Jew could board to get out. He was on his way to New York City

and he never saw his family again. And I grew up in a little house in West Los Angeles where my father never talked about the Holocaust. He never mentioned it. And he rarely mentioned his family.

So, Eva and her husband were telling me about what had happened just the week before. About the *Gedenkbrunnen*. *Gedenkbrunnen* means "Pool of Commemoration."

Freiburg has a big plaza in the center of the city and it's called the *Platz der Alten Synagoge*, the Place of the Old Synagogue, because the synagogue was there until it was burned to the ground on *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938. It was never excavated and it became a trash heap for a long time and then it was turned into a parking lot for a long time until 2006 when the city decided they were going to renovate the plaza, this large piece of real estate, if you think about the size of Lincoln Center Plaza in New York City, it's about that size. They were going to turn it into a very beautiful public space, but what to do with the spot with the burnt remains of the synagogue which was never excavated? They took a lot of proposals from architects and two architects came up with this proposal:

*Yehuda now begins to move around the whole stage and  
physically enact what happened - beginning with laying  
out the map of the Gedenkbrunnen.*

They would build an elevated grey granite slab in the shape and dimensions of the actual footprint of the destroyed synagogue - and it's about so high off the ground (*Yehuda holds his hand about two feet off the ground*) and in the center - I'm not going to go in there now - there are vents in the granite floor and water will come out of the vents and flow over the side of the platform and disappear into vents in the pavement. And that was the idea.

So, the week before I got to Freiburg, in August, 2017, the City announced a "Sneak Preview" of the new public square and it was a very hot day, and the plaza was very crowded and the Mayor - Mayor Salomon - not Jewish, but Salomon is his last name - was there and there were speeches - and, uhm, they turn on the water and it comes flowing out of the vents in the center of the granite platform and people climb onto the platform and they began to party: children, adults, teenagers, it became a big party. And the Mayor on his microphone said, "You see how the people of Freiburg embrace their place. You see all the children of so many colors. This is a sign of hope for the future. This is the people's pool!"

Except it wasn't for all the people.

So, the next day after I had arrived, my friends take me to see this *Gedenkbrunnen* and it's a grey day and when we get there the weather is cool and uhm - I don't know what to think. First of all, I'm surprised that there's no signage anywhere about the burning of the synagogue, nothing. There are a few children quietly walking around the pool with their parents. And my friends point out that in the center of the pool there is this - you really have to be in the pool to see it - there is this big round bronze plaque - the color of it is almost black - it's black on top of a dark grey surface - and it has text about the burnt synagogue. It was formerly outside the



Young women dancing in the Holocaust memorial pool in Freiburg, Germany makes a mockery of the main synagogue destroyed there. Photo by François Blum

pool, it was put up in the 1960s, but as part of the design, the architects had decided to remove it from where it was and embed it in the floor of the pool and cover it with water so it's impossible to see unless you're standing right over it. So I'm looking at this pool and my friends are concerned, you know they're always concerned about me and I know they want to know what I think.... and I have to say, I'm not horrified. I just think it's bizarre and I don't know what to think.

So I go back a few days later and it's hot, hot, hot. And as I approach the *Platz der Alte Synagoge* and I go over to the *Gedenkbrunnen* there's a full-blown party going on: there are people running through the water and taking Selfies and celebrating and eating ice-cream cones and talking on their cell-phones. There're little dogs running through and taking a piss and children tugging their little boats and throwing balls and screaming and yelling. On the outside of the pool, there are people lying on beautiful beach towels and they're applying their sun-tan lotions and what really captures my eye is a woman who climbs onto the platform and she's wearing a kind of sexy black dress and she pulls it down exposing her naked breasts and she lies down in the pool on her back and she has a bottle of shampoo and she starts shampooing her hair and massaging her breasts and taking a swig from a bottle that contains something alcoholic and then she gets up and she does this very sexy dance, which, I have to say is - good - with her bare breasts there - and children running around her and nobody's doing anything and I'm watching this and I - I - I just can't put it together. This party on top of the unexcavated burnt remains of the synagogue. And you know, I don't know what to do.

What I do think is that I need to talk to a Jew. And I don't think there are any Jews there in the immediate area but I DO remember that, across town, there is a synagogue that was built in 1986 but it's always been closed the other times I've passed by there. So I walk over there quickly and there's a bulletproof glass door - most of the

synagogues in Europe have a bulletproof door. And there's a poster in the door taped to the glass from the inside, facing the outside. The synagogue has put it there. It is a blow-up photograph of the opening day ceremony of the *Gedenkbrunnen* with people celebrating in it - and the synagogue people have written across this photograph, one word: *SHANDE!* - exclamation point - SHAME! - so now I know how the Jews feel, which is not what I've been hearing at the pool location, that the Jews are ok with this. That's not true.

Anyway, I call my friend Eva. She comes to Freiburg and I take her to the synagogue to see the poster and she's just filled with anger. Eva is a gorgeous poet and she's also an activist and she's done a lot of work in her town to uncover the Nazi past. So we talk for a long time. And then I go home that night. I know I have to do something and I don't know what but I think if I just talk or scream nobody's going to listen to me and I don't really speak German so I just decide, well, I have my *yarmulke*, my black velvet *yarmulke* with me and I have my Bar Mitzvah *tallis* with me (the only *tallis* I have at that point) and I decide I'm going to put them on and I'm just going to go in the pool and I'll be what's NOT in there - anything remotely Jewish. And I'm going to be the Jew in the Pool. And I'll do some kind of movement but I don't want to do performance. And um I go to bed feeling resolved and good and I wake up and I feel really nauseated, and scared, cause I don't know what could happen.

Anyway, I decide to go, and I get on the train and get there in thirty minutes and -uhm - I didn't have this on that day (*Yehuda points to the Yellow Star on his back*), that was the next year, and uhm, I get to the pool and my idea is that I was just going to go in there and do my thing until the sun went down. And I wasn't going to tell anybody. But when I got there, I decided I better tell somebody, and I call my friend Eva and I say, "I'm going in the pool with my *yarmulke* and my *tallis*" and she says, "I'll be there in thirty minutes." I get to the pool. I take off my shoes and socks. I take my little *yarmulke* and I put it on my head. It's a hot, hot, hot day, the pool is packed. With



children and adults. I take out my kinda raggy Bar Mitzvah *tallis* from the '60s. It's a "stole" style tallis. I lift it up and say a *Bracha* over it. I put it over my head. This is all done really slowly so that the hundreds of people in the square can see me and I step - up - into - the - pool and my feet hit the water and I feel really - good. It's so cool under this hot sun. And I start to walk - kind of a very slow walk- I don't know what I'm doing – a *Butoh*-like walk but it's kind of *Jew-toh* and children are - are movin' around me and they're curious and the adults are kind of uncomfortable at this party. I'm like Moses parting the Red Sea and they're moving to the side. And the children are really sweet - some of them are looking at me and they say, "Allo. Allo" - like they think I'm a clown and they want to play with me. But I can't play because I'm not here. I am - a ghost. And I make my way to the center of the pool and I start to revolve so that everyone can see me. So I start turning very slowly so that everyone - can see - the Jew - in the Pool.

And - kids start splashing me. They just want to play - you know - it doesn't bother me. Uhm, and as I'm turning I start to smell - smoke - that was in this spot - and the fire - and I just start to do a little excavation - what was here *(all through this Yehuda is doing a very slow improvised movement score of searching - looking into the ground and discovering, with his body, the horrors of what happened there)* -

What was here?

And whenever I think I'm being too dancey I pull back. Because I don't want them to think that this is a performance - I'm not performing. Really not. And I start to uncover things:

A wedding. Down there.

A Bar Mitzvah.

A *tallis*.

And I start to - over the next three-and-a-half hours - perform every Jew gesture I can possibly think of in the pool - and then not - then just standing there - so I'm doing "The Wise Jew," I'm doing "The Happy Jew" and "The Sad Jew" and then "The Afraid Jew" - Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew and I then I get down into the water, which smells faintly of urine, and my tallis falls off and becomes wet with water so I just use it as part of the whole thing. And - the kids are getting a little more aggressive - cause I'm sort of ruining their party - and the adults are really unhappy with me - and as I walk by them with their cell phones in the pool - they are deliberately speaking louder as if to say, "You are not here" - which make me - angry. And so I - scream *(He goes into a highly contorted pose of a fierce scream - but does not use his voice and holds the silent pose for a beat - and then drops it)* - really loud and then I think that's not a good thing cause I'm scaring the children - which I don't wanna do cause it's not the children's fault.

So this goes on and what it really becomes is - eventually - I only want to show what was removed from this pool, which is.... beauty. *(He is doing a lyrical, mystical dance with his arms - a prayer)* - *Adonai Echad*. And I see everyone - and I realize that - we're the same. There's no difference. So while this has been going on - I want to say that - I am also connec-

ting with my family - which is here - under the water *(he's crouched on the floor in the water)* and that's very distressing and I -

*Yehuda lets out a brutal scream of pain.  
He pauses.*

And then I feel a hand on my shoulder and a calm voice says, "I think you should stop now. You're making people very upset. And I'm worried for you."

So I get up and there is this man who I had noticed staring at me before. This Muslim man. I recognized this young man who had been sitting outside the pool. He was looking at me very concentratedly - and he looks to me like a Sufi - I know some Sufis back in New York and he has that calm vibe - and we have a kind of long conversation which is interesting because everything around the pool stops because now there's a Jew and Muslim standing in the pool, talking for a long time. And I'm kind of irritated because I don't want to stop at that time - but this is really important, too. I won't go into it right now but this was really important, too.

*(Yehuda's time was almost up at the conference).*

Nothing was resolved but it was good.

At the end, I come out. Eva's there with a bottle of water. She's looking very worried. It's three-and-a-half hours since I've been in there and it's a hot, hot, hot, hot day. And for the next few days we stand outside the pool, Eva and me - and we put papers on the ground - one word on each paper: "Do - You - Know - What - Happened - Here?" "*Wissen - Sie - Was - Hier - Geschenken - Ist?*" and we stand there and answer questions and that was a great experience. It was very difficult. I got yelled at. I got thanked. A whole very complicated conversation.

I go back to Brooklyn. A lot of people that I met around the pool had organized. They write an open letter to the Mayor, it's published in the newspaper. The Mayor issues a statement that, "Yes, something's not quite right with the design. We're going to have a City Council meeting, we're going to invite the Jews and we'll talk about it."

On September 12th, 2017, a hundred people, many of them who I had met in those four days, link hands and stand around the pool in a silent vigil.

And a couple of weeks later, three signs go up around the pool - with a picture of the old synagogue before it was burnt and an explanation and asking people to please be respectful.

So, all of us who were involved in this were feeling very hopeful last fall. And then winter came. The water got turned off for the winter anyway. Spring came. The Mayor didn't make it in the next election. They got a new Mayor.

And then it got hot. And they turned on the water. And people went back in the pool.



Demonstrators form human chain around the pool at the Square of the Old Synagogue in Freiburg, Germany. Photo: François Blum

And the messages I was getting from my friends was that it was actually worse because people were digging in saying, "This is our place."

So I went back to Germany this summer with a fancier tallis. A bigger tallis - and more theatrical. My tallis. And I painted a yellow star on my back so that there would be no question. Because a lot of people had said, "Who is he? What is he doing there?" So there was no question. And this time I danced in there for three days. And, uhm, a week after I left, two new signs went up - with a photograph of the burnt synagogue and the writing said - "please be respectful and do not enter the pool."

So that's kind of it. There's a lot more to talk about. Things are in process. Nothing's solved but things are moving and I thank you for your time.

ADDENDUM: On October 23, one week after I delivered this presentation at the Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World conference, I received a letter from Mayor Martin Horn, the New Mayor of Freiburg in response to a detailed letter I had written him about the situation at the *Gedeknbrunnen*. He said that he had hoped that my "involvement would kick off a public discussion and heighten awareness of how people should behave in relation to the memorial pool. Unfortunately, we now realize that further measures are required to inform tourists about the terrible history of the old synagogue." In June, 2019, I received blueprints from the Mayor's office with plans that included, among other items, pictograms around the site depicting forbidden activities (i.e. swimming, stepping onto the platform, trash, dogs, etc.) a bronze model of the former synagogue to be situated near the pool, and a separate documentation/information center about National Socialism to be opened within walking distance from the pool. As of this writing (September, 2019), the pictograms have been installed (in addition to the four standing signs around the pool which give detailed information about the tragic history of the site).

However, the situation remains unresolved. When the weather gets hot, as it always does in Freiburg in the summer, the pool once again becomes a magnet for inappropriate and disrespectful behavior. This has been documented in photographs recently posted on social media and in the *Badische Zeitung*. There have, thus far, been 17 separate meetings between members of the City Council and members of the Jewish community of Freiburg about a redesign of the *Gedenkb-runnen*. Descendants of the Jews of Freiburg have requested that the water be replaced by planted flowers; a large Menorah be installed in the center of the platform along with several stones from the foundation of the old synagogue, and that plates with the names of the 351 Jewish victims of Freiburg (first deported to Gurs, France and then to Auschwitz where they were murdered) be installed around the rim of the fountain. This has not happened.

**Yehuda Hyman** is an award-winning playwright, choreographer, actor and Artistic Director of Mystical Feet Company. He was born in Los Angeles to immigrant parents from Russia and Poland. Plays include *The Mad Dancers*, *Center of the Star*, and *Swan Lake Calhoun*. Honors include the Kennedy Center New American Plays Award, the NEA/TCG Playwright-in Residence Grant and LABA Fellow/14th St Y. An M.F.A. in Dance from Sarah Lawrence College (2014), he currently teaches Devised Theater at Manhattan School of Music. His essay, "Three Hasidic Dances" was published in *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance* (Editor: Judith Brin Ingber, Published by Wayne State University Press) and in *Dance in America, A Reader's Anthology* (Editor: Mindy Aloff; Published by Library of America). His play, *The Mar Vista* (developed at LABA) premiered at the Pershing Square Signature Center, March, 2019. yehudahyman@gmail.com



When Pola Nirenska and Jan Karski married in 1965 they vowed to one another to never speak of the Holocaust. They both had immigrated to the United States after World War II. Jan was a renowned courier who, in 1943, brought to De Gaulle and Churchill first-hand word and photographs from inside the Warsaw Ghetto and a camp, Izbica, near Belzec. He remained in the US after personal interviews with Felix Frankfurter, US Supreme Court Justice, and President Roosevelt. Pola, who was living alone in Vienna when Austria was overtaken by the Germans, escaped the horrors of the camps by first fleeing to Italy, then finding asylum in England before moving to America. Both were scarred deeply and haunted by the war's ghosts for the remainder of their lives.

Pola was raised in a middle-class Jewish family living in central Warsaw. Her father manufactured ties, and provided well for his family, but held little value for dance and thought it was not a proper pursuit for his daughters. Therefore, Pola did not have training as a child, but loved to improvise. After graduating school, she insisted on receiving training against her parent's will, and locked herself in her bedroom until her father finally consented and slipped 4 brochures of dance academies under the door. Having no knowledge about them, she arbitrarily selected the Wigman School in Dresden, Germany.

# Ghosts of the Past: The Creation of Pola Nirenska's *Holocaust Tetralogy*

Rima Faber

She arrived at the Wigman school in 1928, knowing no one, understanding little about Mary Wigman, and with no experience in dance technique, which might have been a creative choreographic advantage. Wigman immediately recognized Pola's musical gifts, and gave her training as a percussionist as well as providing training in choreography and expressive movement. Pola did not do well at first but, by the time she graduated in 1932, received a "distinguished" diploma, and was invited to perform with the Wigman Company on their first American tour.

There is controversy about whether Wigman willingly released her two Jewish dancers, or did so in fear of consequences after returning from the company's American tour in 1933. At any rate, after her dismissal, Nirenska found herself alone in Vienna where she continued to dance. She was awarded first prize for a solo titled *Cry* (also translated from the Polish as *Scream*) in the 1934 International Choreography Competition held in Vienna. The award launched Nirenska into prominence and a solo career throughout Europe, where Karski saw her perform. She escaped to London and then reached the United States, absorbed into the rising tide of pioneer modern dancers. She was especially attracted to Doris Humphrey's musical dance orchestrations, and it was Humphrey who suggested she move to Washington, D.C. as it was open territory.

Nirenska moved to D.C. in 1951 and lived in a room in the back of Eve De La Tour's studio in Georgetown. She earned her lodging and livelihood teaching for Eve, gradually building her own clientele and dance company. Her "parents" (parents of her students) helped her raise funds to build her own studio in northern D.C., which was her home both personally and professionally beginning in 1959. As fate would have it, Jan Karski now also in the United States, remembered her performance in Europe, and sent her a note after attending her concert in D.C. As they related the story, he invited her to dinner, but she accepted only for a lunch date. They married on June 25, 1965.

Four years later, Nirenska suffered a mental breakdown and, from 1969-79 was in and out of a hospital. Faber was new to the D.C. area and began to dance in Nirenska's work after her re-emergence in 1979. The first group dance she resurrected was a work influenced by Doris Humphrey and performed to J.S. Bach's *Concerto in D minor*. It showcased Nirenska's exquisite musicality and kinesthetic mastery.

Almost 15 years after Nirenska and Karski married, two events changed their pact. Claude Lanzmann interviewed Karski for his film documentary *Shoah*. Karski was then called before Congress to

testify on behalf of building the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. The silence was broken, and in 1980 Nirenska began to choreograph a series of works that became known as *The Holocaust Tetralogy*.

In this article I will verbally reconstruct Nirenska's creation of the four dances through description of the movements that I hope will conjure a vision of the dances in the reader's mind. Since I performed the Mother in all four works from their creation in 1980 until their final memorial performance in 1993, I can provide first-hand experiences working with Pola and motivations for the movements. It took Pola a decade to choreograph the series which, in programs, she titled, "In Memory of Those I Loved...Who Are No More." She had not set out to choreograph four Holocaust dances, but each one led to the next. She created a good number of other group dances and solos during that period, but I truly believe *The Holocaust Tetralogy* is the most profound and greatest expression of her genius. In a review on July 29, 1990, the Pulitzer Prize winning critic for the *Washington Post*, Alan M. Kriegsman wrote: "They constitute a daring attempt, within the humanistic tradition of modern dance, to bear the unbearable and speak the unspeakable." In these four works Nirenska achieves a human core and depth of vision that reaches into one's heart and leaves a scar.



Rima Farber in *Whatever Begins... also Ends* 1990, photo by Sonya Everett

Nirenska was an intensely intuitive choreographer. She choreographed in phrases, not counts. She did not create movements in the studio in advance of rehearsals but entered the space with a general idea or structure and sculpted the movements on her dancers. Since I worked with her during the final decade of her life, she was greatly incapacitated by arthritis and could not demonstrate her ideas, but sat in a chair with her little dog lying obediently under the seat as she indicated movements through her expressive upper body and arm gestures. She often sang in her smoke-destroyed rough alto voice as she dynamically demonstrated phrases.

All of Nirenska's dancers had strong modern dance technique. Most had studied ballet as well, but none moved with the crisp, light, balletic quality that is a hallmark of pointe work. In these dances, our shoulders, spines, and pelvis had to communicate the intense depth and weight of a wrestler struggling against forces impossible to conquer.

### ***Dirge (9 minutes, 37 seconds)***

*Dirge*, choreographed in 1980-81, was the first group piece to be created after Nirenska's emergence, but it became the second section in the series of four Holocaust works. The piece was conceived

in a series of horizontal crossings through which the dancers were fated to follow an inevitable path of mounting annihilation as they weave toward the audience. It depicts a death march to the solemn second movement of Ernst Bloch's *Concerto Grosso Number One*. A mother leads her daughters conjuring all the grief, fear, sorrow, solace, and rage that can be evoked through movements in German Expressionism.

The first crossing is behind an upstage deep blue lit scrim and dark stage. The Mother, who leads her daughters, beckons them as if dragging them onward. Each enters single file with heavily-laden lunges, passing from upstage left to right as silhouetted shadows in the night to the rhythmic drone of a single but syncopated drumbeat.

Interactions between the daughters begin during the second crossing from stage right in front of the scrim. The Mother, again, enters first, but is pulled backwards as if drawn to embrace the second daughter in line as she appears. Each person enters the path of light as an individual character. We pray, cry, hope, console, support one another as the family is compelled to move forward drawn by an outside force toward an ultimate, inescapable destiny.



The third crossing begins with a solo for the Child, who is forever hopeful. The Mother enters with foreboding, then lifts and rocks her as she is supported in the shape of the cross, suggesting a martyred innocent. Nirenska was aware of, and purposely choreographed the symbol of the cross, although she generally did not analyze as she worked. Her relationship to movement was emotional and intuitive.

As Mother and Child finish rocking and move apart, the group enters the lit path, emerging from the left central wing, then splits into movements expressing individualized angst. They gradually move past the Mother and exit stage right as the Mother supported by a back hinge that tilts toward the floor in slow descent. Layered closely together and reaching their clasped hands toward heaven, they gradually sink as one unit until the mother pushes the daughter away into the wings, rolls further downstage, and begins the final crossing with lateral swings suggesting Hemingway's title "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

Another dancer enters from the downstage wing to join the Mother's swings. The group appears and moves forward, rocking between a lunge and forward leg extension as the arms rotate with cupped hands as if catching tears. This final crossing, far downstage, confronts the audience. It builds to hysteria, alternately spreading apart or clutching together in desperate huddles. As Bloch's music climaxes, the movement suddenly slows as it would appear in the midst of an adrenaline rush. The group collects downstage left, staring starkly at the audience. They slowly and simultaneously turn heads to confront their doom, and file offstage to ultimately face their impending death.

***Whatever Begins...also Ends (Seneca), (7 minutes, 7 seconds)***

Although choreographed after *Dirge* and premiered in 1982, this section became a prelude to *The Tetralogy* and was performed as the first dance to the first movement of Bloch's *Concerto Grosso Number One*.

The dance begins with Mother and four of her five daughters in peaceful family repose on the floor upstage left. The fifth daughter enters gleefully and beckons her sisters to join her. One-by-one the children peel away until the Mother is left alone, and her daughters playfully break into unison jig-like bounces. As the Mother, a figure of foreboding, broods and portends what is to come, she is in contrast to the frolicking jumps and turns of the group, reminiscent of Polish folk dance. Their quick changes of direction syncopate with Bloch's rhythms, clearly establishing the daughters' denial of the Mother's warnings.

In contrast, the Mother slowly advances downstage along a stage left corridor. When she reaches the proscenium, she is on the ground as if remembering her babies. Two daughters lift her to join their buoyant frivolity, but the Mother pulls away. There is opposition between them, with each daughter turning away as the Mother supplicates and reaches toward them individually. She receives reciprocal affection from the last daughter and, for a time, all are in unison, but without assent. The Mother succumbs with an excruciatingly slow back hinge descending to the floor, first reach-

ing toward her children, then turning away as if, again, holding the memory of them as infants.

The section ends with one child on her knees, summoning towards the Mother downstage left while her sisters run upstage right. As the Mother lifts her acquiescent daughter into her arms and starts to carry her offstage, the others turn to run toward her before stopping short of reaching her, as if begging the question, "She may be wrong, but what if she's right?"

The reality of the death march immediately follows in the beginning of *Dirge*.

***Shout (3 minutes, 35 seconds)***

*Shout* (1986) is a solo choreographed for and danced by Sharron Wyrrick. Pola described it as the terror she felt hiding from the bombs exploding during the London Blitz. She confided to me that it had similar feeling to her dance *Cry* which won the fore-mentioned prize in the 1934 International Choreography Competition held in Vienna, but she no longer remembered the choreography of *Cry*. *Shout* was choreographed as an independent dance, and was included as part of the *Tetralogy* only after *The Train* was completed four years later. In a *Washington Post* review in 1990, Kriegsmann described the dance as "a ferocious outburst of terror, agony, disbelief, fury, and protest."<sup>1</sup>

Performed to modern, dissonant music, *Hatred of the Filthy Bomb* composed by Lou Harrison, the dance begins with Wyrrick in panic, racing onto the stage from upstage right, remaining frenetic throughout the entire three and a half minutes of terror. The focus of Wyrrick's fear is an imaginary attack from downstage right. She shields herself, shrinks away, and braces herself in anger as she challenges to fight before succumbing in defeat. The music is arrhythmic, and so Nirenska creates her own phrases with starts, startled stops, and moments of pulsating stress against music of screams, screeches, and haunting echoes. The solo ends with Wyrrick trapped inside her desperate panic.

***The Train (18 minutes)***

The last dance, *The Train*, depicts "the final solution". The Mother watches her family as they die and succumbs to her own collapse only after a final furious rail toward God. The choreography in this last section is raw and unadorned.

It is the longest section, partly because the music is that length, but mainly to give each dancer full expression of her individual attitude toward her death. The music is *Sunreader* by Carl Ruggles and contains threatening and ominous overtones of war. It has dissonant, modern tonality and a modicum of meter, but is not atonal as in *Shout*. Nirenska's relationship to it is entirely arrhythmic and in contrast to accented sounds as if confronting them in the music.

The costumes for this dance are entirely different from the first two dances. In *Whatever Begins...Also Ends* and *Dirge*, the costumes are simple dresses in neutral colors reminiscent of an earlier modern dance era. In *The Train* they are torn and ragged, suggestive of the abuse the captured victims endured.

The dance begins offstage left. Whereas in the first dance the group was sitting comfortably affectionate upstage left, *The Train* reveals a huddled, ragged, staggering group clutching one another as they are dragged in by the Mother. They hunch over, pull away, and dart fearful glances in all directions as if waiting for the next blow. Only the Mother is resolute about entering the space.

They are forced to enter the boxcar/chambers or, as victims were told, "the showers" by the SS in the extermination camps. The confined area is represented by a brightly lit rectangle on the floor. In rehearsal, we leafed through Nirenska's book collection of Holocaust drawings and photographs, and Pola chose images to replicate in various "freezes." During creation of *The Train*, there were moments each of us broke into tears. *Dirge* was more abstract and stylized, not direct, primal, nor as near to literal. There is a close line at which emotional becomes emotive, and Nirenska stayed at the edge but was careful not to cross it.

Once inside the "boxcar", the light is extended to contain the entire stage as the chamber. As each dancer struggles with extinction, the remaining dwindling group shields themselves, consoles one another, stares in disbelief, or spasms in sobs. They sometimes cluster in the despairing shapes from the sketches or photographs she had showed us in the previously mentioned art books. It is as if the dancers are a Greek chorus helplessly witnessing their own fate.

The Mother, having watched the death of each of her family, becomes overcome with grief and simultaneously possessed with fury. She attends to each of them, dragging their lifeless bodies into a pile center stage. Before succumbing to her own destiny, she finds strength for a final rail at God as if challenging, "See what you have done! Answer us!" Ultimately, she collapses on top of the heap.

The stage goes dark and the curtain closes.

The festered and searing floodgates had been opened. Nirenska had just completed the entire *Tetralogy* and the performance was scheduled for the Kennedy Center. It never happened because Nirenska suffered her second mental breakdown. She was very ill for at least six months but gradually grew calmer. I realized that, if she were going to recover, we had to fulfill a performance of the completed *Tetralogy*, yet I knew she did not have the strength to do it. To protect her from the process, I did not let her view rehearsals until the suite was ready even though we rehearsed in her basement studio. When I finally invited her to come down, she simply nodded and said, "Very good."

The entire *Tetralogy* premiered at a D.C. dance center called Dance Place (3225-8<sup>th</sup> St., NE). There were two evenings, one coinciding with Nirenska's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, July 28, 1990. At the closing bows Nirenska announced her retirement. She had brought the world her final statement. Alan M. Kriegsmann, Pulitzer Prize dance critic for the *Washington Post* review wrote, "Yet, there was nothing final in feeling about the event. Rather, it had the aspect of yet another milestone on a journey that has taken the choreographer along a difficult but ever-enriching pathway."<sup>2</sup>

In summation about the importance of Nirenska's work, he wrote: "The tetralogy begins with a family closeted in warmth and affection, and ends with the same clan a morbid heap of lifeless bodies. It is an unforgettable metaphor for the numbing finality of genocidal extermination, wherein a whole people disappears without a trace. And for this very reason, keeping alive those traces represented by Nirenska's creation is not just an artistic but moral imperative."

Nirenska never fully recovered from her nervous condition. She remained emotionally and physically frail. She died on July 25, 1992, a few days before her 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday. The cause of her death is a shadow. Her husband claimed she was watering plants on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor terrace of their apartment, climbed on a stool to reach them, and fell off over the ledge. Another version is that she committed suicide and jumped. In respect for Jan's pride, I have never pressed the matter.

***Reconstructions of the Holocaust Tetralogy***

The only complete reconstruction of *The Holocaust Tetralogy* was her Memorial Concert held at the Hartke Theatre at Catholic University on December 20, 1993. In a sense, it was her unveiling [Following a death, when the gravestone is laid over the burial site and the grieving gather, this is known as the unveiling]. It is difficult to label it a "reconstruction" in that Nirenska's cast performed and they remembered it. Nirenska's husband, Jan Karski, was the honored guest, as were leaders of the newly opened US Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Washington Post*, *Dance Magazine*, and *Danceview* critic George Jackson, introduced the evening. In the reception held afterwards, with photographs and mementos of Nirenska's work adorning the hall, critic Alan M. Kriegsmann embraced me in tears. The performance was awarded "Critic's Pick" for the year in *The Washington Post*.

*Dirge* has been reconstructed three times. The first was by a group of graduate dancers at American University. They learned the movement very quickly from working with a video, but it became clear that their training in ballet, Post-Modern dance, and somatic practice had not prepared them for the expressive intensity required. In spite of a trip to the Holocaust Museum, they had difficulty internalizing the finely tuned tension expressive of the movement until I spent a rehearsal having them wrestle with one another.

In 1996, a professional group of Polish modern dancers who had visited the USA learned *Dirge* to bring it back to Poland. The Silesian Dance Company, directed by Jacek Luminski, performed it at Swarthmore college; the dancers had outstanding technical ability and knew how to capture the weight of the work. The content of the piece was close to home and, although none of the dancers were alive during World War II, they lived through its residual destruction and the harshness of the Soviet years. I knew Pola would be happy about their portrayal, and overjoyed that her work was journeying to Poland.

Most recently in 2016, Paul Emerson's Company E performed *Dirge* at the Kennedy Center in a concert celebrating several generations of Polish choreographers and composers. I was invited to dance the Mother again as an ambassador for the geriatric generation which, at 71 years old, was a great honor. The company is an exceedingly accomplished group of versatile dancers. I thought I



Pola Nirenska portrait, 1988, photographed by Rima Faber

would have to adapt the role for my senior status but, as it turned out, I replaced only one highly arched arabesque for an enduringly high frontal extension.

The company was strong and expressive but, again, the challenge was to find a sense of weight, a basic component of early modern dance techniques that has been lost to today's dancers through their post-modern training. The dancers indicated weight through spine ripples or shapes, but found it difficult to solidly succumb to gravity. I find this true, even watching the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Graham technique has changed accordingly. The choreography was learned quickly from videos, but most of the rehearsals were spent deepening their characters and the weight of the movements.

In reconstructing a master work, replicating the movement is only the beginning of the process. Especially in modern dance,

a form in which each choreographer develops an individual style and relationship to movement, the most difficult task is to find the movement quality of the original work and maintain the choreographer's intent. The fact that I carry the history of Nirenska's movement and intent into these reconstructions is of paramount importance.

In recent years a major dilemma has arisen about what constitutes, or qualifies as a reconstruction. An American copyrights lawyer has said there is no legal definition of "reconstruction" in the United States. A work can be filmed and copyrighted, but can an accurate revival of a dance work be produced by someone who has never performed in the work, sometimes has never seen the work, and at worst, has never seen any choreography of the dance's choreographer? If the reconstruction of a work is not an accurate reproduction of it, can it claim to be a reconstruction?

Reconstructing ballet is somewhat easier in that there is at least a codified movement vocabulary to define choreography. This makes Labanotation an easier descriptive tool. However, the movements of ballet dancers are also individualized and choreographers often build their work on the original dancers' gifts and personal expression.

The technologies of video have become a saving grace for the historical preservation and continuity of dance as an art form. It communicates the details and nuances of movement qualities. Great works are easily preserved, and lesser known choreographers, such as Pola Nirenska, can re-emerge and be widely appreciated 25 years after her death.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Kriegsman, *Washington Post*, July 29, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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# Hilde Holger: Legacy of an Expressionist, Emigrant, Innovator

Jacqueline Waltz

**Introduction**

Hilde Holger (born in Vienna in 1905, died in London in 2001) was a pioneering Austrian Expressionist dancer, dance educator, choreographer, and therapist. Her life spanned the entire twentieth century with its devastating major conflicts, and tremendous artistic developments. Holger wholeheartedly believed in the transforming power of modern dance. Her Central European *Creative Expressive Ausdruckstanz* (Expressionist dance) made her part of the wave of revolutionary 'natural' movement which swept across Europe beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The dance developed out of the influence of American dancer Isadora Duncan, and European teachers such as Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, alongside that of other modern dancers and pioneers. These included Rudolf von Laban, Kurt Jooss, Mary Wigman, and Gertrud Bodenwieser (Holger's teacher), and *Wiener Secession* (Viennese Secessionist) artists such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Richard Teschner, Anton Josef Trčka (Antios), Hagenbund artists such as Oscar Kokoschka and F.A. Harta, theatre director Max Reinhardt and others. Amongst these artists, there were many Jewish women dancers and teachers of dance.

Hilde Holger's mother and aunt encouraged her early love of dance and movement. Holger's daughter, Primavera Boman-Behram, regarding Holger's early life, Jewish identity and influence on her dance oeuvre, writes: "She was born Hilde Sofer. When she was very young, her father Alfred Sofer, died and her mother married Heinrich Wohl from Poland who was a very religious Jew. Her grandfather [on the other side] was Siegfried Schreiber. Alfred's brother, Hilde's uncle and his side of the family became Catholic as so many did then (in efforts to thwart the Nazi laws and save themselves). My mother had dance as her religion, but respected and was interested in all religions" (Boman-Behram, 2019).

In 1919 at 14, Holger was sent to study with Gertrud Bodenwieser, director of dance at the Vienna *Staatsakademie für Musik u. Darstellende Kunst* (State Academy for Music and the Performing Arts). Bodenwieser initially discouraged Holger from dancing. However, after only two years of study, she became Bodenwieser's assistant. Holger participated in establishing the Bodenwieser Dance Group and by 1923 was giving her own solo recitals.

Holger, in recollecting Bodenwieser, writes: "Bodenwieser, known as 'Frau Gerty', was 'what you might describe as self-made. There was nobody in her time who could have taught her as much as she demanded' because of her overwhelming drive, and fertility of



Hilde Holger in *Nature*, photographer unknown

creative imagination, teaching and rehearsing for hours, and then going out to the theatre and parties afterwards" (Holger, 1999, 77).

Bodenwieser was lauded in Vienna for over 100 diverse and dynamic group works, especially her sensational *Demon Machine* (1923), where the dancers enact a synchronized, piston-like, ever increasing frenzy. Bodenwieser and other intelligent, emancipated women (especially Jewish) dancers, et al., like Holger took part in salons along with the radical Viennese Secessionist painters and other avant-garde artists. The Secessionist style, both in painting and dance, was characterized by a sense of "on-going movement", decorative elements, curvilinear forms (circles, waves, figure eights and spirals) and arabesque patterns intended to "reveal the inner sensuous and psychic life" (Brown, 1990, in Grayburn 1990, 16). Holger's own choreographic works demonstrated this Secessionist style, as well as others, and were, experimental, innovative and of humor. An undated letter from her assistant described her work: "The dances and technique training following Holger's own first solo evening in 1923 in the Secession drew from both fluidly curvilinear and more strongly percussive and angular forms; from Bauhaus, to the shimmering of a prism, like a bubble suspended in the air. In contrast was (Holger's) stark Madonna-visage, clothed in a red vel-



vet robe in a *Bouree* from Bach” (unpublished manuscripts, Boman-Behram collection, translation, Waltz, 2003).

Holger’s performance in the *Haus der Secession* (Secessionist House), with its renowned Beethoven frieze by Gustav Klimt, was followed by performances in France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1926 Holger left the Bodenwieser Group to establish her own dance school in Vienna’s Palais Ratibor building. She produced works with both political and Jewish themes: *Wacht auf!* (Wake Up!) in 1926 which included a movement chorus; *Four Pictures from the Time of the Paris Commune*, in 1927; *Hebräischer Tanz* (Hebrew Dance) in 1929; *Kabbalistischer Tanz* (Kabbalistic Dance) in 1933; and *Ahasuerus* (the Biblical Persian king in the Purim story) in 1936.

Regarding the darkening socio-political climate and Holger’s relationship to her Jewishness, her daughter Primavera Boman-Behram, writes: “I believe when a relative took her for a holiday to Sweden in the late nineteen twenties, that is when she came up with her stage name of Hilde Holger dispensing with her Jewish sounding surname *Sofer* (which is the same word in Hebrew for the traditional scribe of Jewish scripture). After all, she was a blonde with blue eyes. I feel she had a premonition (of the Holocaust); I have so many letters telling of the start of what was literally unbelievable horror. Just as she was aware of the art the Bauhaus produced in Germany, Hilde was aware of her own Jewishness” (Boman-Behram, 2019).



*Die Golem* by Holger, 1937, photographer unknown

Her daughter makes note of two solos with Jewish themes: the *Hebraischer Tanz* from 1929, and the *Golem* from 1937.<sup>1</sup>

### **Holger’s Teaching**

Holger’s approach to pedagogy, like Bodenwieser’s, exemplified the enlightened, Viennese progressive approach to education and to child development. Students were required, as in Bodenwieser’s curriculum, not only to train in dance technique, but of parallel importance, they were to create their own dance work. A socialist and humanist, Holger taught “children of aristocrats, and children of workmen”, often giving them free classes.

Movement in classes and choreography by Holger, Bodenwieser, and other expressionist dance teachers “contained elements of *Tieftanz* (deep dance), motions on the floor, sustained torso mobility, pairings, swings” (Jackson, 2013, 6), successional movement (both centripetal and centrifugal) arising from the center, upper body, and breath. In training her students, Holger, like Bodenwieser, utilized the ballet *barre*<sup>2</sup> for its efficacy and strength, however, like Bodenwieser she believed that eventually when a student became a performer “(That) dancer, freed from the traditional forms of dance, should develop his or her own physical ‘language’ which the audience should immediately understand” (Bleier Brody 1990, 4).

Holger’s dance, life and work in the progressive artistic atmosphere of 1920s, early ‘30s Vienna, led by the vanguard of Jewish artists, educators, doctors, all collapsed in the face of Nazi persecution. With the closure of her prominent school, she was forced to dance clandestinely in an artist’s studio and she re-trained, learning *Heilmassage*<sup>3</sup> with an orthopedist at the Rothschild Hospital in order to be able to support herself in exile.

In the impending cataclysm, her mentor, Bodenwieser, went on tour with her company to Bogota, Colombia. As a Jewish artist she was not able to return to Austria, annexed by the Nazis; her theatre director husband Friedrich Rosenthal was later murdered by the Nazi regime. Able to secure a visa through her student Shona Dunlop enabling her to reach New Zealand, and later Australia, Bodenwieser resettled and greatly influenced the modern dance there.

In 1939 Hilde Holger fled Vienna, reaching Marseilles and then by boat she continued to far off Bombay. Though saved by her own emigration, tragically, almost all of her family members perished in the Holocaust. In Bombay, after initial dire financial hardships (necessitating her sleeping on the examination table of a doctor friend), Holger met and married an Indian Parsi homeopath and medical doctor, Adi Boman-Behram. They had their daughter Primavera in India, and Holger opened her school, introducing (through teaching and lectures), the Central European expressionist dance to India’s radically different culture. For example, Holger had to display a sign on her studio door, “Ladies Only” because in India, dancers were considered to be prostitutes. Holger was successful as a teacher and performer, dancing in a maharajah’s palace and meeting Gandhi. She had many Parsi students, who were more emancipated in terms of educational opportunities for women.



Juhu beach - 4 girls with sticks, 1944, photo by Charles Petras

In 1948, when India became independent of British rule, the Muslim-Hindu violence of India’s Partition was deeply abhorrent to Holger. She said she would not go through war again, and emigrated once more, with her husband and daughter, settling in London. Initially teaching in a church hall, and again, encountering prejudice because she was seen as a German refugee; a cup of tea was thrown at her by an irate Hampstead resident, who considered Holger to be a “bloody foreigner”. Nevertheless, she persevered. Holger opened her studio in her Georgian house in bohemian Camden Town. It was there in her basement studio she continued to teach for more than 50 years.

Her *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork) approach combined her Viennese experimental collaborations with composers, designers, and creative expressive movement, incorporating her humanist philosophy, early studies with Bodenwieser, influence of India, her love of nature, rhythm and elemental forms.

In London she continued this progressive, pedagogical approach: to train the body according to one’s individuality, and with the help of music, make one free from physical and psychological inhibitions. The philosophy and teaching methods of Holger have been influential sources in dance movement therapy practice and on other dancers (as well as regarding my own beliefs).

### **Holger’s Idea of Technique**

Holger believed in putting a dancer through the discipline of the ballet *barre*. Her rationale was that a dancer had to know how to train the body with aesthetic line and strength, to organise movement and the *barre* was a means of doing this. However, her ballet *barre* was her own. She also certainly drew from her training with Bodenwieser. Holger describes Bodenwieser as “a volcano erupting with ideas...very inspiring (who) never overrode the individual, letting us create for ourselves” (Hirschbach 1990,14). However, Bodenwieser “accepted the relevance of ballet as a system of training though not as choreographic medium” (Brown 1990,18).

What was unique about Holger’s *barre* work, was, in Holger’s words, that “a modern dancer works from head to hip” (Waltz, Holger interview, 2000). Sometimes this meant hanging from the wall *barre* three feet off the ground. Sometimes it meant circling a hoop laid on the floor, bending the torso, arms and legs to follow its circular shape, in order to strengthen and make supple the spine. Differing from the sedate ballet *barre*,<sup>2</sup> Hilde’s *barre* was dynamic, and done on the move, curving and arcing the back in attitude, in travelling and turning *frappé* done at the *barre*, and moving into the center of the room, in spirals, and figure eights. In contrast was the flat profile and angles of the Egyptian step, or the extended arms, flexed wrists and outstretched legs of what she called the ‘Picasso’ step. Changing levels, direction, in turns, jumping and travelling steps (still using ballet turns and jumps including *tour en l’air*, *tour jeté*, and *sissonne*), always moving from the torso, and with arms stretched out through the fingertips, the *barre* and center work were a mixture of influences from her beloved Bruegel *Kunsthistorisches Museum* (Vienna Art History Museum), rollicking paintings, Indian temple carvings, Cubism, rhythmic gymnastics, humour and Zen-like concentration.

Holger also influenced and was influenced by the Viennese marionette designer Richard Teschner, seen in Holger’s pendulum movement using short bamboo sticks, or in her *Villon* choreography with several students suspended over one long pole, bent from the waist, ribs or head.

### **Music**

Holger’s appreciation of music, especially rhythm, was of primary importance to her. Her pupil Feroza Seervai (2002) reported that in the classes in India they danced to Bach, Corelli, and Debussy. Holger found Rudolf von Laban’s work, (as one of the founders of *Ausdruckstanz*) to move without music, too cerebral. I earlier mentioned his protégé Mary Wigman, another of the Expressionist modern dance pioneers, particularly known for her philosophy of *Gesamtkunst*, a synthesis of dance, music, costume, and masks, who, however, held the dance to be paramount: “...most come through music to movement. Almost all our dancers embody music, dance what’s foreign when they could make their own. Free oneself from music! So must all! Only then can dance develop into what one hopes from it: toward free dance, toward pure Art. The body is the dancer’s instrument”. “...*Die meisten kommen ueber die Musik zur Bewegung. Fast alle unsere Moderner Tanzer u. Tanzerinnen verkörpern Musik, tanzen Fremdes und koennten vielleicht Eigenesschaffen. Freiwerden von der Musik! Das mussten sie alle! Erst dann kann sich die Bewegung zu dem entwickeln, was alle von ihr erhoffen: zum freien Tanz, zu reiner Kunst. Der Körper ist das Instrument des Tanzers* (Wigman ,1913, Tagebuch, Binder & Szeemann 1990, 20). (The English translation is provided by the author and also in: Wigman, 1990, 20).

Holger’s attitude to music was not as severe as Wigman’s. However, Holger embodied in her dance, a rhythmic incisiveness underpinning the movement and allowing it to work as pure dance without music. Her collaborative work with composers freed her to compose dances first, and then commission the music.

In classes, Holger kept time on bamboo sticks, or a tambourine in rhythmic, sharp, syncopated beats and very fast tempi, accelerating when she felt frustrated by her students’ execution of movement or when someone came late (causing a number of broken tambourines!). She often used phrases, which she repeated many times but diminished the amount of repetitions from four times to two times, then as four singles. Canons and repetition were frequent devices, as in the motion of hoops like driving pistons, or the dynamism of diving *penché* out of high *bourrée* steps. We employed percussion instruments in repeating rhythmic patterns, the accompanist (usually David Sutton-Anderson) played or incorporated his rhythms in our movement, and even joined the dancers at the *barre* before hopping back to the piano.

In an interview with her on the subject of teaching young children, she likened the training of a dancer to that of the musician: “If a child already learns an instrument, this is of great help, too, in teaching dancing. You know when you are learning an instrument, I’m sure the teacher taught you how to play the piano: you can’t hammer the piano, you can’t play without sense...You must go according to the rules of the instrument. It is the same for dance. I put you at the *barre*, you have to be sometimes very accurate what we are doing or you can’t teach anything in that particular art. It means the child needs to discipline herself or himself” (Waltz, 2000).

**Improvisation**

When I began studying with ‘Mme’ Holger in 1996, she was 91, constricted by arthritis, and teaching from a stair lift at the bottom of the stairs, though age had not constricted her sharp mental capacity, or the percussive incisive tempo of her bamboo sticks on a tambourine. Holger’s two-hour classes were made up of an hour of technique: *barre*, then center and moving across the floor, followed by an hour of improvisation. Holger gave us what were essentially dance problems to solve. For example, how would you move in the cubicles formed by a pattern on the floor of randomly placed bamboo sticks? Or, working in pairs, move into the hoop, then your partner moves into the hoop (how would you move together?); or putting the hoops on the floor and using a low movement, going from one hoop to the other. Props were important, and the variations were endless. The problems were intellectual, physical, and relational, as we tried each other’s movement, worked as partners or as a group. If I ever sat out to watch, which wasn’t often because it wasn’t allowed, I was amazed by the beauty, and complexity which emerged out of very basic, pure movements.

Though I had missed the 1960’s era of Hampstead Theatre performances, her studio still displayed the fantastic array of objects at the back of the studio, such as instruments, different sized hoops, bamboo sticks, and mats, a mahogany *barre* which she had brought from India. Props extended the movements and became metaphors for war, ritual, societal convention, and humor, always within a framework of abstract movement, even when dealing with dramatic ideas verging on mime.

Nature played an enormous role, affecting Holger’s eye as a dancer, as movement of waves, birds, penguins, whales, frogs, lizards, etc.,

became abstract movement vocabulary. Even the nature programs on television were a source of inspiration for her.

Her use of video and film was up to date, and Holger often invited her pupils in the evening to view a video recording of choreography or classes.

There was Holger’s experience of India influencing her teaching using its art, sculpture, music, colors and forms and of course, its dance. While in India, Holger writes, she did not attempt to choreograph Indian dance. However, she made several dances in the West, notably *Apsaras* (1979) that then drew from these experiences, and also she used Indian hand movements, the turn of the hip and flexed foot, strong accents and rhythms in technique classes.

Other sources of influence were literature and psychoanalysis. Although as far as I know, Holger herself did not undergo analysis, she was exposed to it when she was young for it was all pervasive in the Viennese milieu. An example was a dance of Bodenwieser’s called *The Rhythm of the Unconscious*, from 1921, drawn from Freud’s book *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Holger reconstructed it in May 2000 for the Austrian Cultural Institute centenary event at Sadler’s Wells.

**Holger’s Philosophy of Dance**

Holger, a dedicated pedagogue, was very keen to articulate her philosophy and ideas about the importance of dance in general education. The Expressionist *Ausdruckstanz* dance form influencing Holger developed in a period that stemmed to a great extent from Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s philosophy of harmonious dance and musical education. She regarded dance education as a powerful vehicle for the development of inner personality, serving to awaken “both limbs and spirit” and artistic instinct, giving (the child) a feeling for “beauty... color, line and rhythm” (Holger, 1939,1940). Her aim in dance education followed principles of natural movement within a framework of serious discipline, without forcing the individual into becoming a “living automaton.” Her aim in her children’s classes was to refine the precious natural sense for movement and to unfold the creative ability which every child possesses, children of every background, who might grow up to be architects, musicians, or housewives. If a child was having trouble in school, she advised the parents to send them to dance! Her emphasis on individual development, on the concept of encouraging play, imagination, and feeling in children without recourse to the imposition or imitation of adult values or sentimentality, resonates for me in concepts of client-centered therapy work. Holger also writes of the role of dance education in inculcating a taste for “cooperative work, through utilizing the child’s talent in group work, in discouraging exhibitionism, in which natural abilities and energies are brought into play without an undue display of egotism” (Holger, *ibid*, 1939, 1940).

**Dance Therapy**

Holger worked extensively with special needs, and mixed different ability groups in performances and classes, and pioneered, wrote and gave lectures on the subject in the 1970’s and ‘80’s. Her son Darius, born in London, was a child with Down’s syndrome, influencing Holger to pioneer both integrative and special classes for children to improve coordination, body movement and concentration. She

used her son as an example in the classroom for spontaneous, natural movement. Her system of dance therapy drew from her philosophy of dance as a healing art and mind-body technique that released tension. Differing from her more directed use of movement in technique classes, Holger’s therapeutic work drew from the patient, rather than from a formula. She delineated selection of patients for dance therapy, as those with depression, Down’s syndrome or senility. Her assessment and diagnosis of patients came from observation of the individual, their needs, their walk and listening to them. She focused on building mental and physical strength by concentrating on moving the able parts, rhythm group work and concentration. She suggested patients making their own compositions in spatial configurations, moving to music and improvisation with instruments and objects. Planning for groups encouraged interaction in pairs (swinging, touching hands, holding arms, and kneeling).

**Conclusion**

In this essay I have described Holger’s sources for her artistic philosophy, which centred on an aesthetic, educational and therapeutic belief in dance as a healing medium. Her techniques employed strong use of the torso, rhythm, isolation of different parts of the body and co-ordinating use of limbs and body, use of props, percussion instruments, Eastern elements, and structured improvisation in individual movement and interaction with other people. These techniques are highly adaptable in a therapeutic setting. Her technique emphasised individual expression, discerning, fine, subtle movements, also forceful use of the body and strong use of rhythm; curvilinear and directional spatial patterns, cognitive problem solving, spontaneity and emotional playfulness. Her therapy work concentrated on building up from the material she found by observing, listening and talking to the patient. I draw and adapt from her work elements such as strong body action, rhythm, curvilinear patterns, techniques of movement, specific exercises and interactional improvisation that are motivated from an inner sense of movement, rather than imposed from outside.

Motivating her work in therapy were several factors: her original exile; three continental migrations; brutality of war; personal loss; financial hardship; marital difficulties (divorcing and then remarrying Adi Boman-Behram again at 84); and her son Darius’s special needs. She continued to teach until she was 96, only a few months before her death in 2001. Though she was no longer able to walk because of crippling arthritis, nonetheless, she was a role model for lifelong creativity. Holger’s abiding humanism, imbued with a progressive, emancipated, Viennese Jewish socialism, professional dedication, and fierce interest in the life and work of her students, reveal an inspiring example of an incredible life. Her daughter, Primavera Boman-Behram, has been archiving Holger’s fantastic collection of photographs, manuscripts, paintings, costumes, and memorabilia which she had discovered after Holger’s death in four trunks Holger’s mother had shipped to India from Vienna, and then Bombay to London.<sup>4</sup> It depicts through her extensive materials, costumes, photos, and memorabilia, a life and work spanning both the vibrancy and darkness of twentieth century artistic achievements and this Jewish artist’s seminal contributions.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> In Jewish folklore, the most famous Golem was a giant man fashioned from the mud of the Vltava or Moldau River by Rabbi Judah Loew to protect the Jews of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Prague Ghetto.

<sup>2</sup> A ballet *barre* has two meanings: firstly, it is the first half of a ballet class. Secondly it is an actual object, a banister-like of wooden dowel (note the wooden *barre* Holger brought with her from India to England) attached to the dance studio wall, allowing for the dancers to stabilize themselves while doing exercises at the beginning of the class.

<sup>3</sup> Holger was trained in *Heilmassage* or Swedish massage at Vienna’s Rothschild Hospital by an orthopedic doctor as a means to support herself in exile. He also taught her exercises with a hoop including movements of curving around the hoop while on the floor. These strengthened the spine which she incorporated into her dance teaching.

<sup>4</sup> See the Holger website, [www.hildeholger.com](http://www.hildeholger.com).

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# Ida Rubinstein Faded into Oblivion, Why? (1883-1960)

## Judith Chazin-Bennahum

Catapulted to stardom and fame in Paris from 1909 through the 1930s, Ida Rubinstein has largely disappeared from memory. Meryl Secrest, the biographer of Romaine Brooks, who painted many canvases of Ida, and was perhaps one of her lovers, wrote about the eclipse of Ida Rubinstein: “The degrees by which Ida Rubinstein ceased to be long, thin, hieratic, with almond eyes a mixture of Queen Nefertiti and the mosaics of Torcello, and became a pathetic forgotten figure, can be charted in the cycle of changing tastes, which decrees that one generation will find ludicrous posturing the art which its parents have idolized.”<sup>1</sup>

Karina Dobrotvorskaya, art critic and instructor at СПбГАТИ (The State Academy Arts Theatre in St. Petersburg), wrote in her article “The Lioness”: “Rubinstein possessed a geometric body, a biblical face, the viscous plasticity of the feline family. For a cat - she was too grand and too tall. As a tigress - too graphic. A lean lioness. A greedy, imperious and insatiable one. She stubbornly did not wish to notice that her thinness and the splendor of her bejeweled clothing merely underscored the defect of the diamond which on closer inspection was only glass... She was fabulously rich, amazingly beautiful, exceedingly wealthy, and completely without talent. It seems that the name Ida Rubinstein brings only this to mind. Even the remarkable portrait by Serov, imprints an eccentric decadent woman, bare (naked) and with rings on her toes.”<sup>2</sup>

Dobrotvorskaya goes on to discuss Rubinstein’s complex persona: “The phenomenon of Ida Rubinstein existed in contrasts of the exquisite and the ugly, face and body, of a young and feminine idealized tsarina and the daughter of a Kharkov Jewish millionaire.”<sup>3</sup> It is probably not an accident that her wealth and religion are continually cited, as the ugly part. Though Dobrotvorskaya acknowledges Rubinstein’s shrewd commissioning of great modern composers, she attacks her on many levels; her article suffers from a backward looking, Soviet style Marxism, and harbors anti-Semitic assaults.

Rubinstein lived her whole existence in dreams, in a mythic universe and in a desperate search for something more exalted, a greater purpose. She impersonated dozens of heroines and princesses, as well as male heroes, personifying their grandiose characters, living their tragedies and vicissitudes. She traveled occasionally on her yacht, the Istar, and hunted wild animals in Africa, always in the latest fashions.<sup>4</sup> Only during the two world wars did she exist

in any sort of harsh reality; but of course as the savior of young warriors, she needed to be dressed in a beautiful uniform designed by Leon Bakst [Russian Jewish artist who designed many costumes for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes; he had changed his more Jewish sounding name from Lev Rosenberg to Leon Bakst]. Ida was the heroic nurse, there to save lives, to assuage and to comfort. Indeed, she succeeded in this part, winning the *Légion d’honneur*, the Grand Cross of an Officer of the *Légion d’honneur*, (France’s highest order of merit in military and civil life) as well as French citizenship.

Rubinstein grew up and lived in the sphere of Russian dominance until she was twenty- six years old when she moved to Paris. Her mother (Ernestina Isaakovna Van Jung) and father (Léon or Lev) and four children (Roman a brother, Ida, Anna and Rachel, also known as Irène) were together until the shock of the loss of their parents. It is said that her mother died in 1888 when Ida was five and her father in 1892 when she was nine, both perhaps of cholera.<sup>5</sup> One can only imagine the destitution from losing a mother and a father as she was but a child when they died and she was taken, along with one sister, to St. Petersburg where she was raised in the opulent home of her Aunt Horovitz. One of her biographers indicated that she was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church at a very young age, but that is not proven.

Rubinstein’s upbringing included a rigorous and rich education, the study of classical languages as well as German, French, Italian, and English, and extensive readings in history, the arts, and literature. This background prepared her for her later brilliant foray into producing plays and ballets. In Nathalie Stronhina’s essay on Rubinstein’s Russian roots, she reminds us that Rubinstein grew up at a time in Russia with a new phenomenon, “*Il s’agit du mécénat, qui a considérablement marqué l’histoire de la culture russe, y compris la carrière d’ Ida Rubinstein.*”<sup>6</sup> (“It was the growth of philanthropy and philanthropists who made a considerable impression on Russian culture; this included Ida Rubinstein and her family and friends.”) Money and taste provided Ida from the very beginning with the tools she needed to present performances welcomed by her audiences.

She trained as an actress for two years in Moscow and for one year in St. Petersburg giving her the fundamental tools that grounded her philosophy and vision of theatrical performance. Both Moscow and St. Petersburg were hubs for some of the most significant writers, and theater directors such as Nemerov-Danshenko, influenced



Ida Rubinstein as Zobeide, lying on her stomach on a striped couch, head dress, chin on hand, in *Scheherazade*, 1910, courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

by Lugné Poe, Antoine, Stanislavsky, and Meyerhold, who were staging intriguing plays and experimenting with methodologies of performance, as well as training. At the time, the impact of François Delsarte cannot be underestimated. There is no question but that Rubinstein’s brilliant gestural interpretations of her dramatic roles were influenced by her understanding of Delsarte (1811-1871) and his principles of movement and gesture as well as by Vsevolod Meyerhold who championed the *commedia del’arte* and puppetry.

The theater would be her home, the home that she perhaps felt she had lost at a tender age. There, in the theater, lay all her hopes and dreams, the spiritual and the material worlds meshed for her in an incandescent web of meaning. Nevertheless, Rubinstein’s performance life suffered from a kind of abandonment, perhaps self-inflicted, so that even today few dance history students nor the teachers of dance studies have heard of her. Was the fact that she was Jewish instrumental in the back-stabbing by some of her critics, especially when she looked too “*exotique*” (exotic) or “*étrangère*” (strange) in *le Martyre de San Sébastien* (The Martyred San Sebastien), *Jeanne d’Arc*, and other roles that she was deemed by some as unworthy to play?

### **Ida and anti-Semitism**

As a major female star, we must remember that Rubinstein never changed her name to make it less Jewish-sounding, despite her susceptibility to the misogynist and anti-Semitic attacks on her.

Let me begin with some critical comments that demean her Jewish background: In Rebecca Rossen’s book *Dancing Jewish*, she recounts that Rubinstein danced the lead in two versions of her *Salomé* productions (1908 and 1912), both eliciting moments of insidious remarks about her Jewish origins, either by the clergy or the press. Rossen discloses, “When she starred in the Ballets Russes productions of *Cléopâtre* and *Schéhérézade*, Jean Cocteau described her as “the great ibex of the Jewish Ghetto.” Although she was not an innocent party in her framing; her typecasting as a Jewish/Oriental dominatrix revealed growing turn-of-the-century anti- Semitism and the ways in which stereotypes about Jewishness are inseparable from gender and sexuality.”<sup>7</sup>

In St. Petersburg, in 1908, when she acted and danced the role of Salomé from the drama by Oscar Wilde, it was a daring and unconventional choice, especially for a Jewish woman, and despite the criticism and the censorship, she prevailed. The Russian Orthodox Church’s Holy Governing Synod, which functioned as the state Censor, banned *Salomé* as sacrilegious. But Ida was not deterred, she was able to pull strings, and though the actors were forbidden to recite Wilde’s lines on stage, it was a sensation. Since Rubinstein was a first-rate mime, Bakst suggested that they do the whole production in mime. The plan went ahead, and was a genuine triumph. Michael de Cossart describes the exotic and spectacular character of Rubinstein’s performance:

“Never before had the St. Petersburg public been treated to the spectacle of a young society woman dancing voluptuously to



insinuating oriental music, (composed by Glazunov) discarding brilliantly colored veils one by one until only a wisp of dark green chiffon remained knotted round her loins. Although, as Alexandre Benois revealed, this final and reprehensible moment of the dance was dissimulated by means of a lighting trick.”<sup>8</sup>

Sjeng Scheijen recounts how Rubinstein entreated Michel Fokine to teach her to dance in preparation for her Russian *Salomé*. Coming to ballet late in her life, Ida had much to learn. She also implored Bakst to design costumes for the performances she staged. As a dancer she lacked classical skills, but her body language was unusually expressive. “On 20 December 1908, in the main auditorium of the conservatory, she performed the dance of the Seven Veils to music by Glazunov. Alexandre Benois was most impressed. To achieve her artistic aims she was prepared to test the limits of social tolerance and even decency - indeed to go so far as to bare herself in public.”<sup>9</sup>

After 1909 in both Paris and Russia, assaults on Rubinstein proliferated as she became more of a starring personality in a number of plays, especially when she collaborated with Gabriele d’Annunzio and Claude Debussy in *Le Martyre de San Sébastien* (1911). Michael De Cossart wrote in his biography of Ida Rubinstein that on “May 8, 1911, The Cardinal della Volpe questioned why “the two main organizers of this profanation were Jewish in origin?”<sup>10</sup> He was referring to Gabriel Astruc, the theater producer and to Ida Rubinstein. He neglected to mention Léon Bakst’s participation. The Monsignor in Paris, Léon-Adolphe Amette, carried out the Vatican demand and forbade all Catholics from attending the play.

Vicki Woolf reveals that, “d’Annunzio received frantic appeals from Astruc to hurry back to Paris. Already there were rumblings from Italy about anti-Jewish demonstrations on account of Ida appearing as Saint Sebastian. Astruc wrote to d’Annunzio: ‘I am rather worried because a group of ladies, representing the French aristocracy, has written to me to voice the fear that St. Sébastien, religiously speaking may give the impression of profanation. And I do not want to be accused of having crucified the Saviour for the second time.’”<sup>11</sup>

An article by Barbara Jepson makes an insightful point suggesting that, “The Catholic church also may have objected to Rubinstein’s bare legs, and to the portrayal of a male Catholic saint by a Jewish female dancer. Debussy and d’Annunzio both published a statement that they were not practicing Catholics but insisted that *Le Martyre* was intended to glorify Sebastian and all Christian heroism.”<sup>12</sup>

Similar issues emerged one year later when Rubinstein took on the acting role of the beauteous Hélène of Sparta in 1912, the libretto written by Emile Verhaeren, a Belgian Symbolist poet. Two reviews that brought to light her immigrant situation were cited by Daniel Flannell Friedman: “The critic Judith Clavel in *La Vie* denounced

the author Émile Verhaeren for abandoning his work to Jewish foreigners, notably the director, Alexander Sanin, Léon Bakst and Ida Rubinstein.”<sup>13</sup> In the fascist right-wing journal, *L’Action française*, Léon Daudet railed against the Jewish foreigners in the production, “The French public should rise up against Jewish foreigners, against their mercantile obscenity, and their obscene mercantilism; we must tear our theater from its servitude to them.”<sup>14</sup>

It was no secret that Ida was reviled for flaunting her extravagance and wealth, the proverbial Jewish entrepreneur. A producer with sumptuous tastes, Ida rented the Théâtre de L’Opéra almost every year from 1919 to 1934. Pascal Lécroart delves into the criticisms to which Ida was subjected, and concludes that “her talents were formidable and that those who wrote favorably about her counter balance the judgments of journalists at the time who were afflicted with xenophobia and anti-Semitism.”<sup>15</sup>



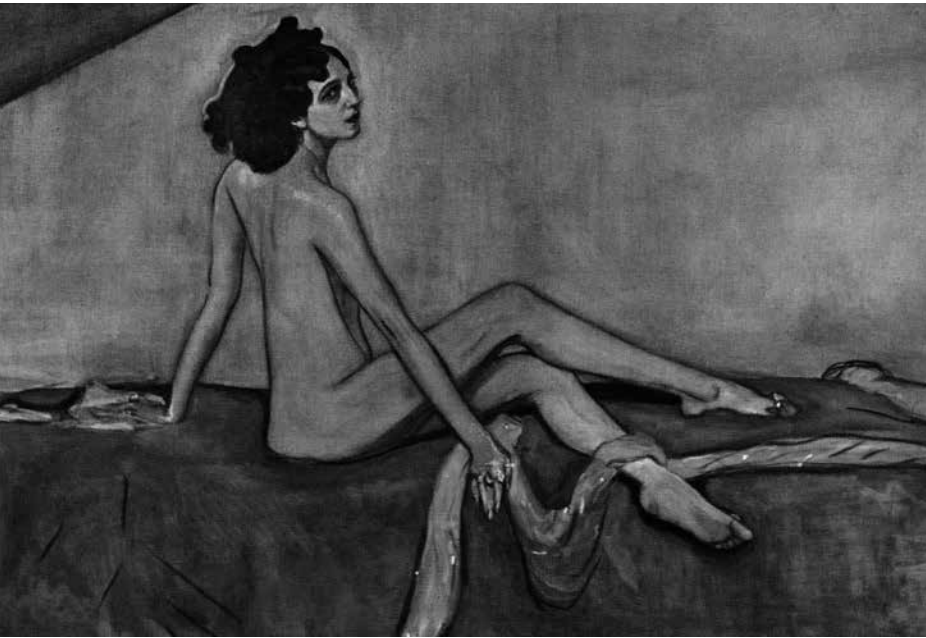
Ida Rubinstein dancing on table in Nijinska's *Bolero*, 1928, courtesy of private collection

Rubinstein’s spectacular, but in some ways catastrophic Season of Ballets in 1928 at the Paris Opéra brought her enormous publicity. She worked with some of the most extraordinary composers, such as Stravinsky, Honneger and Ravel, and notably with the great woman choreographer Bronislava Nijinska. Ravel’s and Nijinska’s collaboration with Rubinstein on *Bolero* in 1928 was the sensation of the whole season. The reason for the disappointment on the occasion of these new ballets was that Rubinstein at the age of 45 did not have the technique that a ballerina needs and was reviled for her audacious decision to star in them. This criticism however, did not apply to *Bolero*, which was inspired by Spanish dancing in which she excelled; she did not have to execute ballet movements.

In these early years of her successes, Ida focused almost exclusively on her work and showed no interest whatsoever in politics or religion. Moreover, she certainly displayed no observance of Judaism. Gradually though, some years after the Russian Revolution and World War I, a phenomenon occurred in France and Europe, a resurgence of conversations about the importance of spirituality and religion. Ida fell under the spell of Paul Claudel’s poetry

and religiosity, collaborating with him on a production of his *Les Choéphores* (1935) playing the lead role of Clytemnestra, and in 1936 she converted to Catholicism.

In 1938, after many years of acting in dramas with Greek or French heroines, and trying her luck with running a ballet company, her final theatrical triumph resulted in the Oratorio, *Jeanne d’Arc au Bûcher* (Joan of Arc at the Stake), also by Paul Claudel with music for chorus composed by Arthur Honegger. Once again, a Jewish woman playing a Christian saint provoked vitriolic outbursts, certainly because at this moment Jews were the targets in Europe [the Nazis already in power in Germany for five years]. It was a supreme irony that her last, signature gift to the stage was her role as the iconic Christian female martyr, Joan of Arc. The first performance in May 1938 took place in Basel, Switzerland under the direction of Paul Sacher, followed by a concert in Orléans, France in May 1939, and



Showing Ida Rubinstein naked, with back to viewer in painting of Ida Rubinstein by Valentin Serov, 1910, courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

finally in Paris at the Palais de Chaillot, the next month in June 1939. Many of her reviews were very complimentary, as they found her musicality and the sonority of her voice with the poem and music as sublime. But there were some scandalous comments found in newspapers known for calumny and poor taste. For example, one author could not help himself from describing the Oratorio criticizing not only Rubinstein as Jewish but Hervé, the composer, as a Mason, which was supposedly a terrible indictment: “After the enemy’s conquest of Orléans, Jeanne d’Arc played by the Jewess Rubinstein came on the scene. The next week, May 8<sup>th</sup>, M. Albert Lebrun and the Archbishop of Westminster came to save the city of Orléans. The deciding damage was to be the performance of *Jeanne d’Arc* with the participation of the Jewess Ida Rubinstein, the Free Mason, Jean Hervé and the musical composition by Arthur Honegger.”<sup>16</sup>

The vituperative comments continued through 1939, as when Marcel Jouandeau in *Le Péril Juif* (or The Dangerous Jew, an anti-Semitic publication known for its incendiary comments about

Jews) wrote, “*Presque tous les chefs d’orchestre de Paris sont juifs; on ne joue que de la musique juive. MM. Honegger et Darius Milhaud, etc., pourrait avoir beau jeu, ils ont tout le jeu.*”<sup>17</sup> In translation the author states: “Almost all the conductors of our orchestras in Paris are Jewish, here one only plays Jewish music. Monsieurs Honegger and Milhaud etc. not only have a good hand, they have all the cards!” The writer assumed that Honegger was also Jewish, which he was not.

At the outbreak of World War II, Ida did not want to leave Paris. It was rather naïve of her not to see the danger she faced being born a Jew. She was determined to continue her performances of *Jeanne d’Arc*. However, she was able to broadcast on Radio Paris a live performance of *Jeanne d’Arc*, and she began touring it to several Belgian cities. But a significant partner in Ida’s life and the financier of many of her productions, Walter Guinness, convinced her that

she had no choice but to escape Nazi Europe. The beverage heir and British politician arranged for her flights and trips. Luckily, she fled before the *ralfe* or round up of 743 Jewish intellectuals and artists in December 1941, including René Blum<sup>18</sup> for whom she had worked in Monte Carlo, and Colette’s husband, Maurice Goudekot. Finally, in May 1941, she and her secretary fled to the South of France, crossed the Mediterranean to Algeria, then to Casablanca and onto an airplane to Lisbon where they embarked for England. Guinness placed her at the Ritz hotel and paid for all her expenses during the war years.

After Guinness’s assassination in Cairo by the Israeli Stern Gang in 1944 [for his supposed anti-Jewish stance preventing Jewish refugees from reaching Palestine] she became very isolated and alone in her mourning, completely leaving her sense of Judaism as she delved into the Christian mysticism and mysteries of the Catholic religion. Although Ida originally identified as Jewish and

her family’s wealth was tied into good business practices inherent in the culture, eventually the religion of Judaism held no attraction for her. Nevertheless, the identification of her Jewishness obviously concerned many writers of her generation and left her legacy obscured by World War II anti-Semitism in a questionable limbo.

But today we are reminded of the singular and important figure she represents in our memories. In many ways, her body, her beautiful dancing body, became the vessel for the epitome of sexuality as it appealed to both men and women, and she used it with consummate attention to its capacity for gestural expression. Between the wars she produced and starred in twenty-nine plays or ballets in major theatres throughout Europe. It was an astonishing output.

She became along with Sarah Bernhardt, La Argentina, Isadora Duncan, Anna Pavlova and a few others, another great woman producer, hiring the most talented, even revolutionary designers, composers, writers and choreographers. She was a meticulous impresario, following every aspect of production. Letters in the





Portrait of Ida Rubinstein by Parisian Studio of G.L. Manuel Frères, photo is signed by Rubinstein, courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Paris Opéra, the Arts du Spectacle, and formidably in the Library of Congress confirm her ferocious involvement and her generosity toward those she employed. Another aspect of her persona was her supremely ethical behavior during both wars, her need to be useful, even heroic in her nurturing care and providing of comfort and charity to wounded soldiers and pilots.

And finally, she was an educated woman, brought up with German, French, English, and Greek and reading confidently in these languages. She traveled widely to many countries, Palestine, Greece, Germany, England, France, Italy, Sardinia, Morocco, Turkey, Central Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, les îles Marquises or the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia, Bali, and other sites. In my view, Rubinstein has earned and deserves a revitalized memory as an artist of courage and genius who should live on into the future.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Meryle Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, Garden City. NY: Doubleday and Company, 1974, 326.  
<sup>2</sup> Karina Dobrotvorskaya, “The Lioness,” *The St. Petersburg Theater Journal*, No. 1, 1993.  
<sup>3</sup> Dobrotvorskaya, “The Lioness,” 3.  
<sup>4</sup> In an article “*Mes roles et mes chasses, lecture pour tous*”, (My Roles

and My Hunting Adventures) *Revue*, 1913, 1-3 (Rubinstein tells the story of her youthful acting and dancing roles, and sings the praises of the Italian poet, Gabriele d’Annunzio; she then tells of her fascination for the hunt, and her description of the animals she kills).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Depaulis, *Ida Rubinstein, Une inconnue jadis célèbre*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995. Lynn Garafola, “Ida Rubinstein, A Theatrical Life.” *Dance Research Journal*, 21:2 (Fall 1989).  
<sup>6</sup> Nathalie Stronhina, “*Les Racines russes d’Ida Rubinstein, Ida Rubinstein: une utopie de la synthèse des arts à l’épreuve de la scène.*” (The Russian Roots of Ida Rubinstein, Ida Rubinstein: A Utopia in a Synthesis of the Arts) *Textes réunis par Pascal Lécroart*. (Texts Gathered), edited by Pascal Lécroart, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2008, 166.  
<sup>7</sup> For those unfamiliar with the English word *ibex*, a synonym is wild goat, hardly a compliment. Rebecca Rossen, *Dancing Jewish, Jewish Identity in American Modern and Post-Modern American Dance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 30-31.  
<sup>8</sup> Michael De Cossart Michael, “Ida Rubinstein and Diaghilev: A One-Sided Rivalry,” *Dance Research Journal*, The Journal of the Society for Dance Research, Vol.1, No. 2 (Autumn 1983), 4.  
<sup>9</sup> Sjeng Scheijen, *Diaghilev, a Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 177.  
<sup>10</sup> Cassandra Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015, 70.  
<sup>11</sup> Vicki Woolf, *Dancing in the Vortex*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 54.  
<sup>12</sup> Barbara Jepson, “This Music Befits a Saintly Legend,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1997.  
<sup>13</sup> Daniel Flannell Friedman, *Ida Rubinstein, le roman d’une vie d’artiste*, Paris: Éditions Salvator, Paris, 2011, 168.  
<sup>14</sup> Friedman, *Ida Rubinstein*, 168.  
<sup>15</sup> Pascal Lécroart, Introduction to Ida Rubinstein, *une utopie de la synthèse des arts à l’épreuve de la scène*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2008, 8.  
<sup>16</sup> José Bruyr, *Honegger et son oeuvre*, Paris: Correa, 1947, 186.  
<sup>17</sup> Pierre Hébey, *La Nouvelle Revue Française des années sombres 1940-1941*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 354  
<sup>18</sup> Editor’s Note: see the seminal biography of René Blum by the author of this article. Judith Chazin-Bennahum, *René Blum and the Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Also note elsewhere in this issue that the French round-ups of the Jews and Blum’s fate are mentioned in Laure Guilbert’s article “Dancers Under Duress: The Forgotten Resistance of Fireflies”.

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# An Exploration of the Life and Work of Helen Tamiris (1902-1966)

## Elizabeth McPherson and JoAnne Tucker

Introduction by JoAnne Tucker

In the summer of 1958, I attended Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School and Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, USA where I studied with Helen Tamiris and performed her *Dance for Walt Whitman*. Although just a high school student, the three-week experience was life changing. Tamiris had a profound impact on my dance career as founder and artistic director of the Avodah Dance Ensemble (1972-2004) and more recently in my work in prisons and jails and with domestic violence survivors.

Elizabeth McPherson joined the Avodah Dance Ensemble in 1990. With her experience in Labanotation as well as having studied and performed many dance legacy works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she staged Tamiris' *Negro Spirituals*, which Avodah performed for nine years.

Because of our mutual and overlapping interest in Helen Tamiris, when there was a call for papers/presentations for the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World Conference,” it was a natural response for us to propose a presentation on Tamiris.

Helen Tamiris: A Biography by Elizabeth McPherson

Helen Tamiris is one of the great pioneers of American modern dance. A dynamic dancer and choreographer, she explored themes central to the American experience. Her diverse career included not only work in modern dance, but also in ballet, nightclubs, and musical theatre. Descriptions of Tamiris invariably include the word “powerful,” describing her dancing and the force of her personality that propelled her into a career in which she followed her passion from one dance idiom to another, captivating audiences. She created dances that purposefully reflected her times, but that still

hold resonance today because they speak to what it means to be human. Tamiris voiced: “The vitality of the modern dance is rooted in its ability to express modern problems, and, further, to make modern audiences want to do something about them” (Margaret Lloyd, 1949, 141-142). Tamiris epitomized this defining aspect of modern dance.

***Tamiris’s Childhood and Early Career as a Dancer and Choreographer***

Tamiris was born Helen Becker on April 23, 1902 in New York City. Her parents were Russian Jewish immigrants. When Tamiris was only three, her tailor father became the primary supporter as well as caregiver of his five children. Tamiris was the only girl and by her own accounts ran wild in the streets until one brother suggested to their father that he send her to dance classes. At Henry Street Settlement House, she studied “interpretive dancing” with Irene Lewisohn and Blanche Talmud. In high school, she studied world folk dance. When she was 15, despite never dancing on pointe, she auditioned and was accepted into the Metropolitan Opera Ballet.

After three seasons of work, she joined the Bracale Opera Company for a tour to South America, followed by one more season with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. During that last season, she studied with the choreographer Michel Fokine, a great innovator of 20<sup>th</sup> century ballet, but she found his classes not too different from the others. She was looking for a new outlet for her creative energy so she began studying at the Isadora Duncan School, but lasted only three months, saying to herself, “What more can I learn – in schools? Each school develops its own type of dancer – I don’t want to be a Duncan dancer – or a ballet dancer – I want to be myself – But what was myself? I was all the things I had learned – I would make some dances – my very own” (Tamiris, 1989-90, 20). She choreographed two dances and auditioned them for a Chicago-based nightclub manager. She was hired, and at this point changed her name to Tamiris whom she knew to be a strong Persian queen, (“like an Amazon,” Tamiris said) (Tamiris, 1989-90, 21). She was well-received but found herself making changes in her dances to captivate the nightclub audience. This was not ideal in her mind. Tamiris began to realize that she could not do what she most wanted in commercial theatre and decided to give her own recital.

Working with composer Louis Horst, she choreographed twelve dances which she presented on October 9, 1927, just over a year after Martha Graham’s debut concert. An anonymous review in the *New York Times*, noted, “Although her program was confined to the pantomimic and interpretive style of dancing in vogue at the present time, it was varied and interesting, covering a wide range of mood and emotional contrast. The young artist is endowed with many natural gifts, a slender elegance of form, personality of real charm and innate refinement” (1927, 15). The experience was fulfilling, but Tamiris had exhausted her savings. She took another nightclub job to support herself and build up funds for a second concert.

In the program for her concert on January 29, 1928, Tamiris printed her manifesto. Highlights included:

- “We must not forget the age we live in.”
- “There are no general rules. Each work of art creates its own code.”

- “Sincerity is based on simplicity. A sincere approach to art is always done through simple forms.”
- “Toe dancing... Why not dance on the palms of the hands?”
- “The dance of today is plagued with exotic gestures, mannerisms and ideas borrowed from literature, philosophy, sculpture, and painting. Will people never rebel against artificialities, pseudo-romanticism and affected sophistication? The dance of today must have a dynamic tempo and be valid, precise, spontaneous, free, normal, natural and human” (Tamiris, 1989-90, 51).

In this concert, Tamiris danced two solos to Negro spirituals: *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho* and *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See*. This was the beginning of her choreographic explorations inspired by black dance and music. Response to the second concert was positive. *The New York Times* (again anonymously written) said, “Tamiris, in her second recital at the Little Theatre last night, established herself unmistakably in the forefront of the younger generation of dancers” (1928, 18). Although Tamiris created a significant body of choreography, the dances that comprise her eventual suite *Negro Spirituals* along with the later *How Long Brethren?* are the works most frequently staged today. These two dances also remain, perhaps, the most controversial.

***Questions of Black Culture and Appropriation***

As viewed today, one might see Tamiris’s choreography inspired by black music and dance as appropriation or even cultural theft, however a full analysis requires examination of context. Tamiris said about *Negro Spirituals* that she wanted “to express the spirit of the Negro people – in the first his sense of oppression – in the second, his fight – and struggle and remembrance.” Tamiris had grown up in poverty, and her parents had escaped the severe persecution of Jews in Russia by immigrating to the United States. As well, in the 1920s and 1930s, there was significant anti-Semitism in the United States. Tamiris would have understandably felt a kinship with oppressed people. Susan Manning describes, “Heightened sensitivity to systematic discrimination allied many Jewish activists with the nascent civil rights movement, the labor movement, and the Communist Party. Tamiris’s desire ‘to express the spirit of the Negro people’ sprang from her cultural politics as a Jewish leftist” (Susan Manning, 2004, 2). Being the child of immigrants, she was also exploring the American experience with fresh eyes that were not swayed by entrenched prejudices in the United States.

That Tamiris was in a position of relative power compared to the black community of the 1920s is a point to consider. She was presenting dances on stage in 1927 that they had scant opportunities to present themselves because of existing prejudices. However, it is unlikely that Tamiris profited monetarily through using source material from the black community, as these early modern dance concerts were lucky to break even. That Tamiris would integrate her casts on Broadway (unusual for the time) gives us further information about her desire to bridge communities (Christena Schlundt, 1989-90, 130 and Donald McKayle, 43, 2002). Christena Schlundt observes, “Long before it became fashionable, Tamiris lived integration” (Christena Schlundt, 1989-90,130). I believe that she was inspired by the spirituals and songs of protest as metaphors for all down-trodden people; her intent was not to use material from the black community for her own gain.

***Tamiris as a Modern Dance Pioneer***

Following her concert in 1928, Tamiris gave successful performances in Paris, Salzburg, and Berlin. In 1929, back in New York, she proposed the idea of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and herself collaborating to produce concerts to reduce overall costs. The group was called Dance Repertory Theatre and lasted from 1930-31 with Agnes de Mille joining in the second year. Although financially successful, it did not last due to differences of opinion, and probably conflicts of personality. While short-lived, however, it was remarkable for drawing these artists together. By showcasing their work collectively in performance, they were announcing the arrival of a new movement. Individually, they were single artists working on their own, but showcased together, they were something bigger than one person or one choreographer. This is really the beginning of American modern dance as a genre.

Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman along with Hanya Holm would soon be involved in another collaborative venture: The Bennington School of the Dance directed by Martha Hill. Although Tamiris had achieved success, she was not invited to be part of this school and festival that would propel the others into being named “the big four.” Why was Tamiris not invited? One reason was that she had a less formalized technique than the others. She wanted her dancers to find personal modes of expression and not be imprinted with one style. As her husband Daniel Nagrin noted, “To me, Helen was a Taoist without knowing it. No system, no iron theory, only a response to the needs of the moment” (Daniel Nagrin, 1989, 33. Elsewhere in this issue, see article “Daniel Nagrin: On ‘This and That’ and Choreographic Methods as Jewishness” by Diane Wawrejko). A second reason was that Tamiris was working in fields outside of modern dance. Hill said, “...she didn’t just have one aim for her dancing; she was spreading out more, into more fields” (Martha Hill, 1978, 78-79). This must have made her seem less devoted to modern dance. A third reason is that Tamiris’s modern dance choreography was seen as being more popular in style and supposedly having less depth artistically. Daniel Nagrin noted that “The mainstream of modern dance looked askance at her *joie* (joy), her glamour, her devastating physical beauty and her spirit. It looked unruly and possibly not serious” (Daniel Nagrin, 1989, 34). Modern dance has come to mean many things to many people. One of the amazing aspects of the form is its immense diversity. And in this wealth of diversity, Tamiris holds her own and more as one of the great pioneers, even if other dance history makers of the 1930s and ‘40s did not think she would or could.



Helen Tamiris in *Salut-Au-Monde*, 1936, photo by Thomas Bouchard

What were these other fields or avenues that Tamiris found for her work in the 1930s? The United States was in the depths of the Great Depression, and the Works Progress Administration was formed to provide jobs. Tamiris lobbied successfully, along with others, for the Federal Dance Theatre. She was named chief choreographer for the New York City Federal Dance Theatre and choreographed four major works from 1936-1939. Grant Code wrote in the *Dance Observer* that Tamiris, “has done more than any other one person to hold the whole project together and keep it going” (Code, 1940, 34). The most acclaimed of her works for the Federal Dance Theatre was *How Long Brethren?* which was based on seven songs of protest by black Americans and won the 1937 *Dance Magazine* award for group choreography (Elizabeth Cooper, 1997, 35). Pauline Tish, who worked with Tamiris in the Federal Dance Theater, describes Tamiris as “a terrific jumper, one who leaped into space, pushing off the ground, a mae-nad, chthonic, emotional. She was all curves but very strong” (Pauline Tish, 1994, 339). Tish remembers specifically that *How Long Brethren?* was a “stirring masterpiece of tremendous urgency for people everywhere,” and that the performances always received a standing ovation (Pauline Tish, 1994, 344).

***Tamiris as a Broadway Choreographer***

Tamiris and her group performed consistently through the early 1940s, when Tamiris set her sights on Broadway. Between 1945 and 1957, Tamiris choreographed fourteen Broadway shows, including *Up in Central Park* (1947), a revival of *Show Boat* (1946), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), and *Touch and Go* (1950), for which she won the Tony Award for Best Choreography. Many dancers who performed in her shows forged new ground in dance over the next several decades, including: Mary Anthony, Talley Beatty, Valerie Bettis, Dorothy Bird, Pearl Lang, Donald McKayle, Pearl Primus, and Bertram Ross. Tamiris, along with Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, and Hanya Holm, worked successfully to make dance more integral to productions rather than just an isolated interlude. Her other great innovation was integrating her casts of dancers. Instead of having a dance for the white dancers and another for the black dancers, in Tamiris’s shows the dancers all danced together, chosen for their dance ability, not their skin color. Dancer and choreographer Donald McKayle explained, “...Tamiris had gone against the traditional color line practiced on Broadway and had racially integrated the dance ensemble” (Donald McKayle, 2002, 43).

Dancer and Labanotation expert Ann Hutchinson Guest performed in the Broadway musical *Great to be Alive!* in 1950, with choreography by Tamiris. Guest described Tamiris as having “style, a natural flamboyance with her slit skirt, high-heeled shoes, and mass



of curly, strawberry blonde hair, a strand of which she would curl around her finger when deep in thought” (Ann Hutchinson Guest, 1993, 358). Of her choreography, Guest recalled, “Tamiris’s movement style for this show balanced a dramatic approach with a sense of ‘romp.’ Her own style of modern dance was of no ‘school,’ but stemmed from her natural affinity with weight and with the use of space as an element to be ‘invaded’ by the body, usually with force and power” (Ann Hutchinson Guest, 1993, 359-60).

Joseph Gifford danced in two musicals choreographed by Tamiris: *Up in Central Park* and *Bless You All* (1950). He remembered Tamiris’s working style: “What was good about [Tamiris] in these musicals, was that she wove everything together. She didn’t separate things



Helen Tamiris teaching at Perry Mansfield in 1958. Dustin Hoffman is in the background, photographer unknown

in an isolated way. Except for the musical revue which was different, she wove the dances out of what was going on in the musical as an entirety.... They weren’t ballets dumped onto the thing as a whole” (Joseph Gifford, 2014).

Daniel Nagrin also danced in several of Tamiris’s shows and worked as her assistant. They married on September 3, 1946. (See Diane Wawrejko’s article “This and That: Implied Jewishness in the Dances of Daniel Nagrin” elsewhere in this issue). Nagrin and Tamiris formed a new company in 1960 which they called the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company. Though the group received positive reviews, it dissolved

around 1964. Shortly thereafter the couple separated. Tamiris got ill with cancer and died at sixty-four in New York City on August 4, 1966.

**Legacy of Tamiris as Teacher**

In addition to being a respected choreographer, Tamiris left a lasting legacy as a teacher. Her students speak of her positive effect on their lives, but that they never carried her imprint physically as Tamiris did not teach her own specific technique. That’s because Tamiris encouraged her students to work from their inner selves, expressively seeking whatever movements would work within a given objective. In some ways this was considered a lack of style, but it was no less important in the legacy of early modern dance for our current times. Carol Dunlap wrote about Daniel Nagrin’s discussion of Tamiris at the American Dance Symposium: “Nagrin said it was difficult to describe her technique because it stemmed from what Miss Tamiris called ‘inner action.’ Inner action, he said, was the artist’s response to three basic questions – Who am I? Where am I? What’s in my way? Since the artist’s response to these questions, when applied to a dramatic situation, determines his actions ‘it was impossible to talk about a Tamiris line or a Tamiris leap,’ Nagrin said. ‘We also didn’t know what we would be doing from one time to the next....’” (Carol Dunlap, 1968, 8D).

Pauline Tish recalled, “Tamiris was never interested in developing a technical system or in teaching technique as such” (Tish, 1994, 330). Christena Schlundt concurs that Tamiris “never developed a technique back in the thirties when she was working with ‘Her Group’ but rather made suggestions and brought out reactions from her dancers” (Schlundt, 1989-90, 129). Tamiris had her own school called the School of the American Dance in the 1930s (John Martin, 1960, X7). She also taught at various colleges including New York University and at the summer festivals at Connecticut College School of Dance and at the Perry-Mansfield School of Theatre and Dance in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

**Further thoughts by JoAnne Tucker**

I saw an advertisement for the Perry-Mansfield School of Theatre and Dance in *Dance Magazine* in the fall of 1957, and it indicated that Helen Tamiris would be teaching in the summer of 1958. I knew of her reputation in both modern dance and musical theater and that was a strong draw for me in wanting to study at Perry-Mansfield. My parents agreed to send me for a three-week session in July of 1958. On the second day of camp, Tamiris held auditions for her *Dance for Walt Whitman*. We were told to put together a short dance to perform on the stage. I put together some of my favorite phrases from the classes I attended regularly at home with my modern dance teacher Jeanne Beaman. I ended it with a sliding fall that I had learned in class. Tamiris asked me to please do the fall again. So, I did. The next day I was thrilled to see my name on the cast list for *Dance for Walt Whitman*. Martha Clarke and I were the only high school students; the rest of the dancers were college age. Having been selected to perform it meant that I would be in the advanced class and able to take Tamiris’s composition class as well.

The composition class focused on taking everyday gestures and using them as a way to build choreography. I remember we did studies based on clapping, yawning and screaming. It made a big

impression on me that she coached one of the dancers to make sure that her scream was totally “real” before she could go on to create her scream movement. With yawning, we were encouraged to put a yawn into different parts of our bodies. I remember yawning with my foot and with my shoulder.

These classes inspired me later, too. I began the Avodah Dance Ensemble in 1972, with our base in the NYC area starting in 1978. I remained the director and primary choreographer until 2004. For the company, I created pieces that were inspired by liturgy, Biblical text, and history. We, as a company, also developed interfaith and multi-cultural projects, including residencies in correctional institutions. I often turned to ritual movement to develop dance pieces. Circling the flames and covering the eyes when lighting Sabbath Candles, wrapping oneself in a *tallit*, or pounding the chest on Yom Kippur are examples of ritual movement that I explored for choreography for Avodah’s repertory. I would hear Tamiris’s voice in my head saying “make sure it is real” or “how can you expand it by slowing it down, putting it in another part of your body, or repeating it in different ways?”

Today in movement workshops with mainly non-dancers, I often use gestures at the beginning of a class as the way to introduce a dance experience. Sometimes it is simply asking each person to say one word about how they are feeling and then find a gesture that fits that word. I then might coach them to put the gesture into different parts of their bodies. Usually we build a movement phrase based on the gestures, and it serves to both enter into the dance experience and build a sense of community quickly.

Something else I learned that summer from Tamiris’s composition class was how critical it is to stay fully focused on what you are doing to be believable. In one class, the assignment was to come to the front of the room and just stand there. When some students took the space, there was a stillness in the room, and it was clear we all were with them. Others who were self-conscious and wondering what to do lost our attention. This simple exercise helped me in selecting dancers. Could they totally put themselves into the movement? I coached the dancers that even a very simple movement done with total focus and intent is very powerful.

**Conclusion**

The so-called “big four” - Graham, Holm, Humphrey, and Weidman -- somewhat eclipse Tamiris in textbooks. Tamiris, however, with her focus on dancers exploring their own expressive capabilities unbound by imposed technique structure, was no less influential. We believe Tamiris deserves increased attention for all she contributed to the dance and theatre communities. She should be investigated more fully to understand how her influence continues until today.

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Dancers Veronica Tennant and Gregory Osborne in David Allan's 1987 ballet *Masada: The Zealots*. Photo: John Mahler/Toronto Star Archives

# The Case of David Allan's 1987 Ballet *Masada*: Did it Matter that the Topic was Jewish?

Jennifer Fisher

In 1987, choreographer David Allan made what critics called “a daring and controversial” 40-minute ballet called *Masada, The Zealots*, for the spring season of Toronto’s National Ballet of Canada. It was based on a legend unfamiliar to most of its 27-dancer-cast, though the siege at Masada was well-known to North Americans who knew Jewish history or had visited Israel, or perhaps saw a TV version starring Peter O’Toole in the 1980s. Historical “Ballet Notes” were provided to the press and to audiences in pre-performance talks, explaining the tragic events of 74 A.D. at Herod’s winter palace overlooking the Dead Sea. Jewish families had escaped the Roman victory over Jerusalem and fled to Masada. There it took the Roman army two years to build their siege ramp and finally break through

the fortified walls. When they did, they made a gruesome discovery: to avoid capture, slavery, and worse, the families chose to end their own lives.<sup>1</sup>

Although many resources were invested in the ballet and several reviewers found it powerful and promising, *Masada* was never repeated. With this essay, I want to bring Allan’s ballet back into the historical record, as well as pointing out how it affected people at the time, and how it leads to conversations about being Jewish in the North American ballet world. I begin with the critical reception of *Masada* from newspaper accounts and documents in the National Ballet of Canada archives, then focus on recent interviews with

the choreographer and seven members of his cast.<sup>2</sup> As an aesthetic product, the ballet was judged uneven but also vital and moving, a fresh and frank ballet at a time when large classical companies searched for new work that would keep up with the times. *Masada* became a distant memory to many; but, on a personal level, the ballet turns out to have meant a great deal more to select participants who felt invested in aspects of its Jewish theme.

## *Just Another Story Ballet*

In many ways, *Masada* fitted into the classical ballet world in that it featured sympathetic characters, a compelling story, and an opportunity for dramatic solos, duets, and group dancing. It differs from the most prominent story ballets, in that they tend to feature Christian characters (or their imagined interactions on foreign soil), and Christian details, from the large cross on Giselle’s grave, to the Prayer solo in *Coppélia*, the Christmas tree in *Nutcracker*, and the Friar who marries Romeo and Juliet. In other words, although separated from religious institutions officially, ballet has always reflected the culture in which it first developed, in the courts and theatres of Europe and Russia. Although Jewish themes have emerged in many Israeli ballets, the only one that comes to mind for a major North American ballet company is Jerome Robbins’s *Dybbuk* for the New York City Ballet in 1974.

Did having Jewish subject matter make a difference in the reception or continuation of *Masada*? There is no evidence of anti-Semitism in the official record, although it was not unknown in Toronto in general.<sup>3</sup> *Masada* participants speculated that its fate was more likely affected by a change of artistic directors, after which it was not repeated. In the year after the premiere, there were plans by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet to film a version of the ballet on location in Israel, but that fell apart when the National Ballet of Canada withdrew any help with costumes or staging, citing too great a draw on its resources and other priorities.<sup>4</sup> Soon after *Masada*, David Allan had left his artistic home at the National Ballet to become a freelance choreographer.

For *Masada*, Allan chose to portray the last 24 hours of the doomed Jewish patriots, focusing on positive aspects of their besieged community. By having lovers say their last goodbyes, he had scope for traditional *pas de deux* (dance for two); to establish the group’s strong ties, he used round dances that critics deemed particularly effective, with the circle motif echoed in loving embraces (Neufeld, 128). The sequential suicides by strangulation provided graphic moments that upset some audience members, according to all reviewers. These violent actions were deemed too melodramatic by a few (Smith 1987, Penfield 1987); for others, they were never “melodramatic or cloying” but instead, “dignified, even in the face of death” (Kelly 1987), making the ballet “a powerful work that at times rises to peaks of great vitality and majesty” (Currie 1987). Allan’s choice of music, the emotion-filled *Symphonic Dances*, Opus 45, by Rachmaninov, seemed suitable to some reviewers (Littler, May 4, 1987; Neufeld 1987; Rasky 1987), while others thought an original score would have served the ballet better (Kelly 1987, Kardonne 1987). E.K. Ayotte’s multi-level set evoked “the dusty but vibrant colors of a desert sunset” (Currie 1987), which were disturbed by lighting designer Robert Thomp-

son’s projections suggesting the fiery projectiles launched by the Romans (Rasky 1987).

Dance historian James Neufeld, writing in an academic publication a few months after seeing the ballet, noted that “The hothouse atmosphere surrounding *Masada*’s premiere made a balanced critical assessment at the time difficult,” referring to company leadership changes and a previous choreographer’s sudden departure (Neufeld, 127). Neufeld pronounces any of the ballet’s weaknesses “respectable ones” and called it “the product of a strong and musical imagination” (p.127) that had “the virtues of simplicity and sincerity” (p. 128). Along with all reviewers, Neufeld praised specific performances, but also emphasized Allan’s role in casting with “a keen eye for the individual characteristics of company members” (p. 128). For Neufeld, a longtime historian of the company, Allan had justified artistic director Erik Bruhn’s faith in assigning him a major commission with *Masada* (p.127).

## *A Choreographer’s Point of View*

Still dancing while he developed as a choreographer at the National Ballet of Canada, David Allan had made twelve ballets before taking on *Masada*, at the age of 30. This was his first main-stage commission (from then-artistic director Erik Bruhn) and Allan’s only ballet with Jewish subject matter, inspired by his grandparents’ photos and brochures from their trip to Israel. He does not recall any objection or controversy over the topic, only that dancers were thrilled to be in a new creation with such dramatic subject matter. Allan and most of the dancers interviewed do remember an emphasis on universality in pre-performance lectures by company archivist Assis Carreiro. “She would say, ‘It’s not a Jewish ballet, they just happened to be Jewish,’” Allan says. “So she could emphasize that it was about what these people went through in the face of indomitable odds.” In interviews at the time, Allan said something similar, that “It’s a ballet that speaks foremost about the human race” (Kelly, C9), but he also emphasized the particular subject matter when he said, “To me *Masada* is a great universal celebration about the Jewish spirit and that is what has attracted me” (Littler, April 26, 1987, D3). In other words, Allan did not object to the archivist saying “It’s not a Jewish ballet,” although it surely was.

The idea of the subject matter being both universal and specifically Jewish reflects Allan’s thinking about his own identity, in that he sees being Jewish and being a ballet-world citizen as both important aspects of who he is. Growing up St. Louis, Missouri, being Jewish gave him “a great sense of uniqueness and pride.” Being observant held importance mainly because of strong relationships with his grandparents, for whom Friday night Sabbath dinners and synagogue attendance mattered. Another revered relative was his great-grandfather, a Holocaust survivor who had started a new life in the U.S. after the war. At Allan’s *bar mitzvah*, his great-grandfather praised his recital of his Torah portion, then asked, “But what was all that dancing about?!” (Allan had run through a few simple *barre* movements at the podium to calm his nerves).

After moving to Toronto to enter the National Ballet School at 14, Allan’s ballet practice started to replace Jewish rituals, especially after the deaths of his grandparents. But, “it all came roaring back



when I decided to do *Masada*,” he remembers. “I was going to tell a story that happened to be Jewish, and that was something I could truly feel inside my soul and in my blood.” Except for *Masada* memories, Allan had trouble at first thinking of his time in the ballet world in terms of being Jewish, in particular. Gradually, he warmed to the topic as he described close company friendships with about seven or eight other Jewish dancers or staff, even though religious observance and cultural practices varied. He says everyone knew him as “a friendly little Jewish guy” who brought *kugel* to company Christmas parties, happy to be who he was and reflect his roots. *Masada* allowed him to fuse together his artistic and Jewish identities in a way he hadn’t even known was missing. In terms of casting the ballet, he doesn’t recall thinking of who was Jewish--“The main thing was whether they were right for the ballet.” Looking back, he sees that he probably cast all the Jewish dancers in the company (three, plus Allan, at the time).<sup>5</sup>

#### ***Did it Matter if You Were Jewish in the Ballet World? Dancers Remember***

The seven *Masada* cast members interviewed recall the excitement of being cast in a new creation, appreciating the way it allowed them to expand their range with a talented and popular choreographer who was still dancing with the company. For leading ballerina Veronica Tennant, Allan’s musicality and depiction of humanity had the emotional power of *Romeo and Juliet*, which she was renowned for dancing at the time. Artistically, *Masada* felt like part of a revolution in that era for all of them, especially after endless tours of *Sleeping Beauty* in the 1970s, when the National Ballet of Canada became more prominent than before for touring with Rudolf Nureyev’s production. For *Masada*, Tennant recalls, “You threw yourself into it,” with every rehearsal energized, every performance being danced as if it were the last. Tennant thinks *Masada* could be performed by today’s dancers “with even more guts and power,” and that it wouldn’t be so radical or surprising but still “very human” and “a very contemporary ballet.”

Asked about *Masada*’s relationship to Jewishness, Tennant did not feel “comfortable” associating *Masada* with “any religious aspect,” preferring to focus on Allan’s talent and accomplishments - it was the dance that mattered, and ballets were about all sorts of subjects. On the other hand, fellow non-Jewish cast members Tony Randazzo and Stephen Legate recall feeling that *Masada* had a special Jewish resonance that was worthy of respect because they could feel Allan’s personal investment in his heritage. Legate, the son of a Baptist minister, actually knew about the story beforehand and thinks the military aspect of the Romans building the ramp and patriots fighting back would have interested him as a young man. Like Legate, Randazzo thought of the ballet as both an artistic challenge and one that “had to be done right” to honor the people he felt he understood better because of Allan’s connection. These dancers had no experience with anti-Semitism, nor did they suspect any in the ballet world. It turned out that other dancers had had different experiences.

For the three Jewish cast members of *Masada* I interviewed, the ballet’s Jewish theme had special importance. They had crossed themselves or knelt before Catholic crosses in ballets like *Coppélia*,

*Giselle*, or *Romeo and Juliet*, and understood that Christian details were common in classical ballet. “But this was *our* history, and that kind of thing never happened,” said Nina Goldman. “For the first time, it felt like we belonged.” Julia Adam thinks she might have been the only dancer in the cast who had visited the Masada site in Israel. Tourists were able to visit because the famed archeologist Yigal Yadin had conducted an expedition there to prove that Masada was not a legend. Though the first excavation predated the premiere of the ballet by 24 years, there was still much excitement about his discoveries. Julia Adam found it “exhilarating to convey a Jewish story” on the ballet stage. At the end of *Masada*, she recalls feeling very emotional as she lay “dead” on the stage: “I felt like I was doing something real, not *Swan Lake* or *La Sylphide* - they were okay, but this was a real story that came from my ancestors.”

Wanting and needing to see their own cultural background onstage, the Jewish dancers had not expected it to happen, having assimilated to the world of professional ballet where they were always in the minority. The company was gracious about giving Jewish holidays “off,” they reported, unless they conflicted with key rehearsals or performances. And although colleagues did not always seem to understand the holidays’ importance, the atmosphere was generally one of eclectic acceptance. But training at the company’s associated school was a different matter. The most dramatically negative story came from Donna Rubin, who, as a student of the company’s associated school, was the target of anti-Semitic taunts in the late ’70s and early ’80s. They came mainly (and perhaps only - she doesn’t recall) from a couple who ran the residence where ballet students lived. “When no one else was around,” she says, “they would say things to me - the usual negative Jewish stereotypes,” she remembers, “and many times, I’d be blamed for something I didn’t do.” Rubin had come to the School of the National Ballet from her native Montreal and didn’t dare tell her parents about the harassment, for fear they would make her leave the school.

Rubin felt miserable but persevered, always wondering whether decisions about her talent resulted from bias, having heard rumors that anti-Semitism existed among her ballet teachers. Being singled out and insulted for being Jewish at a young age tapped into her own insecurities about being a “good enough” dancer, though she became braver about later decisions in her successful career. Not offered a place in the company through teacher recommendation, a usual way to transfer from the school to the company, she left for New York City, then returned to Toronto to train as a ballet teacher. Regaining her confidence, she took the initiative to win an apprentice spot in the company (granted by Bruhn), then was promoted to the corps de ballet. “It was only ever about your weight,” an important teacher who did not support her apprenticeship later said, almost apologizing. But Rubin noted that other young dancers with fluctuating weight problems received encouragement and advice, whereas she received constant criticism.

Fellow Jewish dancer Julia Adam thinks she herself escaped anti-Semitic remarks as a student because her “blond Scottish looks” meant she was not identified as Jewish by the people Rubin encountered. Nina Goldman, the third Jewish cast member in *Masada*, had not attended the school but trained in New York City, where

she was often the only Jewish girl in advanced ballet classes. All three noted a lack of Jewish ballerina role models as they trained. Though there were in fact a few prominent Jewish ballerinas at the New York City Ballet (such as Melissa Hayden and Allegra Kent), their Jewishness was not known to the aspiring dancers at the time. Nor was the fact that the founding director of the National Ballet of Canada was Jewish. Celia Franca, the towering figure at the ballet school and artistic director of the company from 1951 to 1976, had retired over a decade before *Masada* was commissioned. The *Masada* dancers knew her from her annual staging of her version of *The Nutcracker*. Franca’s relationship to being Jewish is worth a small detour into a previous era before *Masada* emerged.

#### ***A Different Era: The Down-low Jewish Identity of Celia Franca***

If you consider the isolation that the three Jewish cast members of *Masada* felt, to varying degrees, during their ballet training, you might guess that having a Jewish ballerina role model close by could have helped them. Celia Franca was not that role model, though she could have been. It’s just that few people knew she was Jewish.<sup>6</sup> In fact, her *New York Times* obituary did not mention it (Anderson 2007); and her biographer faced disbelief and had to explain why she was discussing her book at a Jewish Book Fair (Bishop-Gwyn 2018). From most accounts of anyone in the dance world, Franca was a formidable, ambitious force, admired for her “resilience and toughness” (Bishop-Gwyn 2012). Not in any way approachable, she was often feared, even by mature dancers, much less students. Allan never suspected he had anything but ballet in common with her. “All I saw is, ‘You’re British, and you’re scaring the shit out of me,’” he says now, with both humor and sincerity.

Franca’s relationship to her Jewish identity vacillated over the years. The daughter of Polish Jewish immigrants, raised in the East End of London, Celia Franks changed her name as she started to dance professionally with the company that would become Britain’s Royal Ballet. Taking a professional name for the stage was not an unusual practice, and it also seems an understandable move with the threat of German invasion hanging over London during the war years. She may certainly have faced anti-Semitism in her native Britain, especially given ballet director Ninette de Valois’s preference for casting “nice, middle-class white-Anglo-Saxon Protestant girls” (Bishop-Gwyn 2012). But during the difficult years of wartime shortages, Franca had the opportunity to dance many leading roles before she took an invitation to come to Toronto and help found the National Ballet of Canada in 1951. There, she continued to dance in the early years, then focused on choreographing, fundraising, overseeing the school, and promoting the company tirelessly. Bishop-Gwyn, in conversations after her book came out, speculated that Franca downplayed her Jewish identity in Toronto as she courted wealthy patrons who almost surely held anti-Semitic views (Howe 2012; Bishop-Gwyn 2018).

Franca’s liaisons with Jewish organizations waned over the years, as noted throughout Bishop-Gwyn’s biography. At the age of nine, Franca had received a grant from the Jewish Education Aid Society to help her study dance; and, as a cultural leader in Toronto, she accepted awards from Jewish organizations. Yet by the mid-1970s, she refused to be included in a book about Jews in Canada by saying that she didn’t practice “the Jewish or any other religion,” and that her hus-

band was not Jewish, and his relatives might be upset by her being mentioned in the book. She was much more likely to emphasize her cockney identity, playfully using rhyming slang with British choreographer Antony Tudor. On the other hand, Franca arrived in Canada with “an intimidating, near-perfect, posh accent” that might have been carefully cultivated, or at least was proclaimed “phony” by Franca’s longtime colleague and nemesis Betty Oliphant (Bishop Gwyn 2012). Certainly, in 1940s Britain, Franca might have learned that class-consciousness and prejudice could affect her dancing career.

For whatever personal or strategic reasons, once Franca faced anti-Semitism in Toronto, said Bishop-Gwyn at a writers’ festival discussion, she “decided to turn away from Judaism completely and certainly did feel like an outsider because of her ‘dark, sultry, Eastern atmosphere’” (qtd. in Howe 2012). What Celia Franca thought of *Masada* is not on record, though she most likely saw it. Would she have allowed herself some feeling of “special resonance”, publicly, if she had been born into a slightly more liberated ballet atmosphere, long after her experiences in wartime Britain? Her example makes clear that individual experiences, as well as the prevailing ethos of the times, affects the way Jewish identities are negotiated when it comes to the ballet world.

#### ***Masada’s Legacy of Inspiration***

For Jewish dancers in the 1980s - and perhaps for Jewish audience members - representation was important, so they celebrated the appearance on the ballet stage of a work based on their history. Its impact, however, did not only reach those who could relate to it through shared heritage. For cast member Ronda Nychka, who was raised Anglican and attended the National Ballet school from the age of 9, it felt at first like just another opportunity to progress from her position in the corps. Then, something else happened. “Being in *Masada* truly changed the course of my life,” she says. “It was a turning point for me, awakening spiritual longings that took me on a journey that continues today.” She recalls that rehearsals started to sharpen her focus because of their intensity at a time when she felt something was missing in her dancing. “There was a gap, from being onstage to everything else in life,” she says. “Onstage, the world would sometimes disintegrate, go away. But that gap, that empty space, started to be filled.” *Masada*’s story of sacrifice for a greater cause made her feel that, although dance can be a fleeting experience, she got “a glimpse of eternity that stayed with me.”

After *Masada*, Nychka left Canada to performing in Berlin and then became a principal dancer with the Maurice Béjart company in Switzerland. But she never forgot *Masada*, making a point to see the site while on tour in Israel. When she left performing, she studied Jewish theology at divinity school, eventually becoming ordained in the Anglican church and working with vulnerable urban populations. Having stayed active as a ballet master, teacher, and choreographer, she now is considering a focus on dance as therapy. She has kept in touch with Allan, thanking him for the powerful awakening to spiritual connections through embodying one of the Masada residents during their fateful last hours. For Nychka, the specifically Jewish story opened a portal for sensing a wider universe and scope for her spiritual life.

In the memories of the participants and in the archive, then, *Masada* was both specifically important, for personal reasons, and “just another ballet,” whether described as admirable, flawed, glorious, or history-making. For the researcher, it became a rich line of inquiry to bring out stories and attitudes about being Jewish in the ballet world, because even today, it’s a topic that is not much discussed in the North American context, or maybe beyond. My major question became, “What difference did it make, to be Jewish or bring Jewish themes to the ballet world?” “No difference,” non-Jews said quickly, emphasizing the universal nature of art and perhaps quick to counter any notion of prejudice. “Big difference,” said Jewish dancers who longed to connect their ballet and their Jewish identities, recognizing that representation matters.

Later, Adam choreographed her own Jewish-themed ballets for Houston Ballet and Ballet Memphis, adding to the usual topics that ballet tends to revolve around. For Nychka, *Masada* inspired her dive into theology, starting with Jewish studies. For other cast members, and potentially for audience members, *Masada* added to their knowledge of Jewish history. And for Allan, it still represents the one time he could bring a resonant part of his heritage and identity to the fore, in his chosen realm of ballet.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Ballet Notes” were a convention of the National Ballet of Canada, distributed to press, assembled in this case by Assis Carreiro, the archivist and education coordinator at the time. Her summary of Masada history came from an assortment of sources available at the time. A map of Israel and a sketch of the Masada plateau as imagined before the siege were included. These notes are now available in the National Ballet of Canada archives.

<sup>2</sup> Except for my interview with choreographer David Allan, all interviews were conducted by telephone, with the following *Masada* cast members, to whom I am grateful for their time and memories: Julia Adam, Nina Goldman, Stephen Legate, Ronda Nychka, Tony Randazzo, Donna Rubin, and Veronica Tennant. All conversations took place in August and September of 2018, except that Allan (a former colleague from University of California, Irvine) and I spoke about the ballet on many occasions, in person and by email, after our first formal interview in December 2017.

<sup>3</sup> In his comprehensive overview of anti-Semitism in Canada, Ira Robinson states that in the 1950s (when the National Ballet of Canada was founded), “...anti-Semitism remained a recognizable feature of Canadian Jewish life” (113). Over many chapters, Robinson traces the diminishing overt evidence of anti-Semitism, still noting its presence in Canada, in many ways over time.

<sup>4</sup> A letter to this effect can be found in the archival folder of *Masada* found in the archives of the National Ballet of Canada. Erik Bruhn had died a year before the ballet’s premiere (April 1, 1986), and was replaced as artistic director by Valerie Wilder and Lynn Wallis (1986-89). In 1989, Reid Anderson took over, followed in 1996 by present artistic director Karen Kain.

<sup>5</sup> Donna Rubin and Nina Goldman remembered that there “were a lot of Jewish dancers” in the National Ballet of Canada, varying from four to six during the time they were there. This contrasted with what they knew from professional training classes and other major ballet companies, where they knew no Jews, or at most, one

or two. Julia Adam believed that artistic director Erik Bruhn’s era was one of “more diversity,” because he seemed “so worldly. He was like a breath of fresh air. You could feel he was a risk-taker - who else would do David’s ballet on Masada? After Bruhn left, a lot of others left, too. We didn’t feel the company would be like that anymore.”<sup>6</sup> In my eight interviews, as well as in many conversations with other members of the ballet community in Toronto, I have found that few people had an inkling that Franca was Jewish before the 2012 biography by Carol Bishop-Gwyn, throughout which there is evidence of Franca’s mercurial relationship to her Jewish identity. Whether or not someone is Jewish may seem incidental to ballet world citizens, where dance dominates consciousness. Yet it still seems odd that Franca’s dancers and others were unaware of that aspect of a well-known figure in Canadian dance history.

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# Daniel Nagrin: On ‘This and That’ and Choreographic Methods as Jewishness

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In this paper, I examine American choreographer and dancer Daniel Nagrin’s choreographic methods as a study in Jewishness. I extend the notion that dancing Jewish not only resides explicitly through overtly Jewish themes, time and place, subject matter, and tropes (Brin Ingber 2011, Jackson 2011, and Rossen 2014), but also is posited subtly and discreetly within the methods, content/function, and structures and devices used to create and perform concert dances.

My personal experiences with Nagrin, first as a graduate student and later as a researcher, coupled with admiration for his work are the inspiration and force behind this paper. From viewing videotapes (Nagrin 1967, 1985) and tracing patterns (Adshead et al 1988, and Kane 2003), I assert that Nagrin’s choreographic methods embody characteristics of Jewishness that are implicit yet tangible. My analysis contributes new knowledge to the dialogue surrounding not only Jewishness in American dance, but also American modern dance in general.

Jewish Identity

Daniel Nagrin (1917-2008) and his wife, the modern dance pioneer Helen Tamiris, were native New Yorkers who lived and danced in the cultural hotbed of New York City during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>3</sup> Both Nagrin and Tamiris were secular Jews whose parents fled the pogroms in Russia (Nagrin 1988). Nagrin’s Jewishness, time, and place shaped his desire to create dances (see Banes 1987, Graff 1997, Jackson 2000, Prickett 1994a & b) that in turn reveal aspects of Jewish cultural identity, worldview, and values. Firstly I ask, what does it mean to be a Jew in America? What informs this identity? Then I ask, in what ways is Jewishness manifest in Nagrin’s dances?

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the New York Jewish identity emanated from a reaction to impoverishment, oppression, pogroms, and mass unemployment in czarist Russia. These issues produced a need for altruism (Smithsonian 2004, Goldberg 1988, Jackson 2000) which manifested in the common bonds of community, non-religion, and largely collective Marxist ideals (Franko 1995, Jackson 2000, Perelman 2004). Overall, Jewish immigrants were intellectual, artistic, socially conscious, humanistic, and sensitive to the Eastern European Jewish experience as evidenced in



Daniel Nagrin in *Ruminations*, photo by Michael Hunold. [Ruminations, Box 17.4], digital scan obtained by the author from the Daniel Nagrin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Special thanks to Libby Smigel of the Library of Congress, and to Jeremy Rowe and Beth Lessard of the Daniel Nagrin Theatre, Film and Dance Foundation, Inc.

their art, ideology, and values (Copeland 2004, Greenberg 1955, Jackson 2000). In conversations with Nagrin and from examining his dances and writings (Nagrin 1967, 1985, 1989, 2001, and LoC 2014), he embraced many of these ideals. He was agnostic (Nagrin 2001, 193), eschewed all religions including Judaism, and called reli-



gion a ‘crutch for the weak.’ He would quote Karl Marx, “religion is the opiate of the masses.”

However, I argue that he did embrace Jewishness as his cultural ethos, and it is embodied throughout his choreographic works (see Albright 1997, Foulkes 2002, Giersdorf 2013). Since his high school Depression days of the 1930s, Nagrin adopted the philosophy of skepticism. By the late 1940s and 1950s the Marxist existentialists, particularly Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, offered what Nagrin embraced as a “lovely gift” of confusion. As a result, Nagrin grounded his thinking in doubt and uncertainty, which were “exciting” ways to live and not unusual in that existential, post-Holocaust period as he was “*sure of nothing*” (Nagrin 1997: *xvi*). His personal philosophy transferred to his dances, evidenced by the ambiguous and thought-provoking nature of his works, including *The Fall* (1977) based on Camus’ work of the same title. His dances were full of “unknowns and mysteries,” causing the viewer to think and ask self-reflexive questions. The aim was to achieve understanding to improve one’s self by personalizing or making it “our own poem” (Nagrin 2001, 15).

Insights into Nagrin’s choreographic impetus can be understood by situating his existentialism within the larger frame of Jewishness. In his book *Thou Shalt Innovate*, Avi Jorisch (2018) discusses how Israel’s prophetic tradition over thousands of years produced an innovative culture that benefits and blesses the entire world. For example, on his list of 50 top Israeli innovations are Feldenkrais’ Awareness through Movement and Eshkol and Wachman’s Language of Dance movement notation system (Jorisch 2018, 185). Based in Jewish tradition emanating from the prophet Isaiah (42, 6), it commanded the Jew to make the world a better place by being a ‘light unto the nations.’ This is symbolized by Israel’s national emblem, the menorah (which illuminates Jewish concepts). The Biblical idea mandates “taking responsibility for repairing the world,” which is engaging in *Tikkun Olam* (Jorisch 2018, 6-7).

With this interpretation, *Tikkun Olam* therefore is the core of Jewish identity at the “heart and soul” of the Jew. It produces a culture that seeks higher meaning through the defining purpose of mending, repairing, and improving through the *chutzpah* of persistence, talent, determination, and intellect. *Tikkun Olam* is the “secret sauce” embedded deeply into the cultural DNA of the Jewish people and thus is part of their cultural “osmosis” (Jorisch 2018: XVII). The innovative success behind it comes from several factors. One of these is encouraging one another to “challenge authority, ask the next question, and defy the obvious” (ibid., 4). Another factor is “elevating the mundane” as seen in everyday rituals, blessings, and activities which then “transforms it into something holy” (ibid., 6). I will show how these factors or characteristics of Jewishness, particularly with its tradition of Talmudic study and debate through questioning, are threaded throughout Nagrin’s works.

**Agency and The Human Condition**

Nagrin’s methods and works harmonized well with both Judaism’s *Tikkun Olam* and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s aesthetic ethos. Art now was ameliorative and reflective of one’s own experiences and ideals for the purpose of improving society, maintaining order, and producing solidarity (Sparshott 1970, Habermas 1999). Leo Tolstoy’s Russian

Socialist Realism regarded art as useful because communicating feelings produced unity. This “progressive ideology of tolerance and egalitarianism” appealed to the New York independent Jewish choreographers (Jackson 2000, 9, Perelman 2004, Prickett 1994a). Francis Sparshott asserted (1970, 295) that in a society that values the human condition, the greatest value will be placed on artistic works that embody the deepest feelings and ideas “about the world in which he lives.” Thus, the unifying message was to transcend circumstances in order to make positive, powerful statements for oneself and the community/world. For the Jewish artist in New York City, the answer emerged in the fusion of *Tikkun Olam*, Russian Socialist Realism, and forging an American identity through modern dance. All three are posited in Nagrin’s works.

But how does one actually do *Tikkun Olam*? Jorisch assures (2018) it is by doing good, helping others, and engaging in social activism. Nagrin’s driving concern for the world around him can be defined as social activism or what anthropologists call agency. His "doing-acting" approach wove character, intentions, and emotions into deliberate social actions (Meglin 1999, 105, Schlundt 1997, 2). John Gruen recognized (1975) them as aesthetic social gestures that contained meaning, an idea extended from cultural theory (Desmond 1997). Nagrin’s actions assigned a specific kind of agency to his culture-current characters. His dances are embodied expressions (see Franko 1995) of contemporary social and political actions that move and motivate audiences.

Anthropologist Jennifer Hornsby’s theories (2004, 16 & 21) are very useful to elucidate *Tikkun Olam*’s human agency in Nagrin’s works. Hornsby views human agency’s “realistic” bodily actions as *deliberate*, *willful*, and *intentional*. Actions are ethical choices with causal power, or agent-causation (1980 and 2004, 19). Nagrin defined action as "the inner life that drives what we see on the stage... It refers to the *verb* that drives the dance and the dancer" (Nagrin 2001, 44).

Through the deliberate actions of his characters, Nagrin grappled with the human condition by confronting audiences with conflicted yet relatable characters in order to think and reformulate for themselves. His specific characters embodied a critique of society that confirms Hornsby’s concept of agent/causation: persons [agents] who do something [action/cause] that bring about "the things that they actually do" [effect/causation] (Hornsby 2004, 16). Nagrin wanted his audiences to "look at their lives and think about their values" (Schlundt 1997, 62 and 1998). His characters prompted viewers to acknowledge personal biases and to reflect upon relevant, current social issues (Evans 2002). He articulated his agency as: “It makes no sense to make dances unless you bring news. You bring something that a community needs, something from you: a vision, an insight, a question from where you are and what churns you up" (Nagrin 2001, 21).

From viewing videotapes (Nagrin 1967, 1985) of his works, some examples of agency that emerge include displaying fears of nuclear annihilation in *Indeterminate Figure* (1957) and confronting racism in *Not Me but Him* (1965) and *Poems Off the Wall* (1982). His focus on disturbing, dysfunctional relationships through *Jacaranda’s* (1978) self-centered, cold-hearted lover (Nuchtern 1979, 38) and the blatant

domestic abuse in *The Duet* (1971) brought attention and immediacy to these societal issues. Nagrin blurred the boundaries between art and life, becoming “one step closer to real experience” (Kahn 1972, 79). By exposing and grappling with these messier aspects of life, Nagrin’s *Tikkun Olam* reflexively connected and compelled the viewer to grapple with, repair, and make the world a better place by looking first at one’s own life and resolving to change positively.

**Structures and Devices**

Nagrin’s use of choreographic structures and devices is examined. In and of itself, these are not peculiar Jewish traits; but I argue that the way in which Nagrin used them are examples of Jewishness through *Tikkun Olam*’s agentic mandate to challenge authority, ask the next question, and defy the obvious (Jorisch 2018). Nagrin presented, problematized, and challenged relationships and hegemonic ideals through questioning and reflection to produce an “enquiring, cynical spectator” (Evans 2002, Nagrin 1997, 82 & and Schlundt 1997).



Daniel Nagrin in *Ruminations*, photo by Michael Hunold. [Ruminations, Box 17.4], digital scan obtained by the author from the Daniel Nagrin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Special thanks to Libby Smigel of the Library of Congress, and to Jeremy Rowe and Beth Lessard of the Daniel Nagrin Theatre, Film and Dance Foundation, Inc.

*Peloponnesian War* is one of the best examples of Nagrin’s structuring device of strategic interruption, which compels the audience to react or respond by personally identifying with X. Nagrin allowed the sound tape to run for several minutes while the audience waited in the dark for the performance to begin. When the light arose, he was dressed as one of them - an audience member. Then he imitated their actions from his seat on stage as they stood for the national anthem (Schlundt 1997, Siegel 1969). After a performance in Guam, a spectator told Nagrin that he resented the performer/audience role reversal by implicitly making the audience the spectacle. Nagrin said this man captured the core of the performance. Nagrin challenged the automatic willingness of the audience to act without thinking, which elicited contradictory and angry responses

from them (Schlundt 1997). Considering the work’s subject matter as protesting the Vietnam War, it was a particularly decisive moment. He also used “visceral responses” (Goldberg 1988, 205) such as “continuous blackouts and bump ups - to make darkness and fear palpable,” suspended a chicken about to have its head cut off, used a live snake, fired a rifle point-blank at the audience, and threw things at them (Schlundt 1997, Siegel 1969, 23). With the exception of the Judson group, Meredith Monk, and Pina Bausch, this “manner of working the audience” (Goldberg 1988, Nagrin 1997, 83) differed from most companies of the time.

In general, at this time, American audiences were familiar with German playwright Bertolt Brecht’s (1898-1956) “epic theatre” of alienation (Chaikin 199, 38). The playwright was known professionally as Be. Its aim was to alienate, dislocate, or interrupt strategically the habitual frames of reference or convention through a critical opposite. The agentic effect was that the startling obvious, the ordinary, and the familiar were rendered strange and peculiar (Mitter 1992) which caused the spectator to assume a reflexive attitude through dissociation, but without pity. Also called ‘detachment,’ it presented events unsentimentally yet called the audience to action, even if only in choosing between two things (Chaikin 1991). It was achieved through iconic gestures, tasks, metaphors, improvisation, and privileging the everyday (Banes 2003). For example, in *Getting Well*, the audience relived his injury and convalescence “in total empathy” (Rosen 1979, 12). In *The Fall* (1977), Nagrin abruptly looked into his audiences and asked whether they had a similar experience with an unpleasant, sad relationship. *Jacaranda’s* moral theme of “loss” (Robertson 1979, 47) invited personal reflection.

Jorisch states (2018, 6) that perhaps the center of all *Tikkun Olam* teachings is to elevate and transform the mundane, including rituals, blessing, and everyday things, “into something holy.” Used in this way, alienation manifested as ordinary tasks becomes an agentic device. For instance, in *Spring ’65*, Nagrin chatted informally with the audience during and in between his dances while doing collectively familiar activities such as changing clothes and shoes and sipping a glass of water. He thus drew the audience into the performance through the familiarity of everyday actions, but then defamiliarized or detached them from their quotidian contexts. These became part of the dance by displacing or dislocating them within a performance framework.

Another example is *Ruminations* (1976). He first depicted his mother washing dishes (Nuchtern 1976) and then commenced literally to build a bench. He then questioned and challenged the viewer: “can you be sure that the carpenter driving in the nail is simply driving in that nail” or was it something deeper (Nagrin 1997, 56)? He hinted it was a personal tribute to his father, a skilled woodworking artisan (ibid).

Nagrin’s common, ordinary tasks elicited deeper metaphorical meaning. The methodical, repetitious box-step pattern travelling on a downstage diagonal in *Path* (1965) while carrying a board was a solemn, agentic homage to the hard labor of construction workers. The simple, non-codified, mundane movement in *Getting Well* (1978) was not just a metaphor, but also his actual convalescence



Daniel Nagrin lunging in *Man of Action's*, photo by Marcus Blechman, Museum of the City of New York. [Ruminations, Box 17.4], digital scan obtained by the author from the Daniel Nagrin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Special thanks to Libby Smigel of the Library of Congress, and to Jeremy Rowe and Beth Lessard of the Daniel Nagrin Theatre, Film and Dance Foundation, Inc.

from knee surgery that “orchestrated an ode to the joy of locomotion” (Robertson 1979, 110).

Sally Banes (1999) argues that the analytic task dancers of the 1960s and 1970s primarily did not use metaphor as meaning, as their meaning or content occurred in performing the task itself and nothing more. Nagrin challenged his contemporaries on this idea. His very different view used tasks as acts he viewed strongly as metaphor to reveal the human condition rather than ‘art for art’s sake’ or tasks as new ways to find movements individually and as a group.

Nagrin relied upon improvisation to abstract literal gestures into movement metaphors. His gestures contained deeper meaning which causes us to look at our own lives. This is part of *Tikkun Olam* ethos. For example, *Strange Hero* (1948) heightened pedestrian antics of smoking, running, chasing, and shooting were metaphors showing the absurdity of America’s cult hero worship of gangsters. *Man of Action's* (1948) stressed-out busy businessman, who looks frantically at his wristwatch, sits anxiously in a meeting, and runs to hail a taxi, still resonates in today’s fast-paced world. His wide, second-position lunges both literally and metaphorically attest to being pulled in two directions before finally collapsing backward. Gestural metaphors revealed not only the identity and agency of X, but also the relationship between his characters, whether real or imagined.

Nagrin’s choreographic process relied upon internal questioning and debate, what Nagrin often referred to as “this and that.” The

way I make sense of this as a gentile, albeit not as complex, is to compare it to how Teyve from *Fiddler on the Roof* made decisions by questioning and debating with himself. Nagrin was an actor before he started to dance, and thus he began to choreograph in the way that was inherent in both his professional aesthetic and larger Jewish cultural ethos which were grounded in thorough questioning. Since this was familiar and central to Nagrin, it seems only natural that the six-question acting model of Moscow Art Theatre’s famous director Constantine Stanislavski (1924 & 1936) appealed to him. With encouragement from Tamiris, Nagrin schematically adapted it into his own six-step way of working: who, is doing what, to whom, where and when, why, and what’s the obstacle/tension? (Nagrin 1997, 34). I affectionately dubbed it The Nagrin Method.

### Content and Marginalization

Nagrin’s commitment to human agency came with a price. It fit neither with modern dance’s hegemonic classicist canon nor with its aesthetic guidelines set by Graham, Holm, Horst, Humphrey, Laban, the Judsons, and Merce Cunningham. These formalist, expressionist (Franko 1995) artists elevated empirical, external structures of classical form by manipulating space, floor pattern, body shape, texture, rhythm, and dynamics. Nagrin’s works contrasted sharply. He preferred the grittier, weightier, Dionysian aspects of contemporary life. Several critics, dancers, and writers (see Horst 1957, Schlundt 1997, O’Hara 2005, Martin cited in Schlundt 1997) noted his radical Hellenistic penchant. However, one of the main critics of the time, Doris Hering (1951), did not approve of his non-formalism. Nagrin mentioned to me that because of her acerbic reviews, he did not choreograph for another five years.

According to aesthetics philosophers Sheldon Cheney (1946) and Louis Arnaud Reid (1969, 80), art consists of two strands, "the discovery and construction of form," or finding and making, respectively. Therefore, Nagrin is a ‘dance finder’, not a ‘dance maker,’ since he created his dances through the discovery of motivations and actions rather than by manipulating formal elements. His maverick-yet-unpopular treatment of privileging content is the defining characteristic that distinguishes The Nagrin Method and style. Therefore, Nagrin’s *Tikkun Olam* positions him within a separate strand of modernism as he dared to challenge and defy modern dance formalism. These differences are important when considering Nagrin’s place in the history of American modern dance since these highly visible formalists constructed its prevailing view (Jackson 2000, Kane 2002).

### Summary and Conclusion

I argued that Daniel Nagrin’s dances are studies in Jewishness based in the historical and cultural values of *Tikkun Olam*, which produces an innovative people. Nagrin’s innovative choreographic methods and dances focused on the messier, complicated web of human interactions, relationships, and relevant issues from the world around him. The aim was to bring about both reflexivity and change in the viewer, his version of repairing the world and making it a better place, through confrontation, questioning, and reflection. By examining The Nagrin Method and its content, function, structures, and devices as examples of *Tikkun Olam*, dancing Jewish emerges clearly through Nagrin’s identity, agency (Hornsby (2004, 23), and questioning.

Nagrin’s greatest gift to improve the world, his *Tikkun Olam*, is his innovative, six-step method of choreographic inquiry. The Nagrin Method provides an alternative lens through which we can analyze, read, and narrate the genre of American modern dance and elucidate Jewishness in new ways. He was a maverick and a man of conviction, not afraid to privilege content over form even though it placed him at odds with others and led to his marginalization. His strand of modernism merits a re-visiting of historical strategies and modes of analyzing choreographic processes. His dancing Jewish also calls for an examination of what constitutes Jewishness in dance.

### Notes

See article “An Exploration of the Life and Work of Helen Tamiris, 1920-1966” by Elizabeth McPherson and JoAnne Tucker elsewhere in this issue.

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Koresh company in *Inner Sun*, 2017, photo by Pete Checchia

# Is all that Jazzy Modern Dance Jewish?

Merilyn Jackson

For those unfamiliar with Philadelphia’s dance scene, in this essay I introduce some members of the Jewish dance community (not that they identify themselves that way, except perhaps through programming at the Gershman Y, originally known as the YM & WHA) who preceded or are contemporaneous with Israeli Yemenite American choreographer Ronen (Roni) Koresh. In 1991 he founded the Koresh Dance Company (KDC). What follows are a sprinkling of the people who forged safe spaces and solid ground for KDC’s often Jewish-themed choreographies. I argue that Jewish artists, dancers, choreographers, presenters, producers, entrepreneurs, critics and editors of prominent publications largely shaped the city’s cultural dancescape.

Jewish dancer/choreographer/filmmaker Donya Feuer<sup>1</sup> was born to social activist parents in 1934 in what was then mostly Italian and Jewish-populated South Philadelphia. She went on to a career that began in New York with Paul Sanasardo and then to a lifelong collaboration with Ingmar Bergman, choreographing many of his films, and making her own.

Nadia Chilkovsky Nahumck, with her Philadelphia Dance School and Duncan training, and Joan Kerr, best known for her *Herodiade*, and who died in 1982 at 47, were two other significant choreographers of note with Jewish backgrounds who worked with Jewish or Judeo-political themes. Kerr could be tart when it came to her Jewish-themed work. Once, when a presenter came backstage to tell her how good it was, she said “What did you expect? Chopped liver?”

In the ‘70s, the late Ellen Forman created *Dream of Genesis*, a work about the process of creation, which had Biblical under and over tones. With Alice Forner, Forman had founded South Street Dance Company (STDC) Forman channeled Isadora Duncan quite fiercely with her solo “Moving Theater” program based on Duncan’s works called *Your Spirit at the Window: A Solo Tribute to Isadora Duncan*.

I took classes at STDC and through the late 1970s, Ellen would visit me in my South Street cheese and gourmet food shop. We lunched on cups of soup in the shop or at South Street restaurants now and then, chatting about our children, her *body/language* series, which integrated text with movement, and Duncan explorations, Judaism and Jewish food. Once, when I said that her muscular limbs in her

Duncan dances reminded me of Sabra women, she smiled and thanked me, “Sometimes that’s how I feel. Duncan’s philosophies relate to strong women like the Sabra.”

Although Leah Stein only recently came back to her Jewish roots in her choreography, a survey of Jewish dancemakers in Philadelphia would have to include this site-specific dancer/choreographer. She has worked in cemeteries, parks, churches, a Masonic temple and an armory.

“I made a piece in Poland’s Silesia in an abandoned train garage in 2004,” she told me in a fall 2018 interview. “The train cars were intact, strewn with objects like tools, tickets. Remnants of a repair garage stood in ruins – all in disarray. In one moment, all the performers, 15 young Polish students, were in one car. The door shut. The sound started quietly and slowly built to a full crescendo, and then cut off suddenly.”

“My father loved trains,” she continued, “I always have the image of trains used to transport Jews in my psyche somewhere - not sure I’m even conscious of it. It’s like a shadow that I don’t see at all.” As a way to process her father’s death and his significant influence on her, she created *Bellows Falls*.<sup>2</sup> It shows her lying at the edge of the precipice of the falls with small rocks covering her torso. As she slowly turns on her side the rocks fall with the water. She creates a searing metaphor of herself as her father’s gravestone and the stones mourners have placed there.

Stein thinks about dislocation while making all her works: “The clear through line of my work was seeking to create a ‘sense of place’ and need and desire to ‘locate.’” A friend told her this was no accident, and that she saw it as a counterbalance to the experience of dislocation, and the history of Jews being forced out.

In the mid ‘90s, Sheila Zagar worked through her paternal issues before her father’s death. In her *Father Daughter/Dad & I* <sup>3</sup> piece, she danced with him to a narrative stating, “I could see the only way I could spend more time with him was if I went to synagogue with him every week.”

Randy Swartz, (now director of NextMove) is, to me, the counterpart and successor to powerful East Coast Jewish impresarios Moe Septee and his mentor Sol Hurok who had each brought much dance and theater to Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup> I first saw Bella Lewitzky’s work at the Walnut Street Theater in the late ‘70s or early ‘80s. I had known about her 1949 dance, *Warsaw Ghetto*, and was curious. I can’t recall the program, but there was one dance which seemed to have a pink-clad Jackie Kennedy crawling over the heads of the other dancers as if to reach the Secret Service after her husband had been shot. The word “docu-dance” struck me like a lightning

bolt and Lewitzky’s imagery certainly drove me on my road to becoming a dance reviewer/critic a few years later. Swartz had been presenting dance, much of it by Jewish dancemakers like her, to Philadelphia for over a decade and still is.

There were Jewish-run dance schools in Philadelphia. I studied at Jay Dash Studio under Jewish teachers, until only recently realizing they were Jewish. Once, when interviewing Joan Myers Brown, the founder of the mixed-race company, Philadanco, she told me she was denied admittance there because she was black.

I covered Philadanco’s 2001 trip to Poland for *Dance Magazine*,<sup>5</sup> *The Warsaw Voice* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Accompanying the young dancers and Brown to Auschwitz - my second and most reluctant visit - I stood next to her before an exhibit. “I’d have been killed twice,” Brown said drily, “once for being black, and once for having had a German Jewish grandmother,” which surprised me to learn.

So, this leads to one of the many questions the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” conference raises: How do we know, either by blood, direct assertion, or interpretation, who or what or how any dance is Jewish? And, how does Philadelphia’s substantially Ashkenazi/Eastern European community and Koresh’s Israeli/Yemenite background play out in Philadelphia? I asked Koresh if he noted any difference in support from either community.

“There are small neighborhoods of Sephardic and Yemenite Jews in Philadelphia,” he said. “To my knowledge they are not often among the more wealthy Ashkenazi communities. It seems to me that

in America there is more blending, while in Israel I was not even allowed to date an Ashkenazi girl. I was considered black,” he shrugged, matter-of-factly.

As Stein said, “I feel there’s as much diversity in the Jewish community as connection.” With awareness of these differences, Koresh espouses all aspects of the Jewish experience. At least as it applies to Europe, America and the Middle East, he works towards a representation of Jewish unity.

Former Koresh dancer Asya Zlatina, a Moscow-born artist, made a dance called *Barry Mamaloshen*, a kitschy and joyful celebration of Yiddish life in the interwar and post war years. Zlatina said it’s a universal message of how life triumphs over darkness. Since leaving Koresh, Zlatina has developed her own group in Philadelphia. Unlike Koresh’s schedule of performances, hers starts on Wednesday to Sunday, but she does not perform on Friday night or hold matinees on the Sabbath.

To my eye and to well-known critics like Miriam Seidel (formerly my colleague for many years at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other

publications) and Lisa Traiger who writes on dance in Washington, DC, Koresh bridges Jewish diversity through dances with themes relatable to both Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities.

Philadelphia, PA has a Jewish population of more than a quarter million and a rich dance culture boasting five professional and internationally-known companies in as many ethnicities and dance genres. The city is a likely stage for a Jewish dance company. The first fully professional Jewish American dance company with performance and touring schedule of 38-52 weeks, Koresh Dance Company, (KDC) was founded by Israeli Yemenite choreographer Ronen (Roni) Koresh in 1991. From its inception, KDC enjoyed wide popularity in the region and even more on national tours. Becoming the resident company at Philadelphia’s newest Avenue of the Arts (Broad St.) venue, the Suzanne Roberts Theater in 2008, gave it an even greater presence in the city’s cultural framework.

While there have been attempts to create professional Jewish dance companies in America, they never rose beyond semi-professional, performing mainly in synagogues and colleges. Perhaps because Koresh Dance Company is primarily a contemporary dance company with a strong bent towards Jewish themes that fit into universal themes, and with a firm business model that employs many people, it not only represents Jewish dance in Philadelphia, but nationally, and appeals to a wide audience.

Born of Yemenite parents just outside of Tel Aviv, Roni and his brothers Alon and Nir served what was then the requisite three years in the Israeli military. Roni Koresh had begun competing in dance clubs by age thirteen. His first dance teacher, Alida Gera, brought him to the attention of the Batsheva administration. He studied jazz and ballet in addition to Graham technique, in Batsheva’s second company. At 18, the Israeli military called Koresh up for his compulsory service.

In her 2004 *Dance Magazine* feature,<sup>6</sup> Seidel noted that Koresh convinced a commanding officer to reassign him to a base closer to dance classes. After each day’s shift, Koresh said, “I would climb through a fence and hitchhike to get to the studio in Tel Aviv. Sometimes I couldn’t even change to tights, so I would take ballet classes in my uniform, with ballet slippers.”

Koresh originally came to the U. S. to study for a year at The Ailey School in New York (and briefly at the Martha Graham studio). Another well-known Israeli émigré, choreographer Shimon Braun - who still teaches in his studio just outside Philadelphia - saw Koresh dancing there and invited him to join his highly successful commercial dance company, the Philadelphia-based WAVES. Roni danced with them throughout the 1980s.

Eventually, the brothers regrouped with Roni in Philadelphia taking roles in the company. Alon now runs the dance company and Nir oversees the dance school. The company tours nationally and internationally, and as one of four leading companies in residence at major theaters along Philadelphia’s Avenue of the Arts, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, it performs a winter and spring season.

Since its beginning, KDC found solid footing with audiences. Despite at first feeling marginalized by dancers, funders and some critics for its commercial dance origins, KDC struggled through and enjoyed remarkable growth and transformation. The Koresh brothers have become popular members among Philly’s dancers. But, Roni Koresh admitted to Seidel, “I felt like an outlier. I was cocky, sensuous. I wanted to make a splash, to connect with audiences. I didn’t want to rely on grants, and, with Alon and Nir, we’ve made it pretty far without as much private funding as other companies depend on. Because what do you do when that dries up?”

Roni Koresh has taught at Philadelphia’s University of the Arts (UArts) since 1986. He often cherry picks his dancers from among his students, offering them paid work upon graduation. The brothers run the company and school as viable businesses.

“All my life I’ve worked to create jobs. I once told a funder that I pay my dancers \$400 a week and he seemed appalled. How weird is that?” he asked. “These are the people who put my work out to the audience. When I started, I told those kids who danced for me, ‘I’ll take you to the Promised Land.’ How can I let them down? They are my family and I can only look as good as they make me look. I’d pay them ten times more if I could.”

Writing in the *Jewish Forward*,<sup>7</sup> Lisa Traiger said Koresh stopped performing onstage in his late 30s. The decision came when he saw many of his UArts students graduate to no jobs in the dance field. “I decided to create a place for people in the arts, primarily dance, to make a living in a respectable way, in a way they deserve to.”

Traiger sees that much of his choreography deals with interpersonal issues of abandonment, heartbreak, existential loneliness and the challenges of living in the modern world. Her interview validates what Seidel and I have often written about: though Koresh doesn’t concentrate exclusively on Jewish or Israeli themes, he doesn’t deny that deep cultural connections play a role in his artistic output. “I don’t think you can remove the heritage you grow up in,” he told her. “Everything I do has my Israeli identity in it. We went through struggles that give you an appreciation for everyday life. We like immediate gratification because we know that tomorrow may not be around.”

The Koresches have expanded on their success by providing the regional dance community with the use of its home stage at The Suzanne Roberts Theatre, presenting an annual festival, “Come Together.” Of course, Koresh uses the festival to promote his own signature works or works-in-progress in each evening’s finale. A section called “Water Ceremony” from a work titled *Come Together*, looked like a *mikvah* - a cleansing or blessing ceremony - but was cloaked in such sensuality that it also called to mind the story of David and Bathsheba. A section called *Home*, had the full company out in white dress in a sunny, laid-back sidestepping dance to cascading melodies of Tel Aviv’s Touré-Raichel Collective. A stumbling quartet in rags in another section reminded me of stories of Biblical lepers.

Being on the festival’s roster has brought many a new talent to a wider public view than they might otherwise have enjoyed. And the



Koresh company in *Sense of Human* 2017, photo by Frank Bicking



vibe after every show is as celebratory and familial as at a Bar Mitzvah, with the brothers seeming almost avuncular as they schmooze around the lobby.

“Koresh freely acknowledges wanting to offer audiences a good night’s entertainment,” Seidel wrote. “His larger works, however, also embody his earnest reflections on such big-ticket themes as war - *Exile* is a narrative of an embattled community; the roots of violence show in the Biblical fable of Cain and Abel in *Of God and Evil*. While his work is grounded in Luigi technique, and both Bob Fosse and Jerome Robbins come up in conversations about his style, another key to his sensibility may be Martha Graham with whom he briefly studied. In place of her characters from Greek mythology, he has offered biblical and other archetypes that allow him to explore similarly primal themes.”

Seidel’s observation illuminates Koresh’s stylistically diverse repertoire that derives from all these influences yielding rich sources of socio-historical, folk, and biblical motifs laced with wit and playfulness, sensuality and menace. As an example, in 1991’s *Facing the Sun*, he portrays the Holocaust. It opens with a steam engine’s glaring headlight bearing down on the audience to sounds of a chugging train. The evening length, epic work had the full company of ten facing the horror of the Holocaust while heroically striving to remain committed to their community. The choreography and tattered costumes were extremely literal. Wary and watchful dancers kept in tight assembly in crouching movements progressing and regressing across the stage on a diagonal to sounds of clanging chains and gates and distant trains. A surefire signifier of the era, the women performed bent-kneed goose steps. Finally, single shots take down each dancer before intensifying into machine gun fire.

While passion, speed and eroticism infuse Koresh’s entire oeuvre, minstrelsy, vaudeville, slapstick comedy and acrobatic feats also inflect the repertoire. For Koresh, Jewishness is out there, in there, and, even in shadow, always reaching out to engage the world. He doesn’t provide concrete answers, but leaves many questions open about his experience of Jewishness.

Ohad Naharin’s Gaga discipline emerged as Koresh was refining his own style, and shared elements can be detected throughout Koresh’s choreography – as if the land of milk and honey and sorrow and tragedy informs the movement of its native choreographers. The 2008 inaugural concert as dance company-in-residence at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre featured the U. S. premiere of *Things I Told Nobody* by guest choreographer, Itzik Galili, director of Galili Dance in the Netherlands. Choreographers Donald Byrd and Robert Battle set dances on the company and Ohad Naharin remounted *Passomezzo* (a work from 1989) on KDC, giving audiences a fair assessment of how Koresh’s dancers also excel within other choreographic styles.

In *Twisted Pleasures*, Koresh put aside much of his jazz-based idiom and moved easily into folk dance, but never before with such wit and faithfulness to a primal era. The vaguely Middle Eastern music was overlaid with the typically techno beat which Koresh uses to drive dancers and audiences to a froth.

With its tribal eroticism, the work had the feel of a desert encampment: the company danced as if in an orgy before exhausting themselves into a fitful sleep. Longtime lead dancer Melissa Rec-tor disturbs their dreams and, as in a clairvoyant nightmare, four men rise, arms entwined in a line dance. Near the end, they dance separately from the women, Hasidic style.

So how did Koresh go from outlier to insider? “We all grew up,” he shrugged. “We took the journey alone and together. And that’s how it’s come together.” It has been fascinating to watch KDC’s evolution from nostalgic, sometimes even homesick motifs, to a total embrace of, and pride in being a Jewish American. His 2015 *After-shock* is a love-letter to his adopted homeland. “The juxtaposition between old and new creates interesting landscapes and endless possibilities for expressiveness in my dancers,”<sup>8</sup> said Koresh.

“Every angel is terrible,” said Rainer Maria Rilke. In many of Koresh’s works, I could see angels, terrifyingly beautiful.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Mark Franko, *Excursion for Miracles: Paul Sanasardo, Donya Feuer, and Studio for Dance*, 1955-1964, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. Feuer’s darkly Holocaust-related film, *Dance of the Condemned Women*, opens with four females of varying ages entering the space through a narrow passageway, suggesting birth, and at the same time, death in a Nazi death camp.

<sup>2</sup> Leah Stein, <https://vimeo.com/252810622> (accessed June 5, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Zagar, *Father/Daughter dance* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLA24HF7p8g> (accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Davies Hunter and Steve Martinot, *Philadelphia Jewish Life*, 1940-2000, Temple U Press 2003, 209; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol\\_Hurok](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Hurok) (accessed June 20, 2019); <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Moe+Septee> (accessed June 20, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Jackson, “It’s Raining Dance,” *The Warsaw Voice*, July 1, 2001; “Contemporary Dance Lights Up the Polish Stage,” *Dance Magazine* (December 2001); “For Philadanco, Poland Proves Challenging Tour,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 12, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Seidel, “Roni on the Rise: Ronen Koresh and his Dazzling Company,” *Dance Magazine* (December 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Traiger, “A Twist of Israel in Pennsylvania,” *Jewish Forward* (December 2, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ronen Koresh, “Sense of Human” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpodWnzlH4Q> (accessed June 21, 2019).

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# Jewish Argentine Princess (The Sequel)<sup>1</sup> A Possible Point of View about Jewish Choreographers and Dance Teachers in Argentina

Silvina Szperling

**Introduction**

When I was preparing my presentation about Jewish Argentinean choreographers for Naomi Jackson’s conference at Arizona State University (ASU), I realized that the field is so wide and the choreographers who made a mark in Argentinean modern and contemporary dance are so numerous, that I decided to focus on pioneer Argentinian women choreographers. Often, I have used the guiding principle of the number three in my presentations, in my writing and in other creative work, so to find the magic trio, I made a long list of choreographers. I came up with three central figures: Ana Itelman, Renata Schottelius and Ana Kamien. Those choices made total sense when I realized that each of the three had been honored with Argentinian dance’s highest award, an Homage, presented over the years at the Buenos Aires Contemporary Dance Festival. They had been chosen by young artists (some of them also Jewish). With my narrative as the thread, I thought that I could stitch together both the different generations and their different time periods with many video illustrations and photos.

This article grew out of that ASU presentation. When I arrived at the university last October, I was nervous about how I would feel at such a gathering called “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World,” not being a religious Jew. However, I found that the atmosphere set up by the organizers, Naomi Jackson and Liz Lerman, was extremely welcoming, open minded, reassuring and very encouraging. There was no worry about whether one was “Jewish enough” to belong; I didn’t feel that concern and neither did any of the others I spoke with. In fact, most of the talks that I attended began with some variation of “I am not religious, nor Zionist.” Or “I don’t have a Jewish education.” Or, “I didn’t understand why Naomi insisted so much on my coming. Why me?” and the like. This also reminded me of my sister and her commission for Renate Schottelius’s Homage, which you’ll read about in the article.

Therefore, I don’t feel that I have to “justify” the Jewishness of my three heroes who rarely spoke of their Jewishness, if at all. In fact, I wasn’t aware of Renate Schottelius’s background fleeing from

Germany at age 14 just in the nick of time before the Nazis would have caught her, and all the little (and big) details that this research has revealed to me. I am very grateful to Naomi for having insisted on my participation at the conference. In the Jewish dance world, I feel I am a sister to all these lovely “Dancing Jews” that Naomi has managed to gather together, our relations concretized in the finale event, together on stage with all the conference participants holding hands and dancing.

**History**

The majority of Jewish immigrants came to Argentina between the end of the 19th Century and the first three decades of the 20th Century, although the first immigration can be traced back even to the early 16th Century. Following the Jewish expulsion from Spain and Portugal due to the Inquisition, Sephardi Jews fled persecution, migrating with explorers and colonists to settle in the areas of the new world before they were ever called Argentina.

As in all Modern(ist) History, we can clearly follow a path of Modern Dance pioneers coming from Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s settling in the major cities of Buenos Aires and Mendoza. Renate Schottelius and Isolde Kleitman, among others from that “first wave” (extending into the ‘40s and ‘50s), were followed in the ‘60s and ‘70s by Ana María Stekelman, Mauricio Wainrot, Ana Deutsch, Kamien and, above all, the great choreographer and teacher of choreographers, Ana Itelman.

In this article, I will address three of the pioneers as a way of initiating research through the deserted paths of Argentinean Dance History, which has suffered from the lack of proper archiving (a subject that I also discuss briefly in this article). Only in recent years has there been an interest in our own dance ancestors, especially by younger generations of students at the *Universidad Nacional de las Artes* (the UNA or National University of the Arts), as well as by the Buenos Aires Contemporary Dance Festival through its Homage project. Ana Itelman, Renata Schottelius and Ana Kamien are the three choreographers who constitute the subject of this article. They were all

winners of the Homage project. I hope to be able to broaden my vision of these masters’ legacies by further researching how the younger generations of choreographers and filmmakers in charge of these Homages see them. I also hope that this will only be a departing point for me and many other researchers in order to dive deeper into these waters.

**We Remember**



“A radical man goes to his roots. To be radical is to go to your roots” (Quoted at the Holocaust Museum in Havanna, Vedado Synagogue). José Martí

Starting in 2008, the Contemporary Dance Festival of Buenos Aires (organized by the city’s Ministry of Culture), has been holding an event called The Homage, which pays tribute to choreographers who are significant to the local dance community. This Homage movement makes up for the lack of proper archives where students and researches could visit the works of choreographers who are no longer active. Their legacy still rests mainly on oral transmission by the “intermediate generation.” But it raises the question of how to speak our dance language and how to pass on this body of work without the support of properly catalogued film or video and serious, written material.

Several attempts and initiatives have been frustrated so far in Argentina regarding this crucial matter. Many of them come to mind, the most notable being the National Library’s intended Dance Archive, for which there was even a formal presentation (with drinks), where many choreographers donated their tapes and DVDs for the never-to-be public collection. Later on, the National Library, after doing nothing with this donated material, passed it on to a private dance studio, where the studio still keeps waiting for funding to catalogue and make the material available to the public.

So, in a country like Argentina, which is the case for many Latin American countries (except for Mexico and its wonderful archives) the fact that every other year one particular choreographer is honored at the festival means the Homage is a real treasure. In 2014, it was the turn of Ana Itelman, whose Homage was led by the young choreographers Jimena Pérez Salerno and Josefina Gorostiza along with filmmakers Natalia Ardissonne and Jimena Cantero. They put together an entire evening, which included the restaging of Itelman’s early piece *Tango* by choreographer Oscar Araiz; the screening of

the commissioned documentary *Apuntes sobre Ana itelman*.<sup>2</sup> The directors’ statement published in the festival program reads: “(Itelman) ....a work that questions the relationship between the power of memory, the living archive of the bodies, and the staging of an homage... We were born in 1984... We know that Itelman lived until 1989... (we were too young) to build our version of Ana Itelman so we depended on others’ stories and experiences.”

The performance featured a dozen of the notable disciples of Ana Itelman who joined the directors onstage: Monica Fracchia, Sofía Ballvé, Rubén Szuchmacher, Doris Petroni, Roxana Grinstein, Lili-ana Toccacelli, Diana Szeinblum, Ana Deutsch, Sandro Nunziata, Virginia Ravenna, and Silvia Pritz.



Ana Deutsch (standing), Ruben Szuchmacher, Mónica Fracchia, Sofia Ballvé (seated left to right) at *Itelmania*

**ANA ITELMAN (August 20, 1927- September 16, 1989)**

Ana Itelman was born in Chile, and emigrated at an early age to Argentina. In the 1940s she entered the first Modern Dance company in Argentina, led by Myriam Winslow. She moved to the United States in 1945 and went into training with Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Louis Horst and José Limón. Returning to Argentina two years later, Itelman began choreographing and performing solo work. In 1950 she created a modern dance studio with the aim of developing her own company. The company made its debut in 1955 with her fusion style piece *Esta ciudad de Buenos Aires* (This City of Buenos Aires), which combined tango dynamics with classical choreography.

Itelman returned to the United States and after joining Bard College’s Dance Department as a professor she became head of the department. She also continued her own dance training with Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais, as well as reaching out to any source she could for enrichment, such as lighting design classes, or acting lessons with Lee Strasberg.

In 1970, Itelman returned to Buenos Aires, where she founded the Café Estudio de Teatro Danza. Her first production there was *Ali-cia en el país de las Maravillas* (Alice in Wonderland). Throughout her life, Ana succeeded in developing a marvelous body of choreographic work while crafting a personal method for teaching choreography. Her on-going composition class served as both a cradle and fertile terrain for many young (and not so young) dancers who wanted to become independent and choreographers of their own pieces. For this, she didn’t follow a one-way road, but instead combined elements she had learned from many different sources, such as the Alwin Nikolais–Murray Louis Improvisation Method, or ideas from drama and acting classes, or her own taste and knowledge of classic Russian Literature, among others.

Itelman was particularly influential, since she taught her composition class for many years in the ‘80s and ‘90s where everybody who is anybody as a contemporary Argentinian choreographer attended. She even lent and later donated her own property to host the San Martín Theatre Workshop, where many of the finest dancers took (and still take) a free 3-year-program. Her family donated all of her choreographic notes, video material and bibliography for archival purposes to the Documentation Center at the same theatre, after Itelman’s suicide in 1989. Very recently, through an open, online voting campaign, the Center has been named after her. Itelman’s dance collection is the only well-preserved collection in Argentina.

Itelman developed her own choreographic work mostly with the San Martín Theatre’s Grupo de Danza Contemporánea (Contemporary Dance Group), today renamed *Ballet Contemporáneo* (Contemporary Ballet). Many of her iconic pieces included *El capote* (The cloak), *Historia del soldado* (The Soldier’s Tale), *Las casas de Colomba* (The Houses of Colomba, inspired by Tennessee Williams’s *A Street-car Named Desired*), *Paralelo al horizonte* (Parallel to the Horizon), *Suite de percal* (Percale Suite), and *Y ella lo visitaba* (And She Visited Him). She was honored with the Konex Award for choreography, post mortem, in 1989.



The beginning of *Itelmania* or *Reconstruyendo a Ana Itelman*

The most striking moments of *Itelmania* were the times when each of the 10 performers (most of them choreographers and/or theater directors in their own right) evoked an exercise or assignment from Itelman’s choreography class. A wave of life seemed to travel

through the stage when they were recalling names of assignments, either shouting them out loud, or reading them from a piece of paper. These had been found decades later in notes Itelman kept in a diary of her classes. This seems to raise the question of what is the importance of posing challenges to students/artists, even just naming them. Would that be a way of setting down a milestone, which later might become a legacy? Or, rephrasing: are the pieces of a choreographer’s ideas as strong a legacy as her teachings? Of course, this wouldn’t be a question applicable to all choreographers, but as dance is an ephemeral art, which is in my opinion one of its many charms, it seems worthy to take a moment to reflect on that. How is it possible to read the invisible thread of an artist’s legacy through generations? Which would be the tools to follow those threads? Is this possible at all?

**Renate Schottelius (1921 – 1998)**

Our next figure is a German born dancer who came to Argentina at the age of 16. Here are her own words about her landing in this country, from an interview conducted by Stephanie Reinhart and published in the book *Dancing Female: Lives and Issues of Women in Contemporary Dance* (Friedler & Glazer, 1997).

SR: How did you come to Argentina?

RS: I had to leave Germany; I am half Jewish. I couldn’t have had the career I wanted in Germany. In 1936, at the age of 16, I came alone to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was from a very small family: my parents, myself, and my grandmother. An Argentinean uncle had enough money to invite only one of us over. My grandmother felt nothing could happen to her because she was not Jewish. My parents did not want to be separated. My mother was Jewish and my father was persecuted because he was against the Nazis. Although it was a hard decision for my parents, I was chosen to come. I was excited; I didn’t understand that I might not see my parents again. As it turned out, my father died at the age of 49 in Colombia, but I was able to bring my mother to Buenos Aires in 1941, where she lived with me for 20 years.

SR: What dance did you find when you came here?

RS: There was no Modern Dance whatsoever.

I found it particularly interesting to discover more of Renate Schottelius’s acute and almost sarcastic personality (clearly reflected in these paragraphs) which we all felt as students of hers during her technique class. Also, the acknowledgement of her Jewish origins came as a shock to me, since I had never noticed them, probably as a result of some prejudice towards Renate’s strong German accent. Is it also possible that it came from some sort of immigrant reflex of hers, trying to blend into the new land without any reference to her previous life?

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, at the same measure that Itelman was the most significant teacher in terms of choreographic composition in Buenos Aires in the 1980s, Schottelius was THE Modern Dance Technique teacher in those years. Who dared not to attend Schottelius’s class? As an example of that, one of the avant-garde choreographers of the 1960s, Graciela Martínez, wrote in her own biography in the program to a show: “I once took a class with Renate Schottelius,” as if this would be the exception to the rule, and Martínez was the rebel of her generation. Renate mentioned



this situation to me during an interview that was part of my documentary *Danza argentina en los '60s* (Argentinean Dance of the '60s).

In 2016, Buenos Aires Contemporary Dance Festival commissioned choreographer Susana Szperling to take care of the Homage to Renate Schottelius. In order to do this, Susana revisited both her own memories as a student and the memories of many (and notable) Schottelius disciples: Oscar Araiz, Ana Maria Stekelman, Ana Deutsch, Andrea Chinetti, Diana Theocharidis, and Alejandra Vignolo.

The particularity of the setting of *Renate virtual y sus actuales* (Virtual Renate And Her Actuals)<sup>3</sup> is that all of these artists appear on stage only virtually, projected on three screens (two of them vertical and one horizontal). Their voices and their bodies conform to the frame for a stage piece where three dancers (Susana Szperling, Mauro Cacciatore, and Liza Rule Larrea) embody Schottelius's choreography from her pieces *Aria* and *Paisaje de gritos* (Landscape of Screams), as well as exercises from both her technique and composition class.

As part of the video team, I was present during these interviews when my sister Susana (full disclosure) posed her questions and proposed to these Argentinean dance giants to evoke, not only in words but also in movement, their memories of Renate's legacy. Ana Deutsch was particularly moving when she recreated an improvisation exercise from Renate's class about moving from one's gaze. These three screens are also the surface for images extracted from choreographic pieces, classes, as well as a short documentary where Renate's own voice is heard, marking the end of the whole Homage.



Mauro Cacciatore and Liza Rule Larrea dancing *Paisaje de gritos* (2016)

There are two scenes made up of monologues that stand out. One of them by pianist Aníbal Zorrilla, who was the accompanist for Renate's technique classes for more than 20 years, tells stories related to Schottelius' involvement with music for her class. She would ask for particular rhythms and speeds from Aníbal: "I want them to be surprised," she used to say. And boy, didn't we get surprises all the time! I remember one class when she said: "Yes, it is OK to feel the violence of the speed of movement."

The other monologue, by Susana Szperling, is a spoken word plus movement scene, where she recalls being the odd one at Schottelius class who says, "You don't respect forms." Szperling asks herself

onstage: "Why did they commission me, if I was not one of Renate's preferred students?" *Renate virtual y sus actuales* was premiered on the day of Schottelius birthday (December 8th) and has had a life of its own beyond the festival, with performances the following year (2017) at two theaters in Buenos Aires (25 de mayo and Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti). It has also become a performance-lecture presented in December 2018 at *Ciclo Cuerpos* (Bodies Series, Centro Cultural Matienzo), as well as at academic venues for study such as the UNA *Universidad Nacional de las Artes* (National University of the Arts).

Susana says in an interview by Carolina Prieto:

"She treated us very respectfully, with some distance. Her feedback was very rich. It was nice to hear her talk, her way of expressing, with her usual black turtleneck pullover and her very special bun... And the way she danced! Her vitality, her strength. Already back then, she stated the idea of the dancer as a professional worker, and that dance can happen anywhere... As Oscar (Araiz) tells, her pieces were different: some of them had a lot of humor while others were very strong, alluding to Nazism or to the Disappeared by the military dictatorship."<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Otras danzas (Other Dances)***

In 1987, with the enthusiasm of the recently regained Democracy in Argentina, Ana Itelman and Renate Schottelius joined forces to curate a series of dances that would happen outside the black space of the theater. The result was *Otras danzas* (Other Dances) which occupied many unusual spaces at Centro Cultural Recoleta, a marvelous building that had been an abandoned monastery, later a home for the elderly, and finally had been acquired by the city as a cultural center. Young choreographers (many of them presenting their first pieces) were called to the patios, staircases and hallways of the building. Most notably, Itelman and Schottelius (with the assistance of Silvia Pritz) opened an area for advising the choreographers of these pieces to be developed onsite. This was a first time for those in the dance community of Buenos Aires to exchange their artistic views outside the box: outside the theater and outside the classroom. I dare say that *Otras danzas* marked the beginning of a sense of community for people in the dance field. It marked a milestone in terms of authorizing dance students to advance in order to call themselves artists.

#### ***Ana Kamien (born in 1934)***

The dancer and choreographer Ana Kamien has been part of the avant-garde movement of contemporary dance since the '60s. She was a member of the group of artists gathered in and around the Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires. Kamien has danced her own choreographies in all major theatres in Argentina, as well as Holland, England, Germany and Israel. She is very active in the dance community up to this day, having recently been President of *CoCoA-Datei* (the local association of choreographers) as well as Artistic Director of Prodanza (Office for the Independent Dance of the city of Buenos Aires).

In December 2018 there was an event called *Danzas maestras* (Master Dances) at Centro Cultural Matienzo, as part of *Ciclo cuerpos* (Bodies Series), which is usually a series dedicated to Screendance in its



Susana Szperling dancing *Aria* (2016)

broadest sense. In this case, the evening included one performance-lecture (See section on Renate Schottelius above for the previously mentioned *Renate Virtual y sus actuales*) plus two documentaries: *Les chemins de Noemi Lapsezon* (Noemi Lapsezon's *Trails*, 1999) by Jean-Pierre Garnier, and *Ana + Leone*<sup>5</sup> (2018) by Laura Arensburg.

In the latter, *Ana + Leone* we see at its core, the relationship between Ana Kamien and her photographer husband and partner in artistic life, Leone Soninno. It shows how they have collaborated to create so many pieces together. There's an epiphany towards the end of the film, when they both go into the same theater where they have premiered a series of pieces; they try to recall one with the help of a surprising object, a push broom.

Ana goes onstage and Leone sits in the house, and a dialogue starts where each one reminds the other about details of the choreography, the music, and other elements. The most interesting



The Alternatives (Clarín newspaper, August 9th., 1987)

thing is that Kamien goes through the whole choreography describing orally what she was doing and indicating the movement at every single moment of the piece with her 80-something body.

The evening of *Danzas maestras* concluded with a conversation between Kamien, Susana Szperling, myself, and Daniel Böhm, curator and organizer of the program. Ana started to talk about seeing herself onscreen and went into more specific movement details of the piece, as if the filmed scene was not descriptive enough for the audience to grasp what they had created:

"That piece... I have it in my heart. You might have noticed that I couldn't dance it at the time... (of the filming. Originally) I fell on my knees, and from my knees I fell with my whole body to the ground, like I was beaten. Then, I put my hands on the floor; I jumped up and fell on my knees again... I crawled travelling through the whole stage, and finally while I was on the floor, I kicked with my feet, my hip up, supported by my hands, until I held onto the broom and tried to run away... I remember it with emotion, I am telling it to you again now, after you already saw me doing it on the screen." (Laughs).

That precise narration of the movements, the involvement of the speaker, her whole body reflecting her words while seated on a chair, created a special atmosphere for all of us present at that time. Daniel Böhm stated: "As (her husband) Leone says (in the film), dance is something that happens at a certain moment, and then there's nothing left. Even though you are full of memories and anecdotes, it's very difficult to transmit the experience."

But what I felt (and actually expressed at that time) is that the act of talking, the oral discourse, can also be a dancing act. Narration is a form of art that - as dance does- it allows for kinesthetic empathy of the listener, or the viewer. "To talk dance' is also to dance...," and then Susana added: "I think that behind the construction of a dance piece there are always words, at the (moment and the) way of thinking it. Maybe to reveal some of those words is to unveil something that is hidden in that dance."

The piece in question originally had no title (though it was later called *Heroica* after Beethoven's music). It was part of a series by Kamien and Soninno where they took inspiration from unfortunate phrases said by public figures of the time (1970s), such as the Secretariat of Culture or a prestigious dance critic. The phrase that inspired the push broom section was: "Watch out, right?" Ingeniously, the push broom in question transforms. It changes its function from sweeper to shotgun, to crutch, to a prisoner's pole, to a cross to bear. It all ends with the sound of the executioner's drum and the word "Fire!" followed by a blackout of the stage.

Kamien has been devoted to the teaching of dance since the early stages of her career. So in 2012, when the Buenos Aires Contemporary Dance Festival decided to commission its Homage around her figure, they asked Natalia Ardissonne to make a documentary<sup>6</sup> and many of Kamien's disciples respond to the call: Susana Tambutti, Margarita Bali, Silvia Tissenbaum, Andrea Servera, Ana Garat, and Laura Goyechea. Her collaborators at those swinging times from the Di Tella Institute were also asked: Leone Soninno (of course), and choreographers Marilú Marini and Graciela Martínez.



A stage piece was commissioned from Ana Garat, who performed *Solo para Ana* (Solo for Ana). Garat's statement for the program reads: "229 Defensa St. A staircase. First floor. Behind a glass door, Ana. The music surrounds the bodies that move. In front of my thirteen-years-old eyes, a revelation. To meet Ana was, for me, to know who I am."

But in order to see *Ana Kamien* dancing in her heyday, one must watch the film *Ana Kamien* (1970) by Marcelo Epstein.<sup>7</sup> Shot in black and white just after Di Tella Institute was closed down by the dictatorship. The accompaniment is original music by Carlos Núñez. It has several scenes where the film embodies the most distinctive characteristics of the group including by Martínez, Marini and Kamien. You see the elements the dancers were working on including abstraction of the body figure using props and costumes that modified and deformed its shape. Epstein and his Director of Photography, Andrés Franc Silvert, enhance those features by placing the camera at risky angles, and using the lights at a very contrasted chiaroscuro.

As Rodrigo Alonso states in his article "From Tango to Video Dance - Dance for the Camera in Argentina: "Ana Kamien, together with filmmaker Marcelo Epstein, also created the first work that can be considered, in all senses, 'dance for the camera' ... In this film, the stage was completely replaced by a neutral and physical space created through the movements of the camera and the dancer's body. The spatial fragmentation promoted a visual abstraction. Every movement was considered according to the position of the camera; every shot enhanced the movement isolated from the whole choreography, which remains incomprehensible beyond its audiovisual representation. The editing created its own choreography through the fragments of movement: it did not reconstruct a preexisting kinetic organization. For all this, *Ana Kamien* is not only one of the first examples of dance for the camera in Argentina: it is also one of the best."<sup>8</sup>

As an introduction, Kamien's voice-over recites a poetic description of herself:  
Waterfalls and streams flow through my veins  
My bones delineate multiple ravines  
My name is Ana Kamien  
Seas flow through me  
In them I slide  
The mountains are my bones



Ana Garat in her piece *Solo para Ana* (2012)

In them I take form  
Nature is Mankind

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The reason for the title is that at Douglas Rosenberg's request, I wrote and presented an article called "JAP Jewish Argentine Princess" for the Conney Conference on Jewish Arts (directed by Rosenberg; see <https://conneyproject.wisc.edu>). held at the University of Wisconsin in 2003. The article was an autobiographical text, gracefully revised by Elizabeth Zimmer. My presentation at the Arizona State University's "Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World" Conference is a second round on the same themes, so I came up with this "sequel". In the writing and reporting for this article, I actually ended up in a very different place than where I began for the Conney presentation. However, I decided to keep the title as I have an intention of creating a series on this subject, continuing with the catchy title phrase Jewish Argentine Princess, JAP.

<sup>2</sup>Ana Itelman: (<https://vimeo.com/109295119>, accessed June 10, 2019); and a delicious onstage performance called *Itelmanía o Reconstruyendo a Ana Itelman* (Itelmania or Reconstructing Ana Itelman); see link to trailer: <https://vimeo.com/221105394>, (accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>3</sup>Setting of *Renate virtual y sus actuales* (Virtual Renate And Her Actuals) <https://susanaszperling.com/susanaszperlingrenate>; html, <https://youtu.be/kWZGtiXcOh4>, (both accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Susana Szperling, interviewed by Carolina Prieto, published by Pagina12 newspaper, November 12, 2017; <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/75364-tributo-a-una-maestra-y-coreografa>, (accessed June 10, 2019); *Ana + Leone*. <https://vimeo.com/301377432/c23d41b6f7>, (accessed June 10, 2019); Natalia Ardissonne's documentary: <https://vimeo.com/61534330>. (accessed June 10, 2019); Marcelo Epstein's film: <https://vimeo.com/133870952>, (accessed June 10, 2019); <http://www.roalonso.net/en/videoarte/tango.php>.

<sup>5</sup>*Ana + Leone*. <https://vimeo.com/301377432/c23d41b6f7>, (accessed June 10, 2019)

<sup>6</sup>Natalia Ardissonne's documentary, <https://vimeo.com/61534330>, (accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>7</sup>Marcelo Epstein's film: <https://vimeo.com/133870952>, (accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.roalonso.net/en/pdf/videoarte/tango\\_ing.pdf](http://www.roalonso.net/en/pdf/videoarte/tango_ing.pdf), (accessed June 10, 2019).

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**Silvina Szperling** was born in Buenos Aires. Departing from a strong background in contemporary dance, Szperling dove into Videodance (or Screendance), pioneering the art form in Argentina and Latin America, with awards for her videos *Temblor* (1993) and *Chámame* (2008). In 1995 she founded and continues to direct the International Festival VideoDanzaBA, and this festival is a member of REDIV (Ibero American Videodance Network). Her first documentary film, *Relfejo Narcisa* (2015), was awarded an Honorary Mention from the Jury at FEM CINE Chile and has been screened at film festivals around the world. [silviszpe@gmail.com](mailto:silviszpe@gmail.com)

# Theologies of Modern Dance

Alexander H. Schwan



The current Viennese Theater Museum exhibition "Everybody Dances" welcomes back Jewish dancers into the Austrian dance canon including Hilde Holger and Gertrud Kraus who fled the Nazis, Gertrud to Tel Aviv. The Museum catalogue cover features Gertrud Kraus in her dance *Wodka* c. 1924. Photo Martin Imboden, courtesy of Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband.

**Dance as Religion**

Many protagonists of modern dance, including Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, and Mary Wigman, understood dance movement in deeply religious terms and while escaping from the narrow boundaries of institutionalized Christianity on the one hand, they also developed a new religion of dance on the other. As part of the arts breaking free of religious domination, dance separated itself from the strictures of the Christian tradition, while simultaneously claiming a religious status for itself and promising its disciples a better life *through* dance (Schwan 2017, 28). In this essay, I examine the interconnectedness between modern choreographers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (mid-1910s to mid-1930s) with religious thought of this period; this is the overarching theme in

my current research as a dance historian and theologian. This project investigates aspects of implicit religion in modern dance, asking how religiousness, both Christian and Jewish, was visualized and evoked, specifically through dance aesthetics. How did the pioneers of modern dance make use of older and explicitly religious ideas when they conceptualized their dance practice, and with what movements, poses and dance techniques did they enact these religious notions? Finally, what was the role of the audience in reframing modern dance as a phenomenon that freely crossed the boundaries between the ostensibly separated social spheres of religion and secular culture?

Acknowledging that modern dance was developed against the background of secularization processes that treated religious and aesthetic practices as two parallel and autonomous options, I examine religiously charged modern dance as an aesthetic phenomenon rather than a form of liturgical or religious practice. Investigating implicit religious aspects in modern dance is connected to questioning how spirituality was visualized and evoked specifically through dance aesthetics. The term *spirituality* is here understood in the widest possible sense. *Spiritual* thus refers to any practice with which people relate to the largest possible context of the cosmos and position themselves to this relation in a self-reflective way. Beyond any too narrow and too emotional understanding of spirituality, this wide and abstract definition is free of any esoteric presuppositions (Schwan 2014).

The religious upbringing of many modern dancers often influenced their ideas about dance. This applies to dancers and choreographers from Europe and the U.S. and includes both the pioneers of modern dance like Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn as well as dancers from the second generation like Martha Graham or Mary Wigman. All of them came from Protestant backgrounds that can be further specified by denominational differences like the Lutheran tradition (the form of Protestantism that refers back to the German church reformer Martin Luther), or the Reformed or Calvinist tradition (tied to the theology of the French-Suisse theologian Jean Calvin). This Reformed branch of Protestantism is of particular importance for the U.S. since the American tradition of Puritanism with its strict lifestyle and religious beliefs originated from this very branch. Puritanism is connected to the so-called Pilgrim Fathers, faith-refugees from England who sailed to America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the hope of finding a new country where they could live according to their reformed Protestant ideas. Another American specificity is the Protestant tradition of Methodism, which started as a movement within the Church of England and was later adapted to the U.S. as another branch of Reformed Protestantism characterized by its emphasis on individual responsibility, this-worldliness, and social commitment.

Most of the American choreographers of modern dance came from one of these religious traditions or denominations, and specific theological arguments of their different denominational backgrounds corresponded to facets of their dance philosophy and also their dance aesthetics. Both Ruth St. Denis (1879–1968) and Ted Shawn (1891–1972) had a Methodist background; Shawn even began studying Methodist theology before becoming a dancer and choreographer (Schwan 2017, 28). This Methodist upbringing was reflected in their concept of the dancing body and their ideal of self-enhancement, celebrating or even glorifying the human body



on the one hand and subordinating it to strict principles on the other. Their Methodist background was also problematically related to their “cultural imperialism” (Desmond 2001, 256) with which they colonized other non-Christian religions (with the exception of Judaism) under the umbrella of a universalist connection between religion and dance, yet all the while following presuppositions of the alleged supremacy of Christianity.

Martha Graham’s (1894–1991) understanding of dance and her dance aesthetics had a decisively Puritan character (Schwan 2009). She could trace her American family history back to Miles Standish, one of the Pilgrim fathers who arrived on board the Mayflower ship landing in Massachusetts in 1620. Coming from a prominent family of Puritans and being raised in the Presbyterian tradition, another Protestant denomination of the Reformed branch, Graham developed an attitude towards dance that was clearly influenced by her Presbyterian religious upbringing. The appreciation of rigorous discipline and work, an ethic found in most denominations of the Reformed branch of Protestantism, is reflected in Graham’s principles of dance training and in the discipline and execution of her movements. More strikingly, Graham even transferred the distinctive Calvinist doctrine of election to the realm of dance. According to this belief, faith is not a matter of your own choice but derives from the fact that you are elected by God to belong to the community of chosen people. Parallel to this important idea, Graham was convinced that certain people were chosen to be dancers and should therefore behave and move according to this elect status (Graham 1991, 5).

While reformed Protestantism was uniquely important for modern dance in the American context, modern dance in Europe was more significantly influenced by other religious traditions. Only a few choreographers came from Catholic backgrounds, reflecting the peculiar fact that modern dance education in Central Europe was mainly popular among Protestant and Jewish families and significantly less so in the Catholic cultural milieu (Zander 2001). An important exception is Charlotte Bara (1901–1986) who converted to Catholicism from Judaism at the age of 27. Bara trained with a student of Isadora Duncan and Alexander Sacharoff and undertook a famous European tour of her religious-themed dances before settling down in Ascona, a small town in the foothills of the Monte Verità in the Italian part of Switzerland. In her dancing, Bara used the Christian iconographic tradition of Gothic art and incorporated the pictorial traditions of Mariology, the Catholic theology around Mary, the mother of Jesus. She also focused her expressionist dance on predominantly Catholic topics such as purity, piety, and devotion.

### ***Jewish Secularisms***

With regard to Judaism the relation between dance modernism and religion is strikingly different from the various connections of modern dance with Christian denominations. This is mainly related to the fact that Judaism developed a positive attitude towards dancing, in contrast to Christianity that adopted the negative verdict of the Stoic tradition on dance that had been prevalent in Late Antiquity (Andresen 1961). Since the typically Christian pejorative and even punitive perspective on dance is not part of Judaism, Jewish modern dancers did not need to split from a hostile background

against dance as their Christian contemporaries did. Consequently, the concept of movement in Jewish modernism was far less charged with an overcompensating religious idealization. It is not by chance that Isadora Duncan, who first conceptualized dance as a new religion and who influenced many of the Christian protagonists of dance modernism, did not leave a significant impact on modern dancers and choreographers in Israel.

Thus, Jewish-themed choreographies developed by Jewish modern dancers were situated in a remarkable connection of religiosity, political implications, and various forms of secularisms (Jakobsen/Pellegrini 2008). While none of the Jewish modern dancers and choreographers in British Mandate Palestine and later Israel were religious in an orthodox way, they still sought to express a form of Jewish spirituality through movement. Though being declaredly secular, their dancing celebrated specifically Jewish religious ideas of redemption, liberation, and spiritual renewal. This allows for an analysis of Jewish modern dance that moves beyond the narrow focus on solely religious Jewishness or new Israeli folk dances for Jewish holidays. Instead I focus on the connection between modernist body culture and Jewish spirituality in its broadest sense and try to explore how specifically Jewish-religious ideas fueled the concept of the New Jew and its connection with dance, sport, and movement in general.

In this perspective, the artistic cooperation of Moshé Feldenkrais with expressionist dancers, including Margalit Ornstein, Gertrud Kraus, and Debora Bertonoff (Buckard 2015: 96, 220–221), was more than a temporal coincidence in a shared Zionist context. Instead, this cooperation and the aesthetics of expressionist dance in pre-state Israel were based on a holistic and particularly Jewish understanding of body and movement that was different from Christian anthropological concepts. Modern ideas of bodily expression, renewal, and in the case of Moshé Feldenkrais even healing, matched with the Jewish appreciation for experiences of liberation, exodus, and recovery. Even though the dancers and choreographers in pre-state Israel understood themselves as secular, their dancing was strongly influenced by powerful Jewish religious ideas. Besides this general connection of modern body culture and Judaism, many of the ostensibly secular Jewish dance artists created works with direct references to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish religious dance traditions. Baruch Agadati (1895–1976) was one of the first modern Jewish artists who developed religiously-themed choreographies in a Jewish idiom. Agadati, along with other Jewish modernist dancers and choreographers such as Fred Berk, Else Dublon, and Gertrud Kraus, approached Hasidic dancing from the perspective of avant-garde aesthetics (Ingber 1984, 23; Manor 1978, 19; Manor 1986). Developed and performed in Europe and in British Mandate Palestine mainly from the 1920s until the mid-1930s, these hybrid embodiments of dance and Jewish religiosity onstage often had a decisively Zionist background and confronted two seemingly unconnected realms: the world of Jewish orthodox religion on one side, and the various intersections of modernism with new dance and body culture on the other. Adding to the paradoxical character of Jewish modern dance, these deliberately secular approaches to Hasidic dance aesthetics nevertheless included experiences of spirituality, mainly in the attempt to achieve a state of ecstasy through repetitive movement.

The modernist references to traditional Jewish dancing both referred back to Max Nordau’s notion of the new muscular Jew (“*Muskel-judentum*”, Nordau 2018) as well as to its counterpart, the weak and allegedly neurasthenic diaspora Jew of Eastern Europe. Nordau himself developed much of the negative imagery of the latter, precisely in order to then position his version of a strong New Jew against it. While modernist dancing emphasized muscularity, agility, and in the case of male dancers also virility, the embodiment of Hasidic Jews through avant-garde dance simultaneously confronted the affirmative physicality of modernist dance with stereotypical movement patterns expressing restriction, submission, and weakness. It is not without some irony that bodies already transformed into models of the New Jew through modernist body culture were again embodying the movement clichés of the old European Jewish world. Approaching Jewish religious topics from a decidedly non-religious perspective and through modernist expressionist movement, Jewish choreographers achieved a new form of spirituality characterized by both its muscularity and its paradoxical secularity.

### ***Theologies of Dance***

While many modern choreographers regarded dancing as a means of religious expression and sought acceptance for this vision, only a few theologians in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century supported this view. One of them was the German-born Lutheran theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1933 because of his socialist political commitment and, after teaching for several decades at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, became a professor at the influential Harvard Divinity School in 1955. Beyond the narrow concentration of a personal god, Tillich famously defined religion as the ultimate concern and embraced dancing as an expression of this ultimate concern (Schwan 2009).

Tillich saw art, and with it dancing, as an expression of this ultimate concern and, furthermore, even admitted that the experience of art and dance helped him to develop his specific understanding of religion. During the mid-1920s Tillich taught in Dresden, where Mary Wigman, the German expressionist dancer and choreographer was also based. The theologian and the dancer became friends before Tillich moved to another position in Frankfurt/Main in 1929 after which he emigrated to the U.S. while Wigman chose to stay in Nazi Germany. Tillich’s wife Hannah described their unusual friendship of the 1920s in her autobiography *From Time to Time*, first published in 1974 in English: “Another group we were involved with was that of Mary Wigman and her students. We had lessons in gymnastics in our vestibule. Paulus [a.k.a. Paul] refused to bend down, proclaiming it would hurt his head.” (Tillich 1973, 132). The peculiar term *gymnastics* adequately translates the German term *Gymnastikunterricht* used in the German version of Hannah Tillich’s autobiography which was published only in 1993, five years after her death in 1988. In this German version, Tillich leaves no doubt that it was Mary Wigman herself who taught these movement lessons. It is hard to imagine any closer connection between modern dance and theology than this bizarre encounter of one of the most important choreographers teaching the most influential Protestant theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the techniques of expressionist dance.

Despite his hesitation over fully participating in this form of home dance training, Paul Tillich regarded his contact with Mary Wigman as so important that he referred back to this encounter some thirty years later in 1957, when the American publication *Dance Magazine* approached him and other philosophers, religious and political leaders to write an assortment of texts under the headline “The Dance: What It Means To Me”. Tillich submitted the following lines: “The word ‘dance’ evokes in me the memory of the middle twenties in Dresden. At that time, Dresden was rightly called the ‘capital of the dance.’ I happened to be professor at the Technical Academy, teaching philosophy of religion, and I was connected with the school of Mary Wigman, who was then and still is acknowledged as one of the foremost creators of modern expressive dance. The expressive power of the moving body, the organization of space by dancers (individuals and groups), the rhythms embodied in visible movements, the accompanying sounds expressing the idea and the passion behind the dance: all this became philosophically and religiously significant for me. It was a new encounter with reality in its deeper levels. In unity with the great German expressionist painters, whose works and whom one frequently encountered in Dresden at that time, it inspired my understanding of religion as the spiritual substance of culture and of culture as the expressive form of religion. It also raised in me the unanswered question of how the lost unity could be regained between cult and dance on the hard and unreceptive soil of Protestantism” (Tillich 1957).

Tillich shared this assumption of an allegedly original unity of dance and religion, which after its loss had to be regained with many modern choreographers who approached dance in a perspective influenced by Christianity. Almost as a cliché, all of them sought to revitalize this unity through their own dancing. With the rootedness of *Ausdruckstanz* in the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in its ideals of movement, nature and organic becoming, early modernist dance worked with this tripartite salvation-oriented scheme. Industrialization, urbanization and, paradoxically, modernity itself signified a decline from an allegedly pure past that was then necessarily followed by its amelioration and (self)redemption. On the background of this clearly biblical scheme – a paradisiacal state of nature, its decay and redemption – Isadora Duncan claimed that “dance was once the most noble of all arts – and it shall be again. From the great depth to which it has fallen it shall be raised” (Duncan 1903, 15).

### ***Perspectives***

I will end this investigation of religiousness in modern dance with an array of open questions: Baruch Agadati, Charlotte Bara, Martha Graham, Gertrud Kraus, Ted Shawn, Mary Wigman, – all of them, and each in her or his own way, sought for religious expression through dancing, yet each had a remarkable focus on the solely positive aspects of religion. Beyond the endless repeating of how dance should express religious feelings or how moving bodies ought to become vessels of the sacred, which theological arguments did modern choreographers deliberately or sub-consciously avoid? For in many aspects, theology, both Christian and Jewish, seems to me much more advanced than the often too simplistic equations between dance movement and religious experience, a more or less veiled variety of natural theology, with all its epistemological and soteriological abysses.



In striving for religious expression through dance, was early modernist choreography also capable of expressing the specifically modern experience of being abandoned by God, of being exposed to God's silence, absence, and lack of power? What could dance contribute to complex and theological problems like theodicy, the relationship of God to evil, or *Tzimtzum*, the Kabbalistic idea of a withdrawal of divine power? Is there more to dance and religion than the focus on embodiment, which unavoidably quotes Christian theologies of incarnation? How does dance reflect religious interpretations of human weakness, failure, and guilt?

Deeply irritated and challenged by the catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish and Christian theologians developed radical questions about the legitimacy of religion and broke with the obsolete theology of theism as the belief in the existence of a personal God. Yet, where were these utterly modern frictions and breaks of theology visible in dance? How did modern dance reflect Jewish and Christian theologies in all their richness, complexity and contradictions? And since dance's ephemeral nature and its connection with the imagination unavoidably transcend the factuality of the here and now: Does this transcending character of movement correspond to a non-theistic theology of dance?

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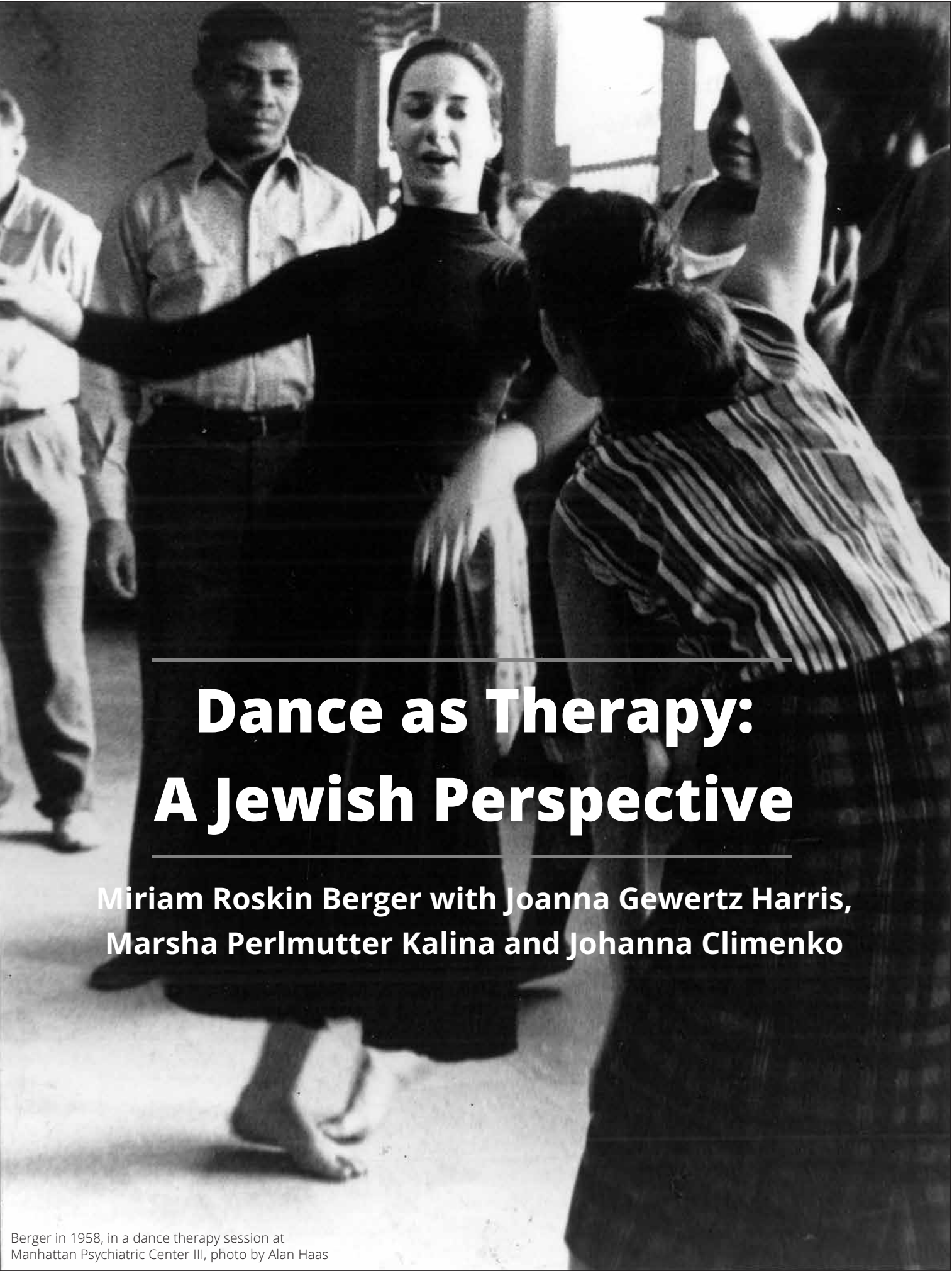
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# Dance as Therapy: A Jewish Perspective

Miriam Roskin Berger with Joanna Gewertz Harris,  
Marsha Perlmutter Kalina and Johanna Climenko

Berger in 1958, in a dance therapy session at  
Manhattan Psychiatric Center III, photo by Alan Haas



This article touches on some elements discussed at the Dance Therapy Panel at Arizona State University during the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” conference in October 2018. Dr. Miriam Roskin Berger was the Chair and author of this summary, and the panelists were Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, Ph.D, Johanna Climenko, LCSW, and Joanna Gewertz Harris, Ph.D.

**Growth of Dance Therapy in the United States**

There were three sources for the growth of the discipline of dance therapy in the United States in the 20th century. The first was the influence of humanistic psychology with its emphasis on the importance of the individual. The second source was the establishment in the 1930s of modern dance departments in several colleges in America. The early dance educators were the first to recognize that the study of dance somehow went beyond technical, intellectual and choreographic achievements... that dance and movement influenced emotional states and development. The third source, surprisingly, was World War II. The return of so many veterans with what was then called shell shock demanded treatment modalities that were suited to group work. Methods such as individual psychoanalysis were not economically or psychologically appropriate. In the United States, dance therapy initially developed differently on the East and the West coasts. In the East, the crucial pioneer was Marian Chace, who had been a member of the Denishawn Company. Chace studied with the social and interactional psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan, and her work was based on group interaction, rhythm, synchrony, and musical expression. On the West coast, the psychological theories of Carl Jung had the most influence, and pioneer Mary Whitehouse developed a distinctly different style where the work was more individual, on a one to one basis.

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was created in 1965. Authorized governmental job lines were established in many states; ADTA standards for Registration, and now Certification, were developed and approved. Dance/movement therapists can now be licensed in several states in the USA. And we have a close alliance with the counseling profession; dance/movement therapists can become National Certified Counselors. Academic programs on the graduate level were established in universities, and now there are programs for doctoral study. Alternate Route training has been developed for those in other disciplines.

**Dance Therapy Throughout the World.... And in Israel**

Initially an American phenomenon, dance/movement therapy is now a global force including dance/movement therapy practice in every country in Europe (including northern Europe's Scandinavian countries and Eastern Europe) and Russia, in Israel and Egypt, in Mexico and South America, in India, in Australia and New Zealand, in the Far East in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and now in China. International dance/movement therapy associations have been created, and standards for practice are being developed that reflect the specific issues and needs of each region. American dance/movement therapists have been part of this global expansion through their teaching in other countries, and through the work in their home countries of international students who have received their training in the United States. But there have been extraordinary pioneers in every part of the world who have developed dance/

movement therapy reflective of their cultural identity, and whose concepts are now being shared with their American colleagues. Israel has, in fact, been a nation leading in dance therapy and I believe it now has the most dance therapists per capita of any country in the world. There have been many Israeli pioneer dance therapists; among them Yael Barkai, Dalia Razin, and Yarden Cohen. Marian Chace visited Israel to train students in the 1960s. Now there are several Master's and training programs throughout Israel led by renowned dance therapists such as Dita Federman and Hilda Wengrower. In the United States the first pioneers, in addition to the Americans Marian Chace and Mary Whitehouse, were non-Jewish Europeans who escaped the Nazis, but the majority of first generation dance therapists had Jewish backgrounds. One of these Jewish first generation American pioneers is Amelie Straus Maslansky, who escaped Germany as a child.<sup>1</sup>

**The Jewish Heritage of Dance Therapy Pioneers**

Marsha P. Kalina, a psychologist and dance therapist, conducted a study of many of the first-generation American Jewish dance therapists in an attempt to discover what aspects of their Jewish heritage might have influenced their choice of dance therapy as a profession and the paths they took in developing the field. This study was the essential framework for the content of the panel. Even though none of the early pioneers had made a conscious connection between their Jewish background and dance therapy, Kalina reported clear reflections, in their individual and collective histories, of the influence of Jewish spiritual and secular principles. What evolved was an exploration of themes such as humanitarianism, *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world), the courage of being a pioneer and questioning authority, and the role of critical thinking and intellectual analysis as an important element in developing new paradigms for treatment.

The life of one first generation dance therapist, Johanna Climenko, gives us this reflection through specific details and experience. She spoke of her *besheret* (Yiddish: באַשערט meaning destiny) relationship to the profession of dance therapy.

*I grew up in an entirely secular Jewish family, with a central identity and powerful ethos of what it means to be Jewish. 'We are all responsible for our fellow man/woman, and for making this world a better, and more just place.' That was indeed the 'religion' of my family...*

*There were two potent streams in my maternal Ashkenazi family: the very spiritually Jewish, and the very secular. My great grandfather, Hirsch Cohen, was the head Rabbi of Montreal, hence the head Rabbi of Canada, since almost all the Jews in Canada then lived in Montreal. I remember Grandpa Cohen as a loving and tender man, with a beautiful presence and a snowy white beard. I remember climbing onto his lap and asking 'if he was Santa Claus?' when I was about 2, and his tender, amused response. In retrospect, I think that this gave me permission to experience being Jewish in the most all-embracing way: it was about inclusive love and acceptance.*

*My other grandfather, Hyman Climenko, was a major neurologist, Chief of Neurology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. He was also a social and political activist. The American Chapter of the Arbeiter's Bund (Workmen's Circle) was founded in his Lower East Side doctor's office. My grandmother Rosie... was also an early feminist. So this is the*

*backdrop of my history...I think that the intersection of Jewish values, social and political activism, and immersion in the arts seem to be the through-line in almost all of our experiences from the generation of 'elders' in our varied work in dance.*

**Dance and the Roles of Jewish Women**

Joanna Harris is also a first generation therapist. She shared her perspective on the evolution of dance therapy in relation to dance and the roles of Jewish women:

*The Torah texts place 'Jewishness' in the contexts of the basic teachings. Jewish history also embraces aspects of the 'healing' professions and Jewish involvement in medicine, midwifery, and psychology. Proverbs 31:10-31 "Eshet Hayil" is a well-known prayer that is offered in praise of women every Friday night at the Shabbat ceremony. Although most of the text cites the Jewish woman's skill in the support of her husband and her household, two lines make reference to her 'reaching out to the poor' and 'her hands to the needy.' These references have challenged Jewish women to be active in social projects, inspiring the organization called "Hadassah", other charities and philanthropic contributions.*

*In 1996, I wrote an article for the journal Judaism citing the work of the early modern dancers, Helen (Becker) Tamiris, Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow:*

*Their work was fostered by NY settlement houses, particularly the Henry Street Settlement House... Jewish communities have continually banded together in support of social, artistic, and political movements. New York City's 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association [now called the 92Y] sponsored performances and classes during years when there was little or no support for developing modern dance. (Elsewhere in this issue see McPherson and Tucker's article about Helen Tamiris). These women were involved with social and political action as well as representing their heritage. Sophie told me, 'First we went to the socialist bookstore, then to classes with Martha Graham.'*

*It is also important to note the work of the New Dance Group that provided inexpensive classes for children and adults and whose motto was 'Dance is a weapon in the class struggle'. These political gestures helped to foster a certain liberation for young women in the '30's and '40's whose families were primarily immigrants to America from the early 20th century and whose prospects for social or artistic activities were limited both by contemporary conditions of the time but also the 'image' of the traditional Jewish woman.*

*According to the traditional Jewish woman's 'body image', she was to be modest in all public and private relationships to her body. Dancing on the stage was considered lewd by the orthodox community. The early modern dancers and their many students in schools, studios and colleges helped to revise this attitude. Success in public performance liberated Jewish women to perform and use Jewish themes in their work.*

*The dance therapy profession, especially in New York City, owed much to the energy that characterized these Jewish postwar activities in dance, and the work of the early Jewish innovators of the American Dance Therapy Association. There are many. Support came from New York City hospitals where dance therapy was fostered, especially at Bronx Psychiatric Center. My personal history as a dance therapist in California began when*

*I was invited, through contacts at Mills College, where I had earned the MA in dance, to 'do something for the children' at Langley-Porter Psychiatric Institute, the mental hospital of University of California San Francisco. Since childhood autism at that point was deifned as the result of limited understanding of 'schizophrenic-genic' mothers, the children were in strait jackets since they kicked and bit. As theory changed and I was successful in recruiting staff to assist, we were able to bring dance activities to the groups. These programs were continued at Napa State Hospital for several years to include teen-agers as well as some adult groups.*



Photo courtesy of Judy Hurvitz taken at Temple Micah in Washington, D.C. during a workshop led by Liz Lerman whom we also thank.

*As education and training was necessary to assist the professional growth in this clinical work, I established a Creative Arts Therapy program in 1975 at Lone Mountain College. ...I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Great Britain in 1979 and was able to help establish the British Dance Therapy Association, demonstrate the value of dance activities in schools and hospitals, and teach many workshops in the UK and in other European countries. For the most part, I was accepted, though I can still hear some German voices asking, "Du bist Juden?" [You're Jewish?].*

*Since mental hospitals were closed in California in the '60s and later, dance therapy practice became more and more private in the face of*



the ‘growth’ movement and other California experiments in ‘human potential’. My own work continues with older adults who experience both physical and psychological limitations but enjoy dance/movement and improvisation. The ‘Jewish’ challenge to bring dance to the community is still an important dimension of my life and work and to the direction, *Tikkun Olam*, a concept deifned **by acts of kindness performed to perfect or repair the world.**<sup>2</sup>

**The Mission of Dance Therapy**

This “Jewish” challenge and vision is still clearly apparent in the art of dance therapy development throughout the world, and has its roots in the experience and work of many of its early Jewish pioneers. From the original dance therapy focus on work with severely disturbed psychiatric patients, the scope has now expanded to include special education, developmental disabilities, family therapy, eating disorders, substance abuse, geriatric populations, trauma, victims of war, violence prevention, aid in natural disasters, child prostitution, business venues, physical disability, medical conditions, and community building, all in an effort to heal the world or fulfill our mandate for *Tikkun Olam*.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Maslansky’s niece is the renowned Israeli choreographer Noa Wertheim, the co-creator of the distinguished dance company Vertigo.

<sup>2</sup> See also Harris’s article “Tenement to Theater: American Jewish Women Dance Pioneers, Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow,” *Judaism* 45, 3 (Summer 1996) NY: The American Jewish Congress Publications.

**Dr. Miriam Roskin Berger**, member of Jean Erdman Theatre of Dance in the 1960s. Past President and charter member of the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA). Director of the Dance Education Program at NYU 1993-2002. Now Director of the Dance Therapy Program, 92Y Harkness Dance Center and the Dance Movement Training (DMT) program at the National Centre for Dance Therapy, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal. Past Director, Creative Arts Therapies Dept. Bronx Psychiatric Center; past Chair of the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies and former co-editor *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. She has created dance therapy programs in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Sweden, and has taught in France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Korea, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain and Taiwan. Recipient: Charles Kellogg Award in Arts and Letters from Bard College in 2009; ADTA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007; 2005 inducted into the Dance Library of Israel Hall of Fame, Beit Ariella Municipal Library, Tel Aviv. mb33@nyu.edu

**Johanna Climenko**, licensed clinical social worker (LCSW- R), pioneer in DMT since 1968, has worked clinically with the range of populations served by DMT, and taught and consulted extensively in and out of academic settings, in the U.S. and the Netherlands. She trained with both Marian Chace and Irmgard Bartenieff, and other first generation DMT and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) pioneers. Since 1986, having trained with Dr. Bernard Rosenblum, she has added Reichian Character Analytic Therapy to her private

practice work, developing the combined modality of DMT and RT and LMA. Currently her focus is on the complementarity of DMT, LMA, and RT in private practice and in training and consulting other mental health professionals and students in individual and organizational contexts for self-care, assessment, and replenishment. She is the director of the ‘Center For Reichian Energetic Therapy’ where this combined modality is used for individual, couple and group therapy, as well as training and consultation. jclimenko@gmail.com

**Joanna Gewertz Harris, Ph.D**, dance teacher, historian, reviewer and lecturer. She taught dance and theater at University of California Berkeley, UCSC, Cal State Hayward and Sonoma. Contributor to scholarly journals and books, including *Margaret H'Doubler: the legacy of America's Dance Education Pioneer*, and *Legacy in Dance Education; Essays and Interviews on Values, Practices, and People*. On the initial editorial board of the *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. Authored seminal article in the realm of dance and Jewish Studies, “From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers: Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow,” *Judaism* 45,3 (1996). Author *Beyond Isadora; Bay Area Dancing 1915-1965*. As a dance therapist, worked with autistic children at Langely-Porter (SF), Napa State Hospital and Bay Area centers; established the Creative Arts Therapy training program at Lone Mountain College and Antioch West; awarded Fulbright Fellowship in UK; helped form the British Dance Therapy Association; taught in Germany, Greece, Taiwan; private practice in Berkeley, CA. joannaharris@lmi.net

**Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, Ph.D**, Board Certified Dance/Movement therapist. Licensed in New York State as a creative arts therapist and psychologist, specializing in health psychology. She has practiced as a dance/movement therapist since 1974 and has worked with various patient populations including the elderly, the medically ill, and those in in-patient psychiatric treatment and a substance abuse and alcoholism rehabilitation program. Has trained therapists and run private groups using the form of Authentic Movement, based on her study with Janet Adler, Ph.D and Zoe Avstreich, Ph.D. As a child of survivors of the Holocaust, Marsha’s Jewish roots are deep. She has close ties to her parents’ surviving relatives, most of whom live in Israel, where she has lived and visited many times. She also has studied Israeli folk dance, is part of a *chavura* and currently is on the Board of Trustees of her synagogue. At present, she lives and maintains a private practice on Long Island, NY, using both verbal and non-verbal treatment disciplines. marshapk@optonline.net



Via Doloroza (1983), choreographed by Amir Kolben. Left to right: Meir Gramanovich, Zvi Gotheiner, Ofra Dudai, Galia Fabin. Photo: Boaz Lanir

# An Israeli Reflects on the Series of Articles on the Subject of Diaspora Jews and Jewishness in Dance

## Ruth Eshel

I was conscious of intense excitement as I read the articles collected for this issue on Diaspora Jews and Jewishness in dance. On the one hand, these demonstrated in content, ideas, history, values and considerations that we are one people, and on the other I saw the differences in relationships to different aspects of dance between a person living in Israel and one who lives in the Diaspora. I want to share with the reader a few of the thoughts that occurred to me and that might serve as starting points for future articles.

**Jewish Dance? Israeli Dance?**

The Arizona State University conference’s title, “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World”, did not contain the words “Jewish dance”. This

suggests that its organizers understood that the question of what is Jewish dance is hard to define and how open it is to a variety of interpretations. To this day, we do not speak of Israeli dance in Israel (save for those speaking of folk dance), but of dance in Israel. In both cases similar questions arise: Is Jewish or Israeli dance a dance whose subject is concerned with Jewishness or Israelishness (such as religion, history, legends), or is it dance whose creators are Jews/Israelis, or is it dance that contains within itself values that we identify as Jewish/Israeli?

The centennial of concert dance in Israel will be in 2020<sup>1</sup>, during these 100 years, the question of “Israeli dance” has arisen, as have



the changes in relationship to it. During the *Yishuv* era, 1882-1948, (or the Jewish Community) in *Eretz* Israel (the Land of Israel or before independence), there was a passion to create Hebrew or *Eretz* Israeli dance as part of the fashioning of a new culture in all fields. In the 1920s dance pioneers<sup>2</sup> were invested in the Zionist project and choreographed dances on Biblical era heroes and reinvigorated Biblical harvest festivals that bridged the time between ancient and modern *Eretz* Israel. They did not confine themselves to this, but also sought to create an original movement language that would express these concerns. Following the Nazis rise to power in 1933, a group of dancers who were practitioners of the *Ausdruckstanz* movement style (Expressionist Dance or expressive dance), some of whom had performed in Europe's leading companies, arrived in *Eretz* Israel. In contrast to their predecessors of the *Yishuv*, they considered that one could express *Eretz* Israelishness within the framework of the avant-garde *Ausdruckstanz* at the time, and that there was no need for a new dance language. Like their forerunners, they expressed *Eretz* Israelishness through themes taken from the Bible, plus adding the *hora* adapted-for-the-stage folk dance to their local *Ausdruckstanz* themes. During World War II and up to 1948, the *Yishuv* was culturally isolated from what was going on in the rest of the world, and so provided for itself – this was the era highlighted by Israeli folk dance festivals at Kibbutz Dalia (1944, 1947) organized by Gurit Kadman.

With the establishment of the State in 1948, there was a huge hunger to connect with current cultural activity in the rest of the world, and the local variety was revealed in all its paucity, especially in comparison with the United States. Subsequent to the 1956 Israeli tour of the Martha Graham Dance Company (at the initiative of the Baroness Bathsheba de Rothschild), which was received with huge enthusiasm, Europe's *Ausdruckstanz* style was totally rejected with the contention that it was outdated, and with it, the attempts to create *Eretz* Israeli dance that were regarded as naïve. Bathsheba de Rothschild founded the Batsheva Dance Company in 1964 with Martha Graham as artistic advisor during its first years. Of note is, that while the company dancers sought to dance universal themes, there was also Graham who encouraged them to choreograph Biblical subjects. In those same years, during the second half of the '60s and into the 1970s, there was a lack of faith in the abilities of



*The Dreamer* (1979), choreographed by Mirali Sharon. Bat-Dor Dance Company. Photo: Ya'akov Agor. Courtesy of The Israel Dance Archive at Beit Ariela, Tel Aviv.

local choreographers. The repertory was based mainly on choreographers from abroad, and the question of making “Israeli dance” was seldom raised and then only as a marginal comment when a critic identified what he thought of as an Israeli element in this or that dance.<sup>3</sup>

It was official State events and Jewish commemoration that provided the impetus to create dance on a Jewish or Israeli theme. For instance, in anticipation of the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, a number of dances were created for the Bat Dor Dance Company; outstanding among which was Mirali Sharon's *The Dreamer* that dealt with Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh. In 1992 in commemoration of the quincentennial expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492, Moshe Efrati made *Camina a-Torna* (Going Around and Round) for his *Kol veDmama* Dance Company (Voice and Silence Dance Co)<sup>4</sup> and Rami Be'er choreographed *Black Angels* for the Kibbutz Dance Company (KDC).

The story of KDC is interesting. Although the company was founded in 1970, it did not aim to make Israeli dance but sought rather to express the values of the kibbutz movement. One of the questions bothering the kibbutz dance community in general, and KDC founder Yehudit Arnon in particular, was whether, if indeed it was at all necessary, that KDC would have an artistic statement differing from the rest of the dance companies. Arnon and Ruth Hazan addressed this question in an article for *Al HaMishmar* (the Kibbutz newspaper *On Guard*).

“Arnon: Will we have something to say that's about us, and does the company's right to exist depend on that? And what is that one particular thing that characterizes kibbutz dancers and choreographers? And if it exists, how are we to demonstrate it, or does the very fact that the dancers and creators are kibbutzniks necessarily create that same particularity? Hazan: The company's right to exist resides in the activities among us of a group of people for whom dance is their very being... and does not require any additional or other proof. Its ability to exist is another question. It is dependent, and let's be blunt about this, simply on Ability. The right to exist is not a given, nor is it in any way a charity. Ability is what you fight for, something that translates into the prosaic problem of time.”<sup>5</sup>

Hazan's remarks above regarding the company did not satisfy Arnon who believed that the uniqueness of kibbutz life and values had to find a mode of expression in the company's work, and if not by subject, then in another way. She said, “I had a kind of fantasy about what I wanted the company to be. It's about humanity and content, even when the work is abstract. Values can also deliver a message. The ‘what’ is important, but the ‘how’ is even more so. I've always worked in a team. Every dancer who had something to say artistically got a chance. All in all, that's the company's line.”<sup>6</sup> That is to say she spoke of a team relationship expressed on stage by means of a certain breezy self-confidence that would relate to paying attention to one another, nourished by the perceptions of the kibbutz world.

The solution arrived with the appointment of Be'er as KDC's in-house choreographer: the Israeli saying that a man is the landscape of his native land suited Be'er's way. He grew up with the values of the kib-

butz movement, with its components of social and political obligations that were higher than those prevailing in the cities at the time. He was born at Kibbutz Ga'aton in 1957, in the kibbutz that had been established in 1948 by Holocaust survivors, mostly from Hungary. Be'er grew up at home in the European tradition, and every Friday family members would gather in the living room of his home and play classical music. There were art books on the shelves and he studied cello. He was groomed to be a leader and he served in the army in an elite unit. All this would resonate in his works that were based on socio-philosophical ideas which were in keeping with life on the kibbutz, to Jewish memory and to Israeli/political realities.<sup>7</sup>

The fringe of Israeli dance exploded onto the scene in 1977, the aim being to make the desert that was local independent choreography bloom via influences emanating from American post-modernism and *tanztheater* in Germany. The choreographers' task was very great, yet the subject of Israeli dance was not a specific goal. Nonetheless, there were a number of works that could be called Israeli, such as those by Liat Dror and Nir Ben-Gal, a young Israeli couple who, with true integrity, danced what concerned them against the background of where we live: *Two Room Apartment* choreographed in 1987; *Donkeys* choreographed in 1988; *Inta Omri* in 1994; as well as the start of Israeli politically-themed dance such as the Arab-Israeli conflict with *Via Dolorosa* by Amir Kolben with the Tamar Ramle Company in 1982 and *Reservist Diary* by Rami Be'er for KDC in 1989.

The seeds planted at the end of the 1970s flowered in the 2000s. The combination of creativity, daring, talent, and knowledge enabled generations of Israeli choreographers to realize themselves and the place they lived in with all of its political complexities. Yair Vardi, the general director of the Suzanne Dellal Center said: “It's an open society. Everything's legitimate. It sometimes goes to extremes that mirror the dynamics in the character of Israeli society. The matter of choice is linked to responsibility and obligation.”<sup>8</sup>

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My reflections return to the collection of articles in which I sometimes encountered an aspiration toward *Tikkun Olam* (the repair of the world) as an engine to activate Jews in the American Diaspora. In relation to this, I remember in elementary school in Bible studies we learned that the Jews and Israel are *Am Segula* (the uniqueness and holiness of the Jewish people as God's nation *Numbers, Ch. 19, v.5* ), *Am Mofet* (Model people, *Ezekiel, Ch. 12 v.13* ), *Or Legoyim* (Light Unto the Nations). As children we believed in that motto and we wanted to embody it. With the years, however, this concept was shattered by our complicated reality. In the 1950s people did not lock the doors of their houses and we were surprised to read in the newspapers about thieves and rapists in Israel. However, I think that the turning point was after 1967 and the Six Day War, with the issue and reality of Israel either “liberating” or “occupying” Judea and Samaria (the words chosen depended on one's political outlook of Israel's gaining the West Bank from defeated Jordan). This began to tear apart Israeli society and *Am Mofet* was put to the test.

I confess that I first came upon the aspect of Judaism entitled even in English as *Tikkun Olam* in connection with dance in 2013; Daniel Banks

and Adam McKinney came to Israel and made *What One Voice Says* for the Beta Ethiopian Dance Ensemble I founded. Their intense desire to come here and expressly choreograph for an Ethiopian dance group of limited means surprised me, and when I asked them the reason for this passion, they explained it was *Tikkun Olam*. I was surprised.



*They Told Us to Go* (2012) by Renana Raz. Photo: Eyal Landsman

Is there such a thing as *Tikkun Olam* in dance in Israel? For two decades now we are witness to a rich and varied output from Israeli choreographers that address themes that might be considered part of *Tikkun Olam*. This includes such areas as the Israel-Arab conflict and the radicalization in Israeli society of perceptions between left and right regarding settlement in Judea and Samaria and the occupation of these areas with the younger generation wanting to have its say and asking tough, irksome questions including choreographers such as Arkady Zaides, Noa Dar, Renana Raz, Yasmeen Godder, Hillel Kogan and Palestinian-Israeli Adi Boutrous. Varied subjects touch on the “other”, whether in the political or gender-politics context, and there are green concerns – the Vertigo Company at the time it transferred to an ecological village in the Eyla Valley saw the move as part of taking responsibility toward the world and the link between man and the soil (Shaal, 2005). Also, there are concerns with the body and issues of health such as dance with the disabled; with Yasmeen Godder working with patients with Parkinson's (Bergmann and Teicher, 2018) or the development of bringing dance benefits to the general public. One may see in Ohad Naharin's “Gaga People” classes – not Gaga, created for dancers –a kind of giving to the community of people of all ages with no dance background for the pleasure of experiencing movement in their own bodies. There is also an abundance of dance activity within and for the community (Hershkovitz and Duek, 2018).

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In the first decades after the establishment of the state there was a gulf between the Jewish citizens from different Jewish communities known by the areas where Jews had settled before coming to Israel: *Ashkenazi* (descendants of Middle and Eastern European Jews), *Mizrahi* (Jews from Arab countries); and *Sephardi* Jews (descendants of Jews who had lived in Spain for 35 generations before their expulsion in 1492). For example, the *Ashkenazi* community denigrated the



dance of the *Sephardi* and *Mizrahi*. Those who performed belly dances in the *Sephardi* and *Mizrahi* communities either at parties or on-stage were regarded as cheap and “tarty” (Mero, 2011). In contrast, the policy of cultural pluralism that influenced social and cultural discourse in the 1970s increased the Israelis’ readiness to bridge the cultural gulf among the Jewish communities and among the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

The first visible change in dance was in the mid-1990s when there were programs of “another shade” within the framework of *Gvanim beMahol* (Shades of Dance) Festival.<sup>9</sup> The turning point occurred when Liat Dror (*Ashkenazi*) included a belly dance segment in *Inta Omri*. Choreographer Orly Portal, whose parents had immigrated from Morocco, returned to her roots and choreographs contemporary Moroccan/Israeli dance (Portal, 2011); Shira Eviatar makes a work on discrimination linked to the Yemenite community (Eviatar, 2018), and Dege Feder choreographs contemporary Ethiopian dance. She immigrated from Ethiopia and is the artistic director of the Beta Dance Ensemble (The company’s name is the Amharic word, *Beta*, for house).

Choreographer Barak Marshall’s work is an interesting amalgamation of styles and differing Jewish community roots. Marshall’s personal story – he is both American *Ashkenazi*, and Israeli Yemenite – is well aware of the tensions between the different Jewish communities. Born to an American Jewish father, Mel Marshall, and to Margalit Oved, from Aden, (near Yemen) who was the star of the Inbal Dance Theatre in its heyday, he grew up in Los Angeles and graduated Harvard in philosophy and social theory. He is a singer, a musician, and a choreographer with personal taste in varied rhythmic beats, movements and texts using such diverse elements as Romanian *klezmer* with texts sung in Yiddish or Biblical Hebrew, *Mizrahi* Yemenite tradition, rock music, and poetry. Everything comes together in a burst of explosive energy as a dance rich in detail which might include theatrical scenes telling short “stories” such as in his dance *Rooster*.

All of these choreographic activities in Israel are not labeled *Tikkun Olam*, but, in fact, they do tune into many of its central ideas of a call to action for changing or fixing the world.

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Since 1995 the Suzanne Dellal Center has presented the *International Exposure* dance festival that attracts international presenters who might select Israeli dance for their audiences back home. On the 24<sup>th</sup> festival in 2018 Judith Brin Ingber wrote:

“International presenters from 189 different countries, including China and Brazil, came to see an impressive compendium of Israeli dance performances last Hanukkah, guests of the Israeli government and the Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance. They watched over 35 dances ranging from solo to large - scale company productions, showing enormous imaginations at work, some with dystopian views of the world, others evolving from Israel’s differing ethnic backgrounds and others with unexpected views of aging or sensuality. Most were danced by fabulous performers often unfortunately unacknowledged by name in the programs, all to impart something of Israel for the guests’ various home country audienc-

es. [...] The dances at the Festival brought something familiar even to the foreigners: identification with components of ourselves that could be lovable, and sometimes unflattering and regrettable. Not all the dances had clear resolutions, but they were convincing for their bravery, honesty, thoroughly strong, and complex expressive of what’s true and valid for Israel” (Brin Ingber, 2009).

And my thoughts wander back to the *Yishuv*, to Margalit Ornstein, a dance pioneer who came out against the decision to make a distinctive *Eretz* Israeli dance. She said “Do not raise your voices to demand Hebrew art before we are Hebrews. Do not demand national expression in art before we will arrive at the specific expression in our daily lives. Do not make the end come sooner!”<sup>10</sup> A century has elapsed since then. Dance is in flower. Is it Israeli dance? One may only say with certainty that this is dance, all elements of which – choreographers, dancers, music (usually), set, costume and lighting design – are made in Israel. Does this reflect Israelishness? One may say that more than in the past, dance in Israel reflects life here for good or for bad.

**Same Subject– Different Viewpoint**

Reading the articles, it also became clear to me how different the interpretation of the subject was between a creator living in the Diaspora and one who lived in Israel (or in the *Yishuv*). It was then that I thought of Gertrud Kraus who had been one of the most outstanding of Central Europe’s *Ausdruckstanz* dancers between World Wars I & II. In 1931 she toured the *Yishuv* giving recitals. On her return to Vienna, full of her experiences in the encounter with *Eretz* 'Israelishness', she choreographed *Oriental Sketches* (1932) in which she illustrated characters from the Bible such as Hagar, Judith and Miriam colored by Arab and Bedouin fantasy. Following the rise of the Nazis, she left Vienna in 1935 and became a central figure in *Yishuv* concert dance. Then, twelve years later, she was invited to appear in California and before leaving she gave an interview to a journalist for *Al HaMishmar*; she said that she wanted to show *Eretz* Israeli dance after she had absorbed 'Eretz Israelishness'. “After all I had had a European education and absorbed *Eretz* Israel into myself.”<sup>11</sup> Replying to Ben-Ami’s question on the nature of *Eretz* Israeli art, Kraus replied: “*Eretz* 'Israelishness' in art - it’s a tone, or a color or a ray of light pouring through all. The artist senses the land and creates from it.” She also spoke of Orientalism, saying that European Orientalism was sweet and sentimental, whereas “our East is not sweet. It’s wild and stormy, naïve and gross. It’s not sentimental, but dynamic, having its own rhythmic language.”

Kraus exemplified and emphasized the difference between one who lives in the Diaspora to one who lives here; she was a good interpreter. All this puts me in mind of Jennifer Fisher’s article on *Masada* that David Allen choreographed for the National Ballet of Canada in 1987. Danya Levin had made a dance on the same subject in 1931. As everybody knows, Masada is a fortress on a lone rocky plateau that rears up in the Judean desert overlooking the Dead Sea and to which the last of the Jewish rebels fled after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. It was ancient Israel’s last stand against the Romans. When their soldiers finally prevailed in 73 CE they discovered that all there had preferred to commit suicide rather than become prisoners.

Although the two versions of *Masada* were created in different styles and in different eras, I think that the choice of a different viewpoint reflects the different perception of the world between the Diaspora and Israel (or the then *Yishuv*). Allan focused on the tragedy of the mass suicide. In her article, Fisher chose to center on the Jewish dancers’ feelings and reactions, and what this meant for their identity as Jews, and those of the non-Jewish dancers who encountered a subject from Jewish history for the first time. For Israelis living among their people, and unfamiliar with anti-Semitism, Fisher’s article opens a window on a world that they have never personally experienced, and on the otherhand, here in Israel, we sometimes regard the Jews of the Diaspora, living in Canada or the US or elsewhere with envy because they do not need to confront the tensions we live with on a daily basis (terrorists, security, political, or the religious schisms in Judaism and so on). I was surprised that even in 1987 in Canada, there are Jews who prefer to hide their identity or deny it because of anti-Semitism.



*Masada* by Dania Levin (1931). Speech and Voice Group. Ruth Eshel private collection

Levin’s interpretation of *Masada* was totally different from that of Allan’s. Her dance was in the *Ausdruckstanz* style – that includes movement, dance, speech and song. The performers were a group of women costumed in shirts with sleeves and long pants in a dark color, reminiscent of work clothes for *halutz* (pioneer) women who scorned the usual feminine fripperies. These are strong women who drain the swamps and wield a heavy hoe in the fields, like the men, and remind one of communist agit-prop posters. The women dance and declaim that “although, and despite everything – *Eretz* Israel”, which is to say that despite the various suggestions for a solution to the Jewish problem, and despite all the difficulties that the pioneers are obliged to undergo, the only solution is living in and building up *Eretz* Israel. They swear that there will not be a second Masada and end the dance with a tempestuous *hora* that almost explodes with its energy. For Levin, *Masada* is a Zionist symbol in that Zion or Israel, will not fall again. It remains a symbol to this day. Generations of youth routinely climb it and soldiers swear allegiance to the state atop it. This is the Masada that I, as an Israeli, know and grew up on.

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The subject of the Holocaust as a dance theme, I think, has a vastly different emphasis in Israel from that of the Diaspora. “Ghosts of

the Past: The Creation of Pola Nirenska’s *Holocaust Tetralogy*” is an article by Rima Farber that describes the Holocaust dances Nirenska made from 1990. The *Ausdruckstanz* style dances describe the frightful suffering of a mother and her daughters and are a challenge to God for allowing such a thing to happen. Dance critic Alan Kriesmann wrote a review of the dances in the *Washington Post* on July 29, 1990: “They constitute a daring attempt, within the humanistic tradition of modern dance, to bear the unbearable and speak the unspeakable.” In these four works Nirenska achieved a human core and depth of vision that reaches into one’s heart and leaves a scar.

It was moving to read how much Nirenska’s dance background before the Holocaust recalls Jewish dancers who immigrated to the *Yishuv*, especially Paula Padani, Elsa Dublon and Katya Michaeli. Nirenska had studied at Mary Wigman’s school and appeared with her company. In 1951 she arrived in the US and later married Jan Karski, a hero of the Polish resistance. They both swore never to mention the Holocaust. Also, in Israel, parents did not speak of the Holocaust, as if to prevent the memories from surging, and frightening the children who had been born here into a new life. There were also other reasons: as a child I remember that the victims and the survivors were considered to be the epitome of the “Diaspora Jew” who “went like a lamb to slaughter” – the very opposite of what was considered the esteemed image of the Zionist Hebrew individual, who fought for his/her life in our war of Independence.

The turning point of Nirenska and Karski, not to mention the Holocaust, came when director Claude Lanzmann interviewed her husband for his epic *Shoah* after which Karski was invited to testify before Congress for the purpose of erecting a Holocaust Museum in the US. In Israel the turning point was the year 1961. After a protracted hunt, the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann was captured in Argentina and brought to Israel for trial. At the trial, survivors mounted the witness box and told what they had concealed for 20 years; for 20 years the Holocaust had been taboo. The trial was broadcast in its entirety on the radio. People heard the survivors’ harrowing testimonies about the death camps that served utterly to discredit the stereotypical Zionist view of “lambs to slaughter.” During and after the trial, the survivors began to publish their autobiographies, and these books also helped to change the veteran population’s attitude toward the Holocaust.

A year after the Eichmann trial, Anna Sokolow mounted *Dreams* (1962) with her company, the Lyric Theater in Tel Aviv. With minimal pathos and with sensitivity, the dance evoked the nightmares of those in the death camps. There was no applause following the performance, the audience remaining mute.

In contrast to Kriesmann’s enthusiastic review of Nirenska’s work, the reviewers in Israel had difficulty agreeing even to deal with the subject: *Al HaMishmar*’s Olya Zilberman wrote that Sokolow’s work is “on a subject that is painful, tragic and very complicated to turn into a work of art. Grave doubts awaken in us whether we should even venture into this subject precisely because of our need for abstract esthetic symbols.”<sup>12</sup>



In 1971, a decade after the Eichmann trial, Stuttgart Ballet artistic director John Cranko premiered *My People the Sea, My People the Forest* that dealt with both the Holocaust and the resurrection of Israel. Cranko was amazed by the upheavals the Jews had undergone in so few years – from near extermination to national independence. A medley of poems underpinned the piece among which was Uri Zvi Greenberg’s *A Mound of Bodies in the Snow* (on the Holocaust). This piece is engraved in my memory. Dancer Rahamim Ron came on stage wearing a suit, such as worn by Eastern European Jews. He stood and began to undress, garment after garment, and when he was naked, his white skin gleaming under the intense light, he fell to the floor as if shot. Then more and more dancers entered, stood, undressed, and fell one on top of the other so that the mound of white bodies grew, creating a cruel and horrifying beauty – a beauty that was close to a betrayal of what happened. As actress Hannah Meron read the terrible words, her voice was hypnotic, emotionless. I remember that scene to this day, and the audience did not breathe.

Compliments aside, there were critics who disagreed with the choice of subject. Miriam Bar wrote in *Davar*, “It’s hard to grasp how an artist of the stature of John Cranko does not sense that Auschwitz is not yet history, that one is already at liberty to search for its metaphors, stage and visual enactments, and so forth.”<sup>13</sup> She contended that art in our time does not recognize limits, “and fulfills Nietzsche’s principal ‘there is no truth, anything goes’ – and yet there still are some limits, spiritual and emotional ones.” She also wrote that one cannot demonstrate the death camps and the Jews who undressed before entering the gas chamber at Nahmani Theatre where Batsheva performed most probably including audience members who had survived the camps. The critic continued “It’s hard to accept the death camps of a generation ago in the stage images of dance.”

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The 1973 Yom Kippur War, that so surprised Israel, added another layer to the changing attitude to the Holocaust. Pictures of Israeli prisoners of war, of weakness and humiliation were aired on TV for the first time. In the wake of the waves of shock these evoked, a door was opened to the legitimacy of portraying other kinds of Israelis, including those whose identity encompassed the Holocaust. At the start of the 1980s, the Education Ministry decided to give Junior High School students the task of writing a *Roots* work that also contributed to young Israel’s growing interest in the Holocaust to which so many of their grandparents were connected, either directly or indirectly.

Over the years Holocaust Memorial Day has become Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day, and when the siren blares throughout the country, all Israel’s Jewish inhabitants stand to honor the memory of the murdered, just as they do for Memorial Day to honor the fallen of Israel’s wars.

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While the two Holocaust-related works mentioned above are by Sokolow – a Jew, and Cranko, a gentile, though according to Giora Manor his grandmother was Jewish. The next two are by Israelis and they highlight the differences in their viewpoint from that of Nirenska, even though neither were choreographed by survivors. The Batsheva Dance Company presented a program of works dealing with the Ho-

locoust on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which occurred at Passover on April 19, 1943. Performed at the Israel Festival, it included *Eclipse of Lights* by Oshra Elkayam-Ronen.

The dance opened with a semi-transparent curtain through which the audience saw movement that looked like a frantic, pointless mass running about in an extermination camp encircled by an electrified fence. It looked like an event remembered in a dream of something beyond belief, that is and is not. In the journal *Musag* (Notion) Leah Dov wrote: “A ballet on a concentration camp, (and who in his right mind could even imagine such a pairing?), that can give one the shivers. The very fact that it has happened, that it is possible, perhaps atones for the awful banality inherent in any such experiment. [...]. Elkayam did it, with a team that worked as an anonymous group, and simple choreography.”<sup>14</sup>

The most famous Holocaust-related work in Israel is Rami Be’er’s 1995 *Aide Memoire* choreographed for KDC. This was not a work that illuminated awfulness, on the contrary, it went in the direction of a poetic visual beauty that recalled a requiem, its connection to the Holocaust floating up like an echo from the past, permitting a moment of respite to the viewer who finds it hard to confront the subject directly.

As the son of Holocaust survivors and a kibbutz member, many of whose friends had come from a similar background, Be’er kept silent for many years. As the generation of survivors dwindled, the importance of preserving those memories increased. According to dance scholar Smadar Weiss, the name *Aide Memoire* signifies a document that is signed by both sides: both Be’er and the spectators, that was supposed to remind both sides to remember (Weiss, 2002).

The movement intersected with the impressive stage architecture of huge, horizontal copper oblong objects at the rear of the stage, equally separated, and that recalled cattle-cars, without windows, that one could climb, progress in single file to the “roofs”, descend, wriggle between the cracks, disappear and reappear against them. The copper set also became a huge musical instrument that you could strike on and evoke sounds in tempo. Thus, the architecture was directly linked to the subject, yet at the same time offered compositional and movement solutions that were artistically sound even without relating to content.

The musical collage consisted of solo piano, song, the sound of moving trains, bells and drumming on the copper. But it was the orders bellowed by a man in German and Hungarian, the languages of the lands from which his parents came, and even in English (indicating their importance to the choreographer that they be understood) that caused the dread. The words were “*Raus*” or “Out! Get Out” in German to those alighting from the train cars or driven from their hiding place, or “*Schnell*” (quickly) to the skeletal creatures stumbling along. “These were the commands played over the loudspeakers in the extermination camps or at the train stations.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the dance, the phrase “For every time and season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...” that indicated man’s helplessness before fate, heard twice in English, was taken from *Ecclesiastes* (Ch. 3, v. 2-8).

In time, the subject of the Holocaust has become more permissible, and can be seen in large productions. Oded Assaf wrote in the newspaper *Ha’aretz* that in music and literature “large-scale works on the Holocaust had been created, rich in scope – no less than for an oratorio, and if possible, opera – at sociably full-volume.”<sup>16</sup> In Natan Shaham’s book *Hutzot Ashkelon* (The Streets of Ashkelon, 1986), he lays his thoughts before one of the characters, a task that he called “touching ghastliness at second hand”. The book also delivers a message that there are artistic and moral limits to ‘Holocaust creations’. “We must be sure to defend those limits, and not cross them. These kinds of works are not meant to ‘present’ or ‘illustrate’, supply easy thrills, or promise comfort or salvation.”

#### ***Dance Torn Between the Anti- and the Longing for Holiness***

In the passion to create *Eretz* Israeli dance in the *Yishuv* era, the choreographers sought to disengage from the Diaspora and from subjects that were linked to Jewish culture in the Jewish small towns/villages (*shtetl* in Yiddish) of Eastern Europe. After the establishment of the State, and thereby the accomplishment of an important phase of the revolution, opposition to Jewish culture weakened but the Israelis were not interested.

In 1962, during one of her many visits to Israel, Sokolow made *The Treasure* based on a Hassidic tale by Y. L. Peretz. For Sokolow, as it would be for other Jewish choreographers arriving in the years to come and founding Israeli ensembles, the choice of a Jewish subject was natural. Speaking with Michael Ohad she said: “I wanted to put over something of the legendary atmosphere of the source. As a Jew, choice of this Jewish legend was natural. ... several childhood memories served me as a background. My parents came to the US from Pinsk.”<sup>17</sup> In that same article dancer Dalia Harlap spoke of her opposition to portraying a Diaspora Hasidic girl. “But Anna quickly overruled me,” she said, “and wasn’t that wonderful that she’d come all the way to Tel Aviv from New York to awaken a Jewish spark in me?”

Sophie Maslow also thought it perfectly natural to mount her 1950 work, *The Village I Knew* with the Batsheva Dance Company, as well as *The Dybbuk* based on Yiddish folk songs and the stories of Sholem Aleichem. The works had garnered much praise in the US but did not speak to the hearts of the Batsheva dancers, nor to their audience.

Over the years Israeli society came to realize that not all of the Jewish peoples would come together and immigrate to Israel and that it was necessary to accept the Diaspora as part of reality, and that Israel and Diaspora Jewry had each other’s backs, as it were. When, in 1977 Rina Yerushalmi made *The Dybbuk* on Batsheva, her choice of a Jewish subject was taken as natural. The seismic change in attitude toward Jewish culture found voice in the establishment of *Yiddishpiel* (Yiddish Theater) by Shmuel Atzmon in 1987, and its audience continues to increase.

The religious home she grew up in informs the choreographies by Noa Wertheim, artistic director of the Vertigo Company. Hers was a welcoming and pluralistic home that bequeathed her an insatiable search for the spiritual as well as a profound respect for the body. Jewish sources provide her with inspiration as seen not only in her themes but also in the titles and program notes for some of her

dances: *Manna* –“Vessel of Light What is repaired first, vessel or light? Is it the Sun’s desire to fulfill the absence of the Moon’s light, or rather is it her lack of light that gives rise to a vessel of innovation?” (the Zohar); *Yama* (2016) followed “And God...divided the waters under the firmament...and let the dry land appear and it was so, and God called the dry land Earth and the waters called He seas.” There was also *One. One & One* (2018) (named after a tractate of the *Talmud*). Noa Wertheim revolves around the individual’s inner wish to be whole whilst being challenged constantly by a fragmented reality within the personal, existential and spiritual realms of one’s being. The above also connects to social and political self-examination in Israeli society vis a vis internal dissensions.

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My reflections return to the conference in Arizona and realize how I envied the ease in which presenters linked dance and religion, taking two exciting experiences as examples. The Embodied Torah Workshop opened with a Shabbat morning service, led by Rabbi Diane Elliot, focusing on dance as devotion. The embodied Torah exploration continued throughout the day with eight breakout sessions which included: *Sh’ma* based on the twice daily prayer of the Jewish credo; *Kaddish* based on the mourners’ prayer; and *Shalsholet* or movement ideas based on chanting Hebrew Scripture or the different cantillations. Meanwhile, the Dance Lab, which began in the afternoon, pulled from the techniques of a variety of young dancers and choreographers, to physically investigate the intersection of movement and Jewish identity, and work towards defining how Judaism informs our broader physical identity.

I imagine that this skein of relationships does not exist within the ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) sector in the US, except that in Israel the religious parties, including the extreme *Haredi* sector, are part of the political coalition in the Knesset (Parliament). Following the results of the April 2019 election, president Reuven Rivlin tasked Benjamin Netanyahu with forming the new government. He did not attain a 61 vote majority because Avigdor Lieberman, head of the Israel *Be-itenu* (Israel Is Our Home) party refused to join the coalition unless the Draft Law was passed.<sup>18</sup> From his point of view and that of the secular population this was the opening salvo against the religious extremists suspected of trying to turn Israel into a theocracy.

A short explanation for those unversed in Israeli religious politics. Already at the very beginning of Zionism there was a contradiction between the Zionist and the *Haredi* sector’s perception of the *Land*, the latter believing that redemption for the land and the people would arrive only with the coming of the Messiah. A near poisonous relationship has developed between the secular and *Haredi* community that extends to every aspect of life including dance. For instance: at the 1998 Israel Festival in honor of Israel’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to be televised internationally from Jerusalem, Batsheva was to perform a segment from Ohad Naharin’s *Kyr* (Wall) that required the dancers undressing down to underwear. Certain of the *Haredi* objected, demanding the dancers wear longjohns rather than briefs. During the televised program the dancers refused to go on stage and went back to Tel Aviv without performing. There was an emergency meeting of the Batsheva Board of Governors to censure Batsheva’s behavior. Then:“... a clear voice said: ‘I request permission to speak’. There was

silence around the table. Veteran actress Hannah Meron took a deep breath and said ‘All of us board members, every enlightened person in the country, as well as the pages of its history owe a huge debt to the dancers. They saved us from a major disgrace, from a fiasco. I wish to thank them for their courage and their determination to stand up against this evil idiocy that has spread among us and swept so many others in its wake, from the least of the politicians and up to our President [Ezer Weizmann] who dismissed a compromise. I wish to propose the motion that we, the members of the Board, fulfill our duty as though elected, get behind these wonderful dancers, and beg Naharin to resume his post as artistic director.”<sup>19</sup> Naharin received complete backing, returned to his position which he had left in solidarity with the dancers and a short time after, Fortis became the company’s general director and co-artistic director.

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While the secular-*Haredi* divide deepened, we witnessed a growing attraction to dance in the religious Zionist sector.<sup>20</sup> Scholar and educator Talia Perlstein explained the strengthened attraction of religiously observant women to dance in terms of modern cultural influences that the community experienced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily from the view of the feminist movement that advocated gender-equality. These led to significant changes in the lives of religious women with the possibility of higher education and integration into the job market opening up to them (Perlshtein, 2014). Religious Studies Seminaries for women were established in the 1980s and pretty soon there were demands to open a dance track at the *Orot* Israel (lights of Israel) Religious College (1988), and that led to a supply of religious dance teachers who sought ways of expressing spiritual processes in dance.<sup>21</sup> The college prepared special teaching programs on how to teach creativity and understanding in choreography through subjects allied to religion or Jewish tradition (Zichroni-Katz, 2010).

In the years from 2000 on, Ronen Izhaki established the *Atzmotai Tomarna* (And My Bones Shall Speak) movement and dance center for men in Jerusalem that also has *Ka’et* (now) Ensemble (Izhaki, 2010). Yaron Schwartz, at the Hartmann High School for boys, wrote: “The encounter between dance and an Israeli man who lives a religious life and worships is significant, possible and desirable according to the values of the individual who prays and according to his body’s needs. [...] Religious protocol allows a man to clap when he’s in a quiet space, to jump, close his eyes, move gently in various kinds of dynamic, unconventionally, move slowly, move from the pelvis in a movement that reveals something of his inner world. The religious Israeli man has all kinds of identities. He is bodily inhibited and reserved, but his religious identity is also found in the body, linked with and attentive to the body, talks to the body, dances” (cited in Izhaki, 2016).

Talia Perlstein established the Noga Company at the Orot Israel College directed by choreographer Sharona Floresheim with special dramaturgy dialogue (Hurvitz-Luz, 2017), and Daniella Bloch established Nehara, both companies are for women dancers only (Bloch, 2017) and the audience is composed of women only. Of the 71 dance tracks for matriculation in formal public high school education, 11 are for observant girls. To examine the situation, there has been a religious-secular theater and dance conference at the Western Galilee College (Rotman, 2017).

In 2016 Janice Ross of Stanford University identified the start of this new dance: “Secular dance traditionally works in the opposite way – the individual is masked to become a neutral medium for the choreographer’s vision, which may rarely, or never, intersect with the dancer’s true life. But in *Ka’et*, and other religious dance group’s work – *Nehara*, *Noga*, *Haliu*, Yael Rowe and Tzipi Nir, Carmia dance groups, the content is the starting place and the medium of the body is already a carefully shaped signifier of religious identity. The dance that follows celebrates what happens when those two come together. [...] What I saw then was the brokering of a complex relationship between the Jewish body, the physical vocabulary of prayer and a secular aesthetic of postmodern simplicity. The ordinary body as an extra-ordinary and holy art medium. The messages these bodies told were complex and layered. Each dancer’s private history as a modern Orthodox Jewish man (sic) nested inside his developing one as a dancer. And when the dance “worked” there was a rare translucence as the dance allowed one to see more deeply into the modern Orthodox man/dancer inside. [...] A dramatically new model of what a negotiation between contemporary dance and Modern Orthodox Judaism might look like is unfolding” (Ross, 2016).

After the conference, comparing dance and Jewishness in the Diaspora, to what’s happening in Israel, I realize there is a surprising relatively new direction with those who are Jewishly observant adding dance study and performance as part of their observance. I look forward to its continuing. The dialogue set up at the “Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World” conference can be extended through connections internationally, and deepened, considering both the differences and commonalities between Israel and the Diaspora. I offer *Mahol Akhshav* as a forum for expanding the considerations and issues of trends, epochs and dancers we have brought forth in these pages.

Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The beginning of concert dance in Israel is ascribed to the first recital that Baruch Agadati gave at Neve Zedek in 1920.
- <sup>2</sup> For instance: Baruch Agadati, Yarden Cohen, Rina Nikova and Devorah Bertonov.
- <sup>3</sup> The exception was Israeli born Sara Levi-Tanai who established the Inbal Dance Theatre using Yemenite Jewish culture rather than any kind of inspiration that was European based.
- <sup>4</sup> Moshe Efrati, who besides his Jewish/Israeli themes in his choreography, was drawn to work with a unique minority: dancers who were deaf. His company *Kol veDmama* (Voice and Silence) included both hearing and non-hearing dancers.
- <sup>5</sup> Hazan, *Al HaMishmar*, 24 May 1972.
- <sup>6</sup> Arnon, interview with the author, 9 September 1996.
- <sup>7</sup> For example, Rami Be’er’s works for KDC such as *Reserve Diary* (1989) and *Real Time* (1991).
- <sup>8</sup> Vardi, interview with the author, 2 September 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> The Shades of Dance venue was established in 1984 and continues to this day with the aim of fostering young Israeli choreographers.
- <sup>10</sup> Margalit Ornstein, “Development of the Art of Movement,” *Ktuvim*, 1920.
- <sup>11</sup> Nahman Ben-Ami, *Al HaMishmar*, 22 April 1948.
- <sup>12</sup> Olya Zilberman, “Anna Sokolow’s Lyric Theater,” *Al HaMishmar*, 1963.

- <sup>13</sup> Miriam Bar, *Davar*, 18 October 1971.
- <sup>14</sup> Leah Dov, “Batsheva Dance at the ’75 Israel Festival – The Ghostly Possibility Is Possible,” *Musag*, April 1975.
- <sup>15</sup> Michael Feirburg, Petah Tikva, 12 December 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> Smadar Weiss, interview with Oded Assaf, *Ha’aretz*, 27 April 2012.
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Ohad, *Davar*, 6 July 1962.
- <sup>18</sup> The “draft law,” is actually an attempt to amend the existing law to regulate the issue of enlistment to the Israel Defense Force (IDF) of ultra-Orthodox and yeshiva students, whose Torah study is their profession. Over the years, various coalition arrangements made sure that exemptions from the IDF were granted to yeshiva students. In 2014 the *Knesset* or Israeli Parliament passed an amendment to the law. To the movement’s position, the new law was not even equal, did not put an end to the long injustice according to the secular Jews whose children are required to enlist, and established large parts of that discriminatory arrangement. But the story did not end there - in 2015, after the *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox), parties re-entered the coalition, another amendment to the law was passed, and it became, in the movement’s position, even more discriminatory than the law passed in 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> Eldad Manheim, “A Loud Thump was Heard,” *Ha’aretz*, 20 June 2014.
- <sup>20</sup> The religious Zionist sector strengthened and most of it is part of the settlement project in Judea and Samaria (a.k.a. the West Bank). How one calls the area depends on one’s political point of view.
- <sup>21</sup> One of the religious dancers trained at Orot Academy College, Efrat Nehama with Itamar Nehama, presented a remarkable movement workshop on the Saturday of the ASU conference dealing with what is and is not forbidden in the body with Talmudic references.

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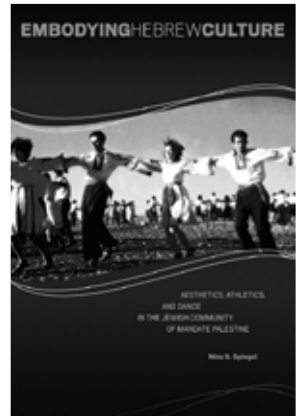
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**Dr. Ruth Eshel** has a rich background in performance and research in dance. In addition to having danced and choreographed many multi-disciplinary solo recitals (1977-1987), she received her Ph.D at Tel Aviv University, Theatre Department (*Movement-Theatre in Israel 1976-1991*). Eshel has been a field researcher for the Israel Dance Archive at Beit Ariella from its establishment (1991-1995), a lecturer on the history of dance, and dance in Israel at Haifa University (1991-2005). She went on to research the dance of Ethiopian Jews and established the contemporary Ethiopian dance troupes, Eskesta (at the University of Haifa, 1995-2010) and Beta (2010 - 2015). Her film *Shoulder Dancing*, about her life project with the Ethiopians, was chosen to open the Addis Ababa International film festival (2015), see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeLsUSbo-Qg&t=12s>, (accessed 28 February 2018). She was co-editor of the quarterly, *Israel Dance Quarterly* (1993-1998) with Giora Manor and the founding editor of the periodical *Mahol Akhshav (Dance Today) – The Dance Magazine of Israel* from 2000 to the present. Eshel was dance critic for *Ha’aretz Daily* newspaper for 27 years (1991-2017). Her website “Israel Dance Diaries” <https://www.israeldance-diaries.co.il/en> includes all the articles in *Israel Dance Annual*, *Israel Dance Quarterly* and *Mahol Akhshav*. She is the author of the books *Dancing with the Dream - The Development of Artistic Dance in Israel 1920-1964* (1991) and *Dance Spreads its Wings – Concert Dance in Israel 1920-2000* (2016). She received both the Minister of Culture’s (2012) and the Israel Artists Organization (E.M.I., 2018) Lifetime Achievement Award in Artistic Dance. After 40 years she returned to performance at the age of 76 to dance her solo *Cloak of Stones*. [eshel.ruth@gmail.com](mailto:eshel.ruth@gmail.com)





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