



CREATURES OF DANCE

A Podcast on Contemporary Dance in Israel

Yali Nativ & Iris Lana

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This is the Middle East Ethnicity and Local Jewish Mizrahi Folklore in Israeli Contemporary Dance

Episode 5

With

Orly Portal Choreographer & dancer, exploring folkloric movement

Shira Eviatar Choreographer & dancer, exploring cultural embodiment

Dr. Dina Roginsky Sociologist and anthropologist of historical and ethnographic research, wrote her dissertation on "Performing Israeliness: Nationalism, Ethnicity and Israeli Folk and

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Ethnic dance in Israel (2004)". A Senior Lecturer of Modern Hebrew language and culture in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University

Dr. Idit Suslik Lecturer at Seminar HaKibbutzim College in Tel Aviv and at the School of Visual Theatre in Jerusalem. In her research, she explores body and dance aesthetics and focuses on performance analysis in dance and theater from contemporary artistic and cultural perspectives. She is the founder and writer of the online platform [The Contemporary Eye](#).

Ran Brown Head of the dance program at Telma Yellin High School for the arts, independent dance researcher and dance critic for Haaretz newspaper

Yair Vardi Founder and CEO of the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv (1987- 2020)

Recorded 2021

Transcription: Guy Dolev

Translation from Hebrew: Natalie Fainstein

Iris: It's nighttime, the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv, the stands are empty. A truck enters the frame, a sturdy man unloads two potato sacks and four dancers in earth-toned dresses position themselves facing forward, dancing the canonic segment from *Monger* – in a deep 'plie', their legs spread wide open, they shift their weight from side to side, and their hands – one is placed on the chest, the other raised in midair, making the gesture of a vow. The scene is intensified by the presence of a group of male dancers, first glaring at them, then walking among them in what may be seen as courtship, or as a threat.

What I'm describing is a dance performance, *Monger*, you can watch an excerpt of this work on our Creatures of Dance website. *Monger*, originally performed on stage, was later made into a film shot in a public sphere, the Carmel market. The film is interlaced with clips from an interview with the choreographer, Barak Marshall, and his mother, Margalit Oved, one of the first Inbal dance theater dancers. He speaks with an American accent, and she – with a Yemenite accent. He's wearing casual contemporary clothes, she's in a traditional Yemenite outfit, and the love between them - a mother and her son - is simply captivating.

This is how Gabi Bibliovitch, the director of the 2013 movie "Steps" (Tzeadim, in Hebrew) – {side note – the only film ever made about Israeli dance} - that's how he establishes the timeline that connects contemporary choreographer Barak Marshall to the tradition of the Inbal Dance Company.

Back to *Monger*: the women dance in almost complete darkness to the sound of "Adir Adirim" (- the greatest of all), by the Israeli musical group [BALKAN BEATBOX](#). Their gestures are intense, rhythmic, combining pelvis and hand movements that change rapidly from one position to another, all telling a story.

Marshall says to his mother, sitting next to him: "I took those gestures from you," and she explains that in her Yemenite dance, the gestures told traditional stories. We see the duality of the movement – which holds a narrational meaning, but it's also abstracts: it's as if we can imagine there's meaning to it, though we can't quite figure out what it is, because we are faced with an assembly of different choreographic elements, deconstruction and reconstruction. Referring to the transition of these gestures from their traditional context, Margalit states – "this is a revolution!" And in a word, defines the theme of this episode: "Revolution!"

HOST: You're Listening to Creatures of Dance, a podcast on contemporary dance in Israel. Creatures of Dance with Iris Lana and Yali Nativ. And in this episode – **This is the Middle East: Mizrahi- eastern identity and local folklore**. With our guests: choreographers Orly Portal and Shira Eviatar, dance researcher Dr. Idit Suslik and sociologist and anthropologist Dr. Dina Roginsky. We will also be joined by our usual guests, Yair Vardi, head of the Suzanne Dellal Dance Centre until 2020 and Ran Brown, an independent researcher and 'Haaretz' newspaper's dance critic.

We invite you to have a look at our website where you will find video clips and photos of the choreographers and dance works we talk about in this episode.

<https://www.tightsdancethought.com>

HOST: Yali Nativ is a teacher and researcher of dance in sociological and anthropological contexts. She's a senior lecturer at ASA Academic College of Society and the Arts. She writes about art education, sociology of the body, movement and performance, and dance and Israeli society. Her current research deals with aging professional dancers. Yali is head of the Israeli Choreographers Association.

Iris Lana is a dance researcher and lecturer at the Dance Academy and Seminar Hakibbutzim College. She Headed the Batsheva archive foundation project and the field of dance in the National Library's digital preservation project. Iris is the director of the "Diver" dance festival.

This episode is narrated by: Natalie Fainstein, Sara Holcman, Avia Spitzer, Yiftach Mizrahi, Nitzan Sitzer, Amanda Soroudi, Tamar Hannah Shtaiern and Ayala Shiftan."

Iris: Hi Yali

Yali: Hey there, Iris.

Yali: In this episode, we want to look at a rather narrow phenomenon in contemporary Israeli dance which is the return of current dance makers to traditional Jewish-Mizrahi ethnic folklore dance. After many years where Western theatrical dance drew distinct lines and deliberate hierarchical order between what's perceived as "artistic dance" and "ethnic- folk dance", choreographers are now seeking to cross these lines and challenge the canonic Western traditional aesthetics. In their work, they wish to re-think identity and body representations and to reflect on what's allowed on stage and what is forbidden.

In this context, this episode is dedicated to one of the most central issues of Israeli society – Jewish Mizrahi ethnicity, identity and culture. An issue that can be seen also in the history of Israeli dance in a variety of ways from its very beginning, before the founding of the State and to this very day. During the 1920s and 30s, Israeli dance pioneers such as Baruch Agadati, Rina Nikova and Yardena Cohen, all of whom came from European dance traditions, appropriated local middle eastern movement styles as well as Mizrahi and Arab costumes to portray and establish their emerging Hebrew identity in this part of the world.

Iris: Nowadays, however, choreographers are turning the spotlight on the Mizrahi ethnicity and identity issue from an embodied, reflexive and critical standpoint.

Ran Brown explains the difference between Rina Nikova's approach to Yemenite dance during the 1930s and that of contemporary choreographers today:

RAN BROWN: Even before the founding of the State of Israel, we're absolutely talking about Mediterranean orientalism, about being enchanted by those Jews who preserved the ancient tradition, and now this Russian ballet dancer and choreographer, Nikova, comes along and feels she can do something with their ethnicity. And that's how they're portrayed as if they possess this exotic charm that was being displayed all over the world at the time. It's apparent in photographs from that period. That's definitely not the contemporary approach that is already aware of these biased perspectives, and I think that when contemporary artists do address it, there's a level of awareness, a reflective space where they seek to ask questions on the matter, challenge it, and offer an alternative to the previous aesthetic and cultural hierarchies.

Yali: Dr. Dina Roginsky on Sarah Levi Tanai, founder and artistic director of Inbal Dance Theater in 1949:

Dina ROGINSKY: So, this is Sarah in 1961, at the time she was in the Israeli labor federation, and this is a file I dug up at the Lavon Institute Archive, the archive of the Labor Movement Party. The title of the file is "Meeting number 7 of the committee of Integration

of Exiles”, meaning, the labor federation sat down to figure out how to integrate the different Jewish exiles through folklore and such, and she gives this passionate speech from within the establishment. So, I’m quoting here: “In order to be Israeli, the Mizrahi artist must unshackle his Mizrahi character and adopt not a general Jewish, human or even original Israeli impression, but instead that of the Eastern European Jew. This raises the question; what fate awaits the Mizrahi artist who is incapable of such an adoption? What fate awaits the Mizrahi origins and values embedded in the soul of the Mizrahi artist?”

and Sara continues: "I asked myself why, under what right, to learn from others, to ask, to combine to adapt, develop, raise, absolutely, but to be uprooted and then send roots and grow fruit in entirely different soil? Only a few will succeed in doing so while the rest will grow barren, silent, bitter, passive or rebellious".

Iris: choreographer Orly Portal:

Orly PORATL: So, the Mendel Program in Jerusalem I was a part of, recently, gave me the courage I lacked to touch on all sorts of subjects I had avoided during the years: issues of periphery, ethnicity, racism, exclusion and authority. All these words. I even had to have these terms explained to me to find my bearings. And, to be honest, it was then that I got the permission to explore these things within me, without the fear of being sucked into it and victimizing myself, because my entire life, despite having gone through some complicated personal and private experiences, I never once felt like a victim...

And it was also an opportunity to show the other side, the glory of those miserable, neglected places and to put it on stage. So, I think *Block*, my new work, is a combination of courage and guts to put things on the table, as well as a glorious display of a preservation of this culture that was born inside all that cement, between those cement walls of the housing project, where I grew up.

Iris: choreographer Shira Eviatar:

SHIRA EVIATAR: I had a presentation for the "March Rabbit", new dance festival in Bat Yam. Back then I was a choreography student at Kelim Choreography Center, where the festival took place, and its founder Anat Danieli, bless her, was a mentor there. I had a presentation following my previous piece *Inventory* and I remember playing a song, and people were like "what is happening..."; and there was a moment where I danced some Moroccan dances I knew from home; and I remember feeling so ashamed! That shame was so deeply rooted in me, and I remember saying to myself: "Oh, what the hell am I doing"! It's a genuine feeling of doing something forbidden and embarrassing; and I also said to myself: "I'm now going to show you a bit of something I decided not to show." Meaning, I'm showing it and erasing it at the same time, positioning it at the most precise location at that moment in front of this dance world that came to see me.

Yali: We heard three perspectives on Jewish Mizrahi eastern identity encountering dance in Israel: Dina Roginsky on Sarah Levi Tanai; and Orly Portal and Shira Eviatar, contemporary choreographers talking about their experience

Yali: Hello Orly Portal, dancer and choreographer, researcher of ethnic folklore dance practices. Orly, for our listeners to get to know you tell us about three works you believe are central to your body of work in recent years.

ORLY PORTAL: So *Rabia* is a piece inspired by Rab'aa El-Adawia, an 8th-century Soufi mystic. It started out as a Soufi piece on Persian music, based on poems written by Rumi, the Soufi poet and was inspired by Persian music composed for his texts by two Iranian musicians living in the States, and it somehow made its way to me, it was like a Godsent. It's a work for a group of 9 women. I used to work only with women during my first years, which was also a theme in the work itself. The work was inspired by Soufi dance, which allegedly doesn't contain much. What we know is the endlessly spinning of the Darwish dancers, and that's everything to them, and to me as a dance researcher, the spin was everything as well.

Also, I was a Feldenkrais student at the time, and Feldenkrais gave me so many tools as to how to transform even the smallest gesture into the whole wide world.

In *Rabia* there's the crossing of the forearms, it's literally a symbol within the piece. At the time I was studying Feldenkrais with a teacher named Basel, who, for me, was the most significant, influential teacher, and he spent an entire week with us, just on that gesture, that crossing and the rubbing of one hand on the other like a violin bow, the same gesture for a whole week, that's what we did, and we examined how it affects the thorax, and how it moves the ribs and how it stirs the sternum and how it adjusts the pelvis and the knees. In short, I was mesmerized, I found great physical inspiration and from there an entire segment of *Rabia* was created, from that place.

Yali: Did the movement of the pelvis play a crucial role in *Rabia*?

ORLY PORTAL: Very much so, I didn't mention this earlier. I mentioned the crossing and the arms, but in fact, it all started from the vibration of the hips and the pelvis. It actually began with that meditative motion I had dove into years earlier to discover myself. And it stems from the world of Mizrahi dance, or belly-dancing.

Yali: Did you study belly dancing?

ORLY PORTAL: No, I researched it. I'm an autodidact. I'm also a bit too proud, after having the best teachers in the world, I'm gonna go to a belly dancer for her to show me how to make those gestures? Also, I didn't think I could pick it up by observing someone or imitating them. I realized I had to find it inside me because these are very complex gestures, it's not that simple.

Yali: It sounds like you were trying to avoid the popular-commercial aspect of it?

ORLY PORTAL: I was terrified, and did not want to be associated with it. I also struggled with the “belly dancer” label. But that’s what I do, so what else can we call it? There was a complex process there, but it was also beautiful and brave.

Yali: Let’s talk about your work *The Rite of Spring*

ORLY PORTAL: *Farid El’atarash’s Rite of Spring*, this piece, in my eyes, is much more courageous in terms of its presentation and its stance on femininity and on dance in general. For this work, I picked three contemporary dance professionals, excellent women, amazing, each different and unique in her own way. I held auditions, I was specifically searching for them, I wanted mature dancers, women, who already have years of experience on stage and in their bodies, who already have a history.

I also knew what image I wanted to achieve on stage and that was to allow this gate of the hips, to go inside, and to let the audience in through that gate; how was I going to do that? I had to expose my hips, but I couldn’t... I always danced covered in clothes and dresses and fabric and lots of fabric effects; then, out of the blue, I told them: “okay, let’s stand in a row, lift our dresses up and expose our thighs”; now, some of us were almost 40-years-old, with the cellulite and all; and let’s stand there for a few minutes and shake our thighs with our knees. And that’s where I inserted the knee-shaking-end-thighs-technique, the movement of the flesh around the thigh bone.

Yali: so, the pelvis basically loosens.

ORLY PORTAL: Yes. The pelvis becomes loose thanks to the knee movement. And the exposure of the fleshy thighs, unlike the meager ones of ballet dancers, is actually taking apart this whole historical myth. It's taboo to show it, and I wanted to enhance that with the lighting, and that’s just what we did. We found this lighting that comes from the bottom, like a flame between the thighs, spreading light on the thighs from underneath, from between

the legs. And this was an image that was hard to swallow for some of the audience, it was tough for them to stay there for four or five minutes, it was a long moment.

Yali: It was a highly intense moment. For me, as an audience, it was a long, breathtaking moment. I remember the length. It was extremely ecstatic.

Iris: Can you elaborate on the acceptance of that moment?

ONLY PORTAL: I could feel that the audience was going through something there, that wasn't immediate, not everyone got swept by it and understood the statement we were making straight away. Rather they first perceived the exterior, the form - the exposure, big thighs, flesh; is there a specific aesthetic to it, is it even aesthetic, is it respectable? There were different voices there. I could also feel it, but to me, it was unequivocal, that's precisely the aesthetics. And I'm giving you a gateway to go through it. And with time, I think you'll feel it too. At least, I hope you will. Also, I'm not doing this just for me, it's for you too, men and women. And the thing with my works is that often the audience comes more than once, they come once, and then they come again to understand more, and then even once more to totally get their mind blown away. so, most of the audience comes to my shows more than once. It's incredible, it's truly a great privilege and a huge honor.

Yali: So, do you want to tell us about the red rug?

ONLY PORTAL: I in fact found a laboratory and fell in love. I found many exercises that enhanced the pelvic movement, on the rug - that is, on the floor. I managed to do things on the rug that I couldn't do standing up, for example, moving the pelvis from side to side with the movement of the flesh. When I was lying on my back, moving the sacrum, I could effortlessly inhale into my belly. And then I asked myself, "how do I do this standing up?" And slowly but surely, I found the technique while standing up. But I had to experiment for years and it's like the pelvis was the main theme and the country to which I exiled away from all other body parts, and then it dawned on me that if I want to improve my pelvic

movement, I have to consider the periphery - the palms of my hands, the hands, the feet, the knees and the head. And this whole world was created on that carpet at home, and I didn't want to be anywhere else.

Iris: The DNA of the choreography is a concept we use to describe the essential characteristics of a specific dance piece.

Yali: In Orly Portal's *Fakarouni* the choreographic DNA is: three men and a woman/ Um-Kultum live performance recording/ light, round hand gestures, a curved back swaying from side to side, shaking of the pelvis, feet thumping/ live singing on stage.

Iris: you can watch an excerpt of this work on our Creatures of Dance website at <https://www.tightsdancethought.com>

ORLY PORTAL: *Fakarouni* is a piece I created for men, three 'alphas'- Arthur Astman, Anderson Braz and Erez Zohar. Arthur came from Russia with a Russian discipline. I consider him a Russian folklorist.

Yali: Why a folklorist? In what way?

ORLY PORTAL: In the deepest sense of the word. In fact, all three of them are folklorists. Anderson comes from Brazil and Erez comes from a Georgian family and grew up solely in Georgian culture. Same goes for Anderson and Arthur. That's also why I picked them. As far as I'm concerned, they each represent a different quality of folklore. Both as dancers with a history of modern contemporary dance and as people who bring a certain history from home. A dowry.

Yali: Did you use these histories? In what way?

ONLY PORTAL: Sure. First of all, it was present, it's in their bodies and personalities, and they're each a proud 'alpha' male and they brought all that into the studio. We celebrated it. I kept arousing that spot in them, I wanted to ignite their folklore: "let's go back to that place in you." And they started doing all sorts of things in the studio, all sorts of Georgian dance flic flaks, Brazilian pelvis movements, and Arthur, he studied Russian folk dance in a folklore dance school in Russia, plus he comes from a ballet discipline. It was simply one big celebration. And they themselves felt like "Oh! We can celebrate it! We can be who we are, we can be our own roots and still be the great dancers that we are", and together we just flew.

Yali: What's the meaning of *Fakarouni*?

ONLY PORTAL: *Fakarouni* means "Remind me" in Arabic. It's the title of an Um Kultum song. Why does it mean so much to me? Why is *Fakarouni* a piece I mention as significant? For years I've been waiting for the right moment, where I'm mature enough to create an entire dance piece based on one of Um Kultum songs.

As far as I'm concerned, it's letting Um Kultum's voice into my own voice. That's why I'm also in the piece, I couldn't not do it. And I'm there singing, aloud, singing the most difficult part of Um Kultum's song, a part I absolutely worship. Whenever I hear it I get chills, my hair stands up and I scream it out loud.

Yali: You did something very clever because the piece premiered as an online video and there was the sound of the audience from Um Kultum's actual performance; there was clapping, we could hear the audience reaction to her singing within your dance piece and it was fascinating. Say something about the decision to do it like that, because Covid-19 forced you into an audience-less situation and us to sit at home alone; and to me, watching it from home, this sound of the audience created a whole new experience of participation.

ONLY PORTAL: Yeah, that's how it opens. It opens with a video showing a theater filled with people, mostly men, worshipping Um Kultum who is on stage, clapping hysterically for the queen. As I see it, her audience taught me something about her.

Even before I ever thought I'd be an artist, whenever I'd hear Arabic music, I would scream with excitement and say "oh, this is beautiful!". It was uncontrollable, and hearing them, the audience once again, I realized this was a culture, this is an expression of ecstasy, of 'Tareb' in Arabic - the experience of elation from music, that's the expression - it's screaming and yelling.

Yali: are there certain places in the music where it's allowed to scream? How do you know when?

ONLY PORTAL: That's where it reaches the sublime. And I experience Arabic music the same way and I'd like that to be part of this piece, to be present in the piece. I wanted that 'Tareb' to have a place in the piece, for people to hear it.

Iris: Dr. Dina Roginsky is a sociologist and anthropologist. She's a lecturer at Yale University's Jewish Studies Program and at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. In 2004, she received her PhD from Tel Aviv University on the subject of "Dancing Israel: Nationalism, Ethnicity and Ethnic Folk Dancing in Israel."

Yali: Dina, what is folklore? Please share your definition or idea of folklore with us.

Dina Roginsky: What is folklore? What is folklore in the modern-day world, what do we take from it, how do we rely on it, draw legitimacy from it - these are all broad sociological questions. Not only artistically, but historically, sociologically, culturally; and they touch upon the art field as represented by Sarah Levi Tanai. Meaning, the folklore is a sort of fountain, a fountain of a people's knowledge, folk-lore: folk is the people and lore is the

knowledge, meaning a fountain of knowledge from which the modern world, modern art, modern state, draw legitimacy, justification, elements, ornaments; they draw and draw and draw. So, the real question is who is using folklore, to what end, how is folklore represented, how is it laid out, what's the discourse surrounding it, etc.

When it comes to Sarah Levi Tanai, her guiding notion was that there's some kind of - and I'm using her words here - a flowing fountain of heritage, culture, wealth, musical wealth, movement wealth, physical, poetic wealth, from which she wanted to draw elements, to be inspired by them and put them on stage; a modern, Israeli national stage ... Inbal was founded in the late 40s-early 50s, so we're talking about a mid-twentieth century context. And the big question is, what did she in fact do with it and what did the audience see in it, and of course what did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs see in it; because they sent Inbal all over the world to perform in front of Jewish and non-Jewish communities, as a representative of some Israeli spirit, and again - what exactly is that Israeli spirit? Some sort of archetype that's half-traditional, half-modern, half-Mizrahi, half-Ashkenazi, half-ethnic, half-nationalistic.

So basically, "Inbal Dance Theater" embodied the many tensions of that "native Israeli", this body that moved on the tension between East and West, traditional and modern, ethnic and all-Israeli nationalism. So that's really where the dialogue starts.

Yali: could you elaborate on the issue of these tensions, for example, between the ethnic and the Israeli. What was the problem? Where did it stem from?

Dina Roginsky: What we see is this fluctuation between exclusion and inclusion. No one can say "Inbal didn't get any money," because they did. On the other hand, no one could say Inbal was one of the more influential ensembles - even today - looking back, you see art, culture, dance historians, do they consider Inbal an influential ensemble? It's a question. There's a tension here between inclusion and exclusion...

The discourse is made up of many voices. Everyone says whatever they want, and at the same time it's also identity politics, agenda politics, performative arts politics. The problem is that each side highlights the elements convenient to them in the discussion, meaning cultural lobbyists emphasize one thing, Sara Levi Tanai as a choreographer and artist emphasizes something else, and the audience, as a general, what they want in return for their money, what they want to see, to watch, what they feel represents them, that's another voice to consider. There are just plenty of voices here.

I think the conversation on Mizrahi ethnicity in general and the conversation on Mizrahi art is diverse. Sara was truly a pioneer of this discourse because, think about her creating an ensemble in the 50s which she calls "Levi Tanai's Mizrahi Ensemble" - that was the name of the group before "Inbal," I mean putting the word Mizrahi in the title. And that was 1949, ok? And calling herself a Mizrahi artist, that's groundbreaking, ahead of its time, revolutionary.

Yali: It's a subversive act, and rebellion of sorts.

Dina Roginsky: That's the question. She didn't consider it a subversive action, but rather a simple one. She talked about herself in the 20s. The historical context is important here, because what we witness now in 2021 in comparison to what she experienced in the 20s, that's 100 years back, is different. So, you must understand things in their historical context, so when she went to the Ohel Theater or Habima Theater in 1928-9-30 and said "please hire me, I have the training, the knowledge, I'm creative," and they replied, "no, we're not hiring." She then realized that the reason she wasn't hired wasn't that she wasn't talented, but because there are barriers of color and of accent that don't belong on the pre-statehood 1930s and 40s Israeli or Hebrew stage. And then she basically...

Yali said subversive, right? Because we feel it's subversive, but as I mentioned in my research on Sara Levi Tanai, her statement wasn't... We sometimes hear shallow statements about Mizrahi ethnicity, her's, already in the 30s and 40s, was far from shallow, she specifically said in the clearest, most outright, most honest way, and this is incredibly significant in her

biography: "I have two sources from which I get my inspiration: my parents' Yemenite roots, my family's, the community into which I was born".

By the way, she was orphaned and left her original Yemenite community at a young age. That's why she basically wandered between foster homes and institutions that were Ashkenazi, Zionist, European at their essence - her second source of inspiration. And that's where she was brought up to appreciate art, culture, was exposed to works of art, etc. And she never complained, she never said "you're discriminating against me." Instead, she said "I understand that this is what's going on here; or to put it in other words - "there's an Ashkenazi establishment here and I joined it."

Sara Levi Tanai joined it - she married a union activist, Israel Tanai, she teamed up with the most influential female dance figures in the early stages of the state, all of whom were European, especially German. She teamed up with influential pioneering men! When she talks about the women she means Moshe Sharet's sisters who raised her as an orphan, and later Tabenkin and Chazan who were colleagues, well, not colleagues, but she was in dialogue with them. What I'm saying is she'd had a very pioneering, Zionist milieu that she belonged to. But at the same time, you can't say she "went Ashkenazi", because inside this milieu she kept insisting on getting the recognition that she and others were different in color, accent, body language. As I said, the body language, raising the body language, observing body language, performing, representing...

I look at the sociological elements of the context in which she operated, that she somehow managed to harness both biographical starting points of her life and pave a path, not a bypass, but a meaningful path, a representational one, to make room for something that she felt was being neglected. but never using the "we were discriminated against and deprived" narrative. It was as if she said, "I understand why you don't want me and it's still wrong, and I want to create a different path so here I am, from within the union organization, doing it, creating it.

I think that placed her in a very interesting sociological position and that's why she succeeded in paving her way.

Yali: And now, a description of an archival document – a photograph taken in 1956.

We invite you to have a look at this photograph on our Creatures of Dance website at <https://www.tightsdancethought.com>

Iris: I'm looking at a photo of Anna Sokolow, the American dancer/choreographer teaching the Graham technique to the Inbal Dance Company. The photo, captured at Inbal's studio which back then was in Alexander Yanai Street in Tel Aviv, was taken by photographer Mirlin-Yaron. In the photo, black-and-white, obviously, Anna Sokolow gently touches Inbal dancer Moshiko Halevi who with his curly hair and naked torso is sitting at her feet in what's called fourth position, typical to Graham's technique.

It's not a "bravura" shot or a photo of a dazzling display of skills in a performance, but rather one that was taken during a routine daily class, capturing an intimate moment of the art of dance where a training process takes place and wherein movement and bodily knowledge is being transferred from teacher to student. A testimony of the process of artistic work and an unearthing of the iceberg under the surface of the water.

What does the American Graham technique have to do with Inbal's Yemenite ensemble? Why are the dancers being trained in this technique? That's the interesting story. Let's trace the money... The America-Israel Cultural Foundation wanted to support dance in Israel at the time, and sent Jerome Robbins, a prominent American choreographer, one of the managers of the New York City Ballet - to Israel. His job was to recommend which Israeli dance ensemble to support – and among the active groups at the time, he pointed out Inbal, because he was enchanted with what he had recognized as the expression of the new local rooted - Middle Eastern Mizrahi Israeli dance. Then, funded by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, Ana Sokolow, one of Martha Graham's top dancers and by then, a well-known choreographer in her own right, arrives in Israel to teach Graham's technique to the Inbal dancers. That's the story. Hence, this photo captures a pivotal historic moment in dance in

Israel, where Americanization is seen practically taming, training and policing the Inbal dancers' Yemenite, Mizrahi bodies.

Yali: Inbal Dance Theater Ensemble has resided in [NEVE TZEDEK, TEL AVIV](#) since 1971. In 1989 Yair Vardi was invited to be the founding director of Suzanne Dellal Dance Centre and was its manager until 2020. Yair shared with us his personal and professional relationship with Sara Levi Tanai.

YAIR VARDI: It's very moving. I had nothing else on my mind since you approached me to talk about Sara. I thought about what I would say about her and decided I wanted to go dozens of years back because I knew Sara even before I went to London and before I started Suzanne Dellal; so, it all kind of meshed together for me, but when I took on Suzanne Dellal there was no question that one of my first goals would be to incorporate all Inbal's work and Sara's in particular in the Center.

Yali: Why do you think that never happened?

YAIR VARDI: A few reasons. The first might be the people involved, of which I was one, no doubt about it. I may not have done my full share to strengthen the connection. On the other hand, the Inbal ensemble wanted to remain completely independent in the place, so I got it, and there was also her lack of enthusiasm to cooperate with us, which I never understood. Unlike the Batsheva dance company that used to say: "What's next, Vardi? Let's do everything together..."

Iris: Could you describe what happened next?

YAIR VARDI: It changed because the way I see it, the ensemble was supposedly rejected. I could be at fault here as well. After all, I didn't go out of my way to embrace them in Suzanne Dellal. And society in Israel considered Yemenite dancing as... Well, she created an original, highly unique Israeli dance that's like no other today, and there's hardly even a trace

left, except for a few photos and videos, really, and it's such a shame because she created an entirely new dance world.

Iris: How would you explain the fact that she didn't nurture new generations of choreographers and artists? A line of successors?

YAIR VARDI: I think that in her mind she had no time to do so, she wanted to create and create and create. Perhaps she expected one of the female dancers, of whoever danced with her, to understand her and take it upon herself, but since she wasn't respected well enough, I think, in my mind, that's why, that's what caused that distance; because at the end of the day she was somewhat ousted by Israeli society, the new, developing Israeli society; a young society that sped forward without looking back. Except for Jerome Robbins. For him she was Israel, and he took her to New York. At the time Inbal was THE company, the only company that existed before Batsheva, the only company the world knew about, the only one that performed abroad. There was nothing but Inbal, and the company shined. It was all thanks to Sara because the world took notice of the fact that this woman was bringing something extremely innovative, something very special, this combination of Sabre Israeliness with Mizrahi thinking and music that she brought with her from Yemenite tradition; the world and the international community considered it something remarkable.

Yali: Dina Roginsky:

Dina Roginsky: It's well-known that Sara was extremely creative and a true visionary, but at the same time she was an individualist, she didn't raise a generation of successors or choreographers. She was a centralist and never let others create choreographies and develop from within the ensemble. So basically, her physical and age-related decline echoed that of the ensemble; the next generation never quite emerged under her leadership.

Yali: So what's going on with Inbal today? Here with us is Dr. Idit Suslik, a dance researcher and lecturer.

Hi Idit, let's talk about Inbal Dance Theater today and about the process the company went through in the past few years, which brought them back to the heart of the contemporary dance scene in Israel. We want to focus on the work of choreographer Mor Shani who created a trilogy of dance works for Inbal: *A Simple Dance*, 2017; *While the Fireflies Disappear*, 2018 and *Lehet*, 2020 (which means "walking" in Hebrew). How do you perceive the connection between these pieces?

Idit Suslik: What I think makes Mor Shani's Inbal trilogy fascinating is his choice to create an observation that I define as zoom-in and zoom-out. Starting with *A Simple Dance* which I consider to be an exploration of what's folklore and folk dance is, through a very wide and inclusive lens; And I remember seeing this work on its opening night, I was there as a dance critic, it was extremely interesting to see how he weaved together dances from different origins - hip hop, ballroom dancing, tap dancing - to create what I characterized back then as "contemporary folk dancing." That is to say something on what folk dancing looks like today in this era. And then in the second work, *While the Fireflies Disappear*, there's suddenly this zoom-in on Inbal's heritage, to Sara Levi Tanai's Inbal movement language, and there's a real correspondence between Mor Shani and Levi Tanai's aesthetics, with various movement elements, up to the most delicate and precise details.

It was an attempt - as he put it - to re-imagine Sara Levi Tanai's language, today. And then comes *Lehet* (walking) - the third work of the trilogy, and once again we zoom-out, only this time the zoom-out doesn't quite focus on folk dancing or folklore as a whole, but it's a genuine examination of the mechanics of the folklore and folk dancing genome - the step or the stride. And in this sense, *Lehet* is truly a work about walking. Mor, the choreographer, connected it to people's fidgety walk during Covid-19, but I think there's something there that also relates to his perception of what is folklore, what is folk dancing.

Iris: can you tell us about other contemporary choreographers who are interested in this kind of research and examination of traditional folklore?

Idit Suslik: here in Israel, we have, of course, Shira Eviatar and Orly Portal, but if you look outside to the international scene we can also mention Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. I recognize this tendency also from my own niche, that of Flamenco' through co-operations of contemporary choreographers who work with Flamenco choreographers, and that basically opens up this entire genre to new interpretations. I think that the new concept towards folk dance now, is not the perspective of a traditional dance that belongs to a community and is frozen in time, but a more primal, relevant, human perspective - of folklore as something that creates a community. We still have traditional communities today, but we also have a global community, a trans-cultural one, a community that is integrated with a variety of differences, and that's what I believe contemporary dance artists correspond with.

Yali: I think that's very clear in *Lehet*, this global perspective, also through the music. Mor Shani mixes popular music with Yemenite references, such as the Israeli group [The A-Wa Sisters](#).

Idit Suslik: It's fascinating that you brought up this issue of music because we're so used to thinking of folklore as something inseparable from music and costumes, and in this trilogy, Mor used a very interesting abstraction, which by the way, is a distinct contemporary choreographic tool in terms of dealing materials. So, if I go back to his piece *A Simple Dance*, for example, it has no music whatsoever; the entire piece takes place in silence, apart from the steps that provide the beat that takes us back to something primal, a sort of rhythm that is common to us all. And in this work, there's just one moment where Shlomo Gronich's song "Don't Go" pops in. Then we arrive the second work, *While the Fireflies Disappear*, where we see the roots of what he later developed in *Lehet* - which is this fascinating fusion between electronic music, original digital music and references to Yemenite traditional music. In this piece there are specific citations from the Inbal gestural movement language, from Sara Levi Tanai's specific pieces. He literally took elements, like the stick from her work

“The Song of Songs”, or his choice to work with the Israeli canonic fashion brand Maskit’s costumes, because we know that back at the time, Maskit used to design Inbal’s costumes.

yali And the sunglasses!

Idit Suslik: Yes! The sunglasses!

Let’s talk about the sunglasses! But before we do, let me just say one more thing about the music in *Lehet*, which is that this work truly completes this process: the use of electronic trance style music is much more dominant, but at the same time, there are also these references that make you as an audience aware of Mor’s reflective cultural awareness and I think, awareness, is key mechanism here.

Now - I somehow feel like the sunglasses have something to do with it, because they represent in another way Mor’s cultural and historical awareness of the constant orientalist gaze on Inbal since the day Sara Levi Tanai founded the company in 1949. And that trick on stage, where they take off the sunglasses, there is that immortal opening scene of two male dancers sitting, putting the sunglasses on and taking them off again and again. When the glasses are on, they suddenly give the audience the Yemenite Inbal nuances we’ve come to expect, and when they take them off, something changes in their movement language. Then, toward the end of the piece, the dancers move down stage, coming to sit on the front edge staring at us. And I think that this moment of appropriating the historical gaze of otherness and returning it back to the audience, reflects in a way the dialogue that Mor Shani himself is having with the gaze on the Inbal company through the years and through history. In other words, what staring back at us basically does, is asking us to pause and think - what did we expect to see when we came here? What do we remember from the cultural discourse about Inbal? Did we expect to see Yemenite folklore dancing tonight or rather a contemporary current cutting edge Inbal company?

Yali: Can we talk about the institution in relation to the newly envisioned Inbal Dance Theater?

Idit Suslik: I think it's safe to say that one can see a larger artistic choice or agenda that Mor Shani paved and is now continuing with guest choreographers invited to work with the company, most of them Israeli. After "A Simple Dance" - Idan Sharabi created *FEM*, Noa Shador created *Suddenly We Were All Alone*, and now Emanuel Gat, who in fact is based in France, created a new dance under the title *Suzanne* for the ensemble. So, I think that opening up the company as a cultural organization, opening it up to new choreographers and the invitation of contemporary choreographers speaks for itself.

But I do feel that something about that moment when *A Simple Dance* performed at the Diver Festival of contemporary dance was a significant landmark, probably also in the eyes of the larger Israeli cultural establishment, that realized that this company could not only present innovative work, but in fact create a repertoire that is made of what I think are glorious, magnificent choreographies that absolutely go in line with the historical style, values and culture of this company.

Iris: Today, Inbal company is an artistic organization that seeks - and finds - the way to address its heritage. As Orly Portal told us earlier, we can see that this is an issue that other Independent choreographers are interested in. We invited Shira Eviatar to talk to us about her 2016 work *Shining* (Zorchot in Hebrew), where she explores the embodiment of Moroccan and Yemenite Mizrahi dance and gestures with dancer Anat Amrani.

Yali: The choreographic DNA of *Rising* (Zorchot): A duet for two women, a juxtaposition of Moroccan and Yemenite movement. An exposed female body. body vibrations, rattling, contorting, repetitiveness of movement, rhythm. Smiles. No music, sounds of speech and sounds of moving and breathing.

you can watch Shira Eviatar's full works on our Creatures of Dance website at <https://www.tightsdancethought.com>

yali: Shira:

Shira Eviatar: It started with me working on my piece *Bodily Mandala*. At the time, Anat Amrani was exploring her heritage of Yemenite dance. Like me, she wanted to go back somewhere, to go full circle. And when I heard she was doing that, I said “wow, Anat, let’s get together and compare and see what we’ve got.” It felt like we were the only women doing that at the time, it was 2014 and it felt totally subversive, peoples’ reactions were: “what, she’s doing Moroccan dance? What, she’s doing Yemenite dance?” “Okay, let’s underground, as they say, and compare materials.” and we did; she came over to my place and I remember looking at her dancing and saying “wow, this is completely different.”

I remember we arrived at the presentation for ‘Haramat Masach’ (Curtain Up), a central Israeli dance annual event in Tel Aviv, to show our work in progress to artistic directors Hillel Kogan and Itzik Giuli. It was 9 am, we got undressed and started shaking and rattling our bodies, our curls fluttering and wild. Wow, it felt like... I asked them before the presentation “Are you ready for us? Are you ready?” For us, doing it was so scary. And I’m glad to say we were accepted, and we premiered there, at Curtain Up’.

I remember Itzik Giuli who was our mentor, never laughed, throughout the entire process but when we performed for the first time in the south of Israel, in Dimona, a peripheral town of mostly Misrahi descents, , people were really laughing, out loud, and cheering us at the end, I said to him after: “But you never laughed” and he said, “I know, it was hilarious, but I didn’t want you to get used to my laughter.” And in fact, after that, we always could tell when the audience laughed during the shows. For us it was an astonishing discovery to find that the piece... We felt that the piece was filled with humor, we ourselves couldn’t stop laughing. We had that mischief. You know, my grandmother used to call it “crazies.” There was something in her body that she taught me, that thing like saying “I’m goanna get up now

and just dance, let's go! What?! are we supposed to just sit now?! Oh, well, too bad, I'm getting up now and I'm goanna dance no matter what, I don't give a damn," something like "Come and show them how to celebrate, celebrate, you will not box me in, hell no! I'm goanna get up now and move my body in a way that maybe I'm not supposed to" - and that was her rebellion. It was small but that was her rebellion. So Anat and I were very much in her "crazy" spirit. It was very mischievous, but we had no idea that the audience will pick up on it.

Iris: Shira, you come to this process with contemporary aesthetic skills and approach, and in this work the two of you are making some sort of breakthrough by inserting traditional materials into the choreography

Shira Eviatar: I actually use two aesthetics I grew up on that are very much in me, contemporary dance where I see myself positioned in, where I feel fluent in and in love with, and it's the language I speak; and Mizrahi dance, specifically Moroccan which is embodied in me, something that I grew up with at home, very familiar to me and I love it very much. I am interested in bringing this two-movement aesthetics together to find out where one is lacking, where the other is lacking and in what way.

I also wanted to allow Moroccan dance and later Yemenite dance and other genres an unbiased space, and not narrow it down to one image, but rather create a place where we can observe it, re-learn it, see things with fresh eyes and open up the wealth, share the endless richness that these cultures have to offer.

For example, even in *Rising*, there's a very basic contemporary choreographic practice: we start the first ten minutes with our backs to the audience; so you see the dance from an angle you've never seen before. And of course, I keep playing on the audience's cultural reading when they look at the movement and say "Oh, I know that!" That's why there's humor and laughter because there's that moment of Boom! they get it and it hits them, "Oh,

that's a Yemenite step," or perhaps they suddenly have this image of an old aunt that used to do this particular dance move.

At that moment the body becomes a certain object in space that can signify and embody infinite meanings and interpretations, right? And by the way, that's why in this piece for example, we chose to address certain things on stage, like, let's say, the speaker that stands there throughout the performance; it's not as if - "it's the fourth wall, the curtain opens and we're in some different world now" - no, no, it's here and now! We also see the object that is the theater itself, the fact that I'm looking at you and you're looking back at me; at the end of the day there is a set of conventions that allows us to look. Now, when you look at me in my bra and panties, shaking my ass in your face, there's always that back and forth on that thing, constantly referencing these conventions, beliefs and stereotypes.

Iris: In 2017 you created *Eviatar/Said*, a solo for a male non-dancer. The title of the dance is an amalgam of both your name and the name of the dancer, Eviatar Said - how did this come about? How did you meet him?

Yali: Where did he dance? What was his dance experience? At home? At parties?

Shira Eviatar: Yes! at home, parties, weddings. I call it... I mean he's a non-dancer, but in fact, he's this insanely culturally-trained dancer.

Yali: Come to think of it, it's a super-radical choice, putting him on stage.

Shira Eviatar: Totally, but he also really explored this traditional dance, he went to archives, researched the nuances, so we both researched the subject and, of course, it's in his blood, he knows it since the day he was born and he finds it interesting. So yeah, at that moment it was super radical; it was interesting because when we started out we had to re-learn everything: how do we even begin to articulate a language when we don't have that shared basis of movement language? Or how do we go into the studio?

Iris: And then you decide not to perform with him

Shira Eviatar Oh, I got in the way so much! [Laughing] At first, we thought this was going to be a duet, we desperately wanted to work together and then I told him: "look, I'm just getting in the way, I shouldn't be there", because then what's the use of comparing my knowledge and his?

He was so interesting to watch, his presence on stage as a non-professional dancer, and everything we talked about that I basically had the obvious professional training and he did not: understanding the stage: lights on, lights off, that you have to be quiet offstage, the sensation of feeling the stage lights on you back - all of these.

Yali: Habitus, it's called habitus. He didn't have the stage habitus.

Shira Eviatar: That's right. When he performed for the first time in "Diver Festival" in 2015 at Inbal Theater, I knew I couldn't explain to him the intensity of the sensation of having a 100 people staring at your back in silence. It's a sensation that makes your entire experience of time and your whole consciousness just change, your body changes.

Yali: I will say again that I think it's an extremely radical move, I remember that show. He came on stage and I said to myself "who is this guy? What is this? Where did he come from?" And I could see that he had no stage experience. It showed. But it also was very interesting to watch because it broke the rules, Shira.

Iris: You broke the rules, Shira!

Yali: You know, we interviewed Orly Portal as well for this episode, and music plays a highly significant role for her in her work, ... when you go in the quote-unquote Mizrahi direction, the Moroccan, the Yemenite, the music is extremely tempting, there's a groove to

it, it is known for its charisma; but with you, the use of music is very minimal. Could you explain why?

Shira Eviatar: That's true. There are several reasons. One, let me just say that music is the whole wide world, it's so rich and amazing that to me it means putting - and I'm not criticizing those who do so - but to me, it's like putting a giant veil on things - I'm telling you what to feel, where you are, I'm laying so much information on you that I don't even know if you could even see the dance work for what it is; and also, it's someone else's art. I didn't create the music.

Secondly, what we explore in my piece is exactly that, the "wearing" of the gestures, the muscle memory. So, when I do the movements, they of course have their own rhythm and beat and sometimes I sing to myself, either a specific or a non-specific song, a certain beat.

Yali: I remember there was a genuine sense of relief in the audience when the music finally came - it's finally here (the music), and the audience clapped, but it was terribly short. 'Click' and it was gone.

Shira Eviatar: By the way, let me just say that in *Eviatar/Said* he sings and dances, and we also sing in *Rising*. There's plenty of vocals, there's always noise and sound. There is this moment in the work, as you mentioned Yali, when the audience hears Aharon Amram's music and everyone goes "Ahhhhh!" We give it a moment, a minute even - of just the music, and you suddenly see where all the information you got, or some of it, at least, comes from; and you make the connection. It happens after you've already gotten to know the movements and suddenly it hits you and you say "Oh, that's where it came from!"

I'd like to add, that one of the things that were important to me, in *Rising*, for example, was bringing feelings of joy and celebration as feelings that have their place and ought to be explored in the artistic sphere, because joy is a very deep emotion, the way I feel it, at least; and it doesn't get the impact it deserves, certainly not as a platform for serious cultural research. Feelings of loneliness or unrequited love, or anything that involves conflict or

depression, get much more attention and legitimacy, or even feelings of rebellion get their place. But joy? It's just joyful...

Yali: like It's superficial you mean...

Shira Eviatar: And I'm like: "no, it's anything but superficial!" So, we also bring our solidarity, our good nature and endless nuances of what joy is. It's important for me to say that. The goal of this research isn't to drain or exhaust anyone, oh God! On the contrary, I came to splash out these feelings.

Yali: we didn't come here to drain swamps!

Iris: Ran Brown, independent dance researcher, director of the Telma Yelin high school dance department, and 'Haaretz' magazine's dance critic. Ran, what's your take on ethnic identity and folklore in contemporary Israeli dance?

Ran Brown: I think this issue has only recently surfaced, prompting artists to deal with it, obviously besides the historical exception, Sara Levi Tanai of Inbal. It's part of a global trend that goes back to dealing with identities and in particular, identities as sources for creation, especially identities that may have been excluded up until recently; it also comes from the current tendency to challenge the distinction between high culture and low culture or between folklore and artistic dance. It is happening in Israel too, but hardly as often in dance, and hardly as often as in other art forms where you see this awakening, such as in literature, film or art. Dance-wise, you can literally count the number of choreographers dealing with it on one hand. I believe it also has to do with where people's career trajectories or their artistic habitus guide them because at a very young age they have already been inducted into the Western artistic dance. This in a way, forces them to forget all other forms of dance or physical cultures, different movement methods as well as to get in line with "the proper way of dancing or making dance"; and if they do preserve this tradition, they compartmentalize it, it has no place in the artistic dance because it belongs

with social celebrations at home such as weddings, and it's definitely not something you do on stage and certainly not something that is considered prestigious or even acknowledged. One central institution that does deal with this subject today, is, of course, the "Inbal Dance Theater", thanks to its historic background and their commitment to keep asking and exploring these questions, even though they have updated the way to ask these questions. It's not trivial at all to deal with Yemenite culture, folklore or heritage, but now the question is where does it belong in face of contemporary dance and culture.

Yali: Which only happened recently, right?

Ran Brown: Yes, only recently. And it's clear by the invitation of certain choreographers that are invited to work with the company, meaning its active invitation of artists to come and address a predetermined subject. But it still remains very much open, and we can indeed see that these artists choose to address it in different ways.

Iris: I'd like to point out that all this started after Eldad Grupy was nominated as Inbal Dance-Theater's CEO.

Ran Brown: Also, at some point, American Israeli choreographer Barak Marshall became the company's artistic director. He certainly brought the issues of ethnicity and folklore with him, from his point of view, which is much more diverse, hybrid, universal perhaps. I think it also has to do with his own personal identity, a choreographer whose mother danced with the Inbal company in the past and who brings with her the Yemenite heritage.

Iris: Margalit Oved

Ran Brown: And a father who's both American-Ashkenazi and who brings with him a different culture. And Barak weaves many diverse cultural references in all his works. Jewish writer Shalom Aleichem and Samuel Beckett, musical theater and modern dance, plus, of course, the Inbal heritage.

Yali: And hip hop.

Ran Brown: And hip hop - and this is indeed some sort of statement that I believe has to do with his own identity as well as an artistic statement that refers to the global village.

Iris: As head of Suzanne Dellal, Yair Vardi, you produced two of Barak Marshall's pieces.

Yair Vardi: It was a love story with Barak. I spotted something so unique about that guy.

Yali: What were the circumstances that brought him to Israel?

Yair Vardi: His mother was made manager of Inbal. He made Aliyah (immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel) and he came with her, I don't know how our paths crossed, and he submitted a dance piece to "Gvanim" Dance Festival that we did at Suzanne Dellal Centre. He worked on it day and night. One day he comes into my office and says "I'm not doing it, Yair." "The hell you're not, you're going straight back into the studio and you finish the piece." There was terrible screaming and yelling and terrible anger, and he went back to the studio and won first prize.

Marshal has a unique consciousness for ethnic music and for a brilliant integration of Mizrahi and fabulous original Jewish music; it's simply gorgeous. He knows how to connect these genres musically in his movement order and in his dancing structure; he knows where to start, there's this cultural knowledge in him that to this day I still haven't figured out... We talk a lot, but I haven't always fully understood him.

There's a very exciting moment in his work *Rooster* from 2009, where he invites his mother, Margalit Oved at an old age, to come on stage and she sings her Yemenite songs in the most poignant yet heart-rending way. There were plenty of arguments on the subject of her coming on stage... (Laughter). Montanari invited the piece to the Montpellier Festival and we

said: wow, that's some recognition, we can't not go. And he insisted, Jean-Paul, to bring Margalit to the show, but Barak tried to tell him that she could not remember things; But Jean-Paul insisted and said, "I'm not doing the show without her".

Iris: I saw it here in Israel, she came on stage shining like the sun and you couldn't see anyone else but her, that's how charismatic she was.

Yali: back to Ran - taking a panoramic view of present-day artists using folklore in their works, could you somehow define these works, offer a typology of the artists, characterize their process, what they do?

Ran Brown: I think there's an intriguing division between Mor Shani and Barak Marshall, and Shira Eviatar and Orly Portal. I can't quite say whether it's solely a gender identity thing, two men and two women, or their biographical stories, Barak Marshall is also kind of an immigrant, living in the States, son to parents of different backgrounds, and Mor Shani wrote a text in relation to his work *A Simple Dance* where he tells of his mother's identity as an adopted child, both under the context of multiple identities. He himself also went to study abroad in a school that was global, so there's something about Mor and Barak's works that reflects precisely that aspect of their identity. Their works are extremely eclectic, combining different styles and origins. Barak Marshall's works may be more theatrical, perhaps, and include texts that provide context; with Mor Shani, the examination is more modernistic, I would dare say; he tries to deconstruct things back to their raw state, but it's very clear that these deconstructed materials were taken from various sources.

With Shira Eviatar and Orly Portal, on the other hand, there's a return to their subjective personal body, to traditions that were deliberately neglected and forgotten but they were familiar with from home; and now they're sort of re-learning them anew, they dive into one or two styles. They go deep, whereas the men spread wide. It's an interesting distinction to make between them. So, if it's Orly Portal who chooses tribal dance, Moroccan folklore and belly dancing under some generic title, but, of course, she also combines them all, I should

mention, it's not that they do it 'par excellence'. So, she combines it with her own embodied physical history, with contemporary dance, with contact improvisation and Feldenkrais method; so it goes through a melding process, but you can still feel the deep dive exploration into these styles. Shira Eviatar also turns to Moroccan dance and in the piece, she creates with Anat Amrani they turn to Yemenite dance, too. Shira is another example of someone who, on the one hand, has a contemporary dance education and experience and on the other hand, what she started out with was *Bedek Bait*, her first piece wherein she examines the social structure of her personal ethnic identity and how her family affected her and is embedded in her body. With her, the grandmother becomes a major factor as she goes back to her "joyful dances" as she calls them.

Iris: If we look globally, could you say something about trends we know from artists such as Akram Khan, Alessandro Shiaroni, Esther Solomon... Works that address folkloristic materials. Could you define this global trend and where it's headed?

Ran Brown: It's basically a conversation about cosmopolitanism or a multicultural society. Europe and North America, that now acknowledge their historic wrongdoings of rejecting the "other", and the exclusion and deleting of cultures, and are now actually filled with immigrants, with people they brought in from the now-dispersed colonies - but are now living the results of those actions. The circumstances have led us to become a complex society; and this awareness compels them, compels us all, to deal with these questions. Even in our own little local neck of the woods - I mean there was never a real gathering of exiles or a melting pot here in Israel; - what happened here was the annihilation of certain cultures under the pretense of neutrality and a rhetoric of a melting pot, but in fact there was a domination of one style. And if we're now going back to make amends, to look at things directly and honestly, then we can say - wait, there was more... And perhaps the vision of the "Levant" and its other possibilities hadn't been explored yet, so we can look into it.

Yali: And are there other artists who don't possess an ethnic eastern-mizrahi background or identity who deal with that corpus? Choreographers that are curious about the question of folklore or local ethnicity?

Ran Brown: I think that the current Inbal Dance Theater's place in this question is significant because dealing with these questions is part of its agenda. When Eldad Grupy invites these artists, he invites them to do so from their point of view. So, for instance, he invited choreographer Noa Shador to create a piece for the company, *Suddenly We were All Alone* and that question, for her at least evoked on the one hand an exploration of the traditional Inbal language and its past works, but on the other hand, raised the question of folklore in general. And one of the sources of inspiration for this piece was American folklore researcher Alan Lomax's documentary project. He traveled the world, filming different tribes, people from different places and tried to find a connection between the steps, their characteristic choreography and their culture and way of life.

He generated a considerable amount of footage and Shador, along with the company dancers really studied it. They chose samples and learned them. Later, she integrated them with Inbal's tradition. So, what she did was connect Inbal's tradition to a wider scope of global traditions as well as to enhance the company's curiosity and interest in asking questions on the meaning of folklore now. And perhaps you could also say that what motivated Lomax, this ambition to find some pattern, or generalization, if one even exists, is also a question that Shador asks without having an ethnic personal, embodied cultural connection to this thing. However, Noa Shador's works most certainly ask questions about the relationship between choreography, society and identity in Israel which she seeks to deconstruct and examine.

By the way, I think that if we consider the way current-day culture works and why this phenomenon is taking place now, we have no choice but to work and speak in two voices. To work with one language within another language, is the way to challenge a world that wishes to box things in clear, distinct, different categories and to continue separating

between high and low, east and west. When artists who don't belong in mainstream hegemony, when they enter the canon, when they use the mainstream to insert their traditions or points of view, and by doing so they challenge this continuous world view, that's when they succeed in performing the subversive deed that might threaten, break and alter their audience's point of view.

Iris: We would like to thank Orly Portal, Shira Eviatar, Dr. Dina Roginsky, and Dr. Idit Suslik. Thanks to our regular podcast panelists, Yair Vardi and Ran Brown. Many thanks to Matan Ashkenazi from Ozen Musikalit Studio in kibbutz Ma'abarot and Zohar Zalts from Eshel Studio in Tel Aviv for the sound and editing; thanks to all the artists whose works we discussed today: Sara Levi Tanai, Barak Marshall, Mor Shani and Noa Shador. Special thanks to Eldad Grupy, CEO of Inbal Dance Theater.

This episode was recorded in spring and summer of 2021.

Music in order of appearance:

Adir Adirim, performed by Balkan Beat Box. Written by Uri Kaplan and Tamir Muskat. 2005.

Mastika, written and performed by Farzad Farhangi. From the Album "Rubikon". Free Music Archive 2021.

"While the Fireflies Disappear". Choreography: Mor Shani. Music: Itamar Gross. 2018.

Traditional melodies from "Yemenite Wedding" performed by Inbal Dance Theater. 1962.

"Hakawati", written and performed by Farzad Farhangi. From the Album "Exile". Free Music Archive 2021.

"Apple", lyrics by Aharon Amir, music by Sara Levi Tanai, adapted by Ovadia Tuvia, performed by Inbal Dance Theater 1966.

"Shining". Performed by Shira Eviatar and Anat Amrani. 2016.

"Eviatar/Said", singing: Eviatar Said. 2017.

"Night Train to Baghdad", written and performed by Farzad Farhangi. From the Album "Sandstorm". Free Music Archive 2021.

"Arabian" written and performed by Serge Quadrado. From the Album "Islamic". Free Music Archive 2021."

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