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**A Podcast on Contemporary Dance in Israel**

**Yali Nativ & Iris Lana**

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# Project 48 Dance:

# One-Time Encounter for a Creative Community

Episode 56

Transcript

From the series

**Creative Direction and Curation**

With

**Dana Ruttenberg** Dancer, Choreographer, and Dance Entrepreneur

**Sigal Dahan** Producer

Additional participants

**Ofra Idel** Choreographer; artistic director of the Shalem Dance Center

**Ofir Yudilevich** Choreographer, dancer, and acrobat

**Ariel N. Wolf** Theatre director and movement designer for stage and film

**Gilad Jerusalmy** Dancer and independent creator for stage and media

**Nurit Drimer** Creator, director, and writer

Recorded at Eshel Studios, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, November 2025

Transcription: Iris Lana & Yali Nativ

Translation from Hebrew: Dana Ruttenberg and Yali Nativ

**for citation**:

Ruttenberg, Dana & Dahan, Sigal. (2025). Project 48 Dance: One-Time Encounter for a Creative Community [Transcript Episode 56]. In: *Creatures of Dance/Iris Lana & Yali Nativ*.

**Dana**: I'm Dana Ruttenberg, and lately I've grown tired of the title "choreographer." I feel like it no longer captures what I do or what I want to do. I think of myself more as an interdisciplinary maker. Or maybe just multidisciplinary.

**Iris**: And a dancer?

**Dana**: A dancer when needed, yes.

**Iris**: Sigal?

**Sigal**: I'm Sigal, and my umbrella title is "producer," but I actually do many different things. I'm comfortable with that title, though people usually ask for more explanation. So, emotional support, technical support, production support, and consulting.

**Iris**: Networking.

**Sigal**: Networking, technology support.

**Announcer**:
You're listening to Hayot Mahol (Creatures of Dance), a podcast on contemporary dance in Israel. Hayot Mahol with Iris Lana and Yali Nativ.
And today: Dana Ruttenberg and Sigal Dahan on Project 48 Dance.

**Dana**: Project 48 Dance is a project where I invite dance artists, artists from outside the dance world, and dancers into a kind of creative blind date built around dance. Twenty-four hours, plus another twenty four hours, forty-eight hours total.

We meet one evening in a place with five studio spaces, and we hold a raffle. The participants don't know who else is taking part until right before the project begins. That's why it's a blind date. The raffle divides everyone into five ensembles. Each ensemble includes between two and five dancers, and two "parents," co-creators. One comes from the dance world, and one from outside of it. Then I give everyone the same reference point: a short video clip they're asked to respond to, take inspiration from, or let carry them somewhere unexpected. It's basically the only thing all the groups have in common.

From there, they begin the first creative round: evening rehearsal, morning rehearsal, lunch, afternoon rehearsal, and at the end of those first twenty-four hours, a one-time live performance in front of an audience. A performance that will never happen again. It's documented and immediately enters the dance archive, never to return to the stage. At the end of the performance, all the artists come back onstage, the names go back into the hat, and we hold a second raffle that reshuffles the same people into entirely new ensembles. There's a new reference, everyone returns to the studio, and another twenty-four-hour cycle begins, ending again in a live performance. The whole thing is accompanied by a streaming videographer who broadcasts everything live from the rehearsal spaces, so people can peek into the process, like being a fly on the wall inside these intimate studio environments. There's also a still photographer documenting the process, trying to capture these fleeting butterflies before they disappear. And before each evening performance, we present a live photo exhibition from the previous twenty-four hours.

**Iris**: Can one of you describe the moment everyone walks in and receives the reference?

**Yali**: How many people are there altogether?

**Dana**: Twenty six. But actually, the reference doesn't come immediately when they walk in.

**Sigal**: Right. It happens in two stages. First, everyone arrives, and there's a lot of awkwardness, a lot of anxiety. But I also feel that everyone senses they're about to go on some kind of journey, even though they don't fully understand what they've signed up for. Then there's the shared gathering, where Dana starts laying out what's going to happen. And that's usually the moment everyone freezes a little, because

they realize there's about to be a raffle, and suddenly the only thing on their minds is: Who am I going to end up with? Who am I going to work with? That moment is always fascinating to watch. Something very primal comes up in people's eyes, even among artists who are incredibly experienced and have worked with countless collaborators before.

Then comes the raffle itself, which is always exciting. Suddenly, people lock eyes and meet each other for the first time. It's such a powerful moment to witness. And we're there too, excited of course, but calmer than they are. They always seem slightly disoriented to me, genuinely shaken by the whole thing. And then within seconds it's chaos: "Where are you?" "Who's in my group?" Everyone scatters instantly and gets thrown straight into the deep end.

**Dana**: In recent years, we've been working at the Seminar Hakibbutzim campus in Migdal Shalom, in central Tel Aviv. So people arrive by elevator, and there's always this moment when the elevator doors open, and they step out into the space. It honestly reminds me a little of Big Brother. The doors open and there they are. The people coming from outside the dance world suddenly find themselves surrounded by faces they don't recognize, while dancers often encounter people they've heard about but never actually met.

We also invite students from the college to work with the production team. They get exposed to the entire process, which becomes an educational experience in itself. They witness, in microcosm, how an artwork comes into being from beginning to end. They get access to artists they'd never otherwise have the chance to observe in the studio, how they work, how they struggle with ideas and with other people, and what a production process actually looks like behind the scenes. Part of our role is connecting people. Sometimes we discover connections we didn't even know existed. In the most

recent edition, for example, three participants realized they had studied together years earlier in the same acting class at drama school. I had no idea. Suddenly, it became a kind of reunion.

**Iris**: How do you choose the participants?

**Dana**: Throughout the year, both Sigal and I are constantly on the lookout. We're always scouting young talents, interesting artists, sometimes people who disappeared from the scene and maybe could be brought back. Quite often we invite people who no longer dance professionally to come back and dance for two days. Then I start making phone calls. I intentionally don't do an open call. I think open calls activate a certain kind of ambition. People apply to everything simply because applications are open, and sometimes they convince themselves they want something they don't actually want. So instead, I invite people personally. We have a conversation. I describe the project honestly. I don't "sell" it. I explain exactly what happens. And usually, I can hear in someone's voice whether it's right for them at that moment in their life. For one person it might not be the right time this year, but maybe another year it will be. And only if it genuinely feels right for them, only if they're willing to accept that they may end up paired with someone completely outside their comfort zone, then we both know it's the right fit.

Of course, once the process actually begins, people's perceptions shift. They arrive differently. A kind of tabula rasa does emerge. Old relationships are renewed. New things happen. And only if they're willing to step into the unknown do I finally say: "Welcome. But you can't tell anyone." Sometimes two dancers from the same company are participating, and neither knows the other is involved.

**Yali**: How many years have you been doing this together?

**Sigal**: Four? Maybe five. But the last four editions, we definitely created together.

**Dana**: The project actually grew out of a theatre project Roy Maliach Reshef initiated at Tzavta called 14/48. I think that was the name. He invited playwrights, directors, actors, and actresses. Together they wrote topics on slips of paper, put them into a hat, drew one at random, and that same evening the playwright went home to write a play. The next morning, the script was handed to the director. The playwright knew, for example, that they were writing for two actors and one actress, but they didn't know which actors. Then the actors simply received their roles and embodied them.

A friend of mine participated in that project. Back in acting school, she was always cast as "the funny girl." I don't even know why. Sometimes it's appearance, or just the way people perceive you onstage at an early age. So she always got comic roles.

But in this project, she was cast in a dramatic role, and suddenly, people were like: "Wait, there's a dramatic actress here?" It was a revelation, even for her. You discover something in yourself you thought was completely inaccessible. And I thought: wow, in dance we get channelled so quickly. You graduate from dance school, join a company or work with a choreographer, and very quickly you become identified with one specific thing. Everyone knows you through that lens. And inside that framework there may be entire abilities you never get to explore.

**Yali**: Or abilities you don't even know you have.

**Dana**: Exactly. Nobody ever asked you to do them. And even after you leave that framework, people still want you to remain that same version of yourself. Changing direction is incredibly difficult. But someone who doesn't know you, someone who hasn't already decided who you are, might suddenly cast you differently. And then you discover another possibility inside yourself. That was one dream behind the project.

And the second dream was this: I remember us working at the old Bikkurei Ha'itim Center in Tel Aviv. Every morning different choreographers would arrive, each entering their own studio space, and nobody knew what was happening behind those doors. We were literally working wall to wall, studio next to studio, and I realized I had no idea how these people actually worked. Maybe they had methods or creative processes I'd never encountered before. But there was no access to that kind of sharing. That's where the idea of the "fly on the wall" came from.

Then I thought, what if something like that could happen in dance? It was important to me to build it in a way that preserved the freshness of the creative process. That's why there's always a co-creator from outside the dance world. Their perspective is different. They see things differently, and they create together with the choreographer. And that produces all kinds of unusual and unexpected ways of working.

**Ofra Idel:** My name is Ofra Idel. I participated in Project 48 as an outside eye. One of the most magical things about the project is the reliance on intuition and gut feeling within such a short and accelerated creative process. To create something meaningful within that timeframe, people have to trust their instincts.

There's something very powerful about taking the choreographer's initial idea, along with all the feelings and impulses that emerge in such a raw, almost primal way among the rest of the group, and simply following them all the way through. You take one idea, dive into it completely, and spend the remaining hours before the deadline fully committed to it, without second-guessing yourself or looking sideways.

The results were often beautiful, funny, and deeply original. Before analysis enters the room, before feedback and outside advice, like in more conventional creative

processes, there's something incredibly valuable in trusting that first instinct and working from that raw place that carries a genuine spark of creation.

**Dana**: I'll tell you something that happened in the very first edition. Gil Kerer participated, and honestly, everyone who joined that first edition was incredibly brave because the whole thing sounded impossible. At the time we were working at Studio Naim in Tel Aviv, back when it had just opened. There was only one studio on Salame Street and not all the spaces were even proper dance studios. There were two standard studio spaces, another room on the roof with tiled floors, and maybe we even rehearsed in the foyer at some point. We took whatever we could get. Gil had one line he needed to say during the performance. He was standing backstage waiting to go on, and in those few seconds before entering he suddenly thought, "Why am I actually doing this right now?" But before he could even finish the thought, he had to go onstage. Afterwards, he said, "Wow. I suddenly realized how many pop-up thoughts I usually have that stop me." The process was moving so fast that there simply wasn't time for those thoughts to take over.

That's part of what's behind the speed of the project. There's very little time to say no. The choreographers, the artists, everyone has to rely on each other because nobody has enough time to figure everything out alone. And when people do try to do everything alone, it usually fails. Then something else has to emerge.

**Yali**: That's interesting. Can you expand a bit on this principle of collaboration inside the groups? You said everyone has to work together; nobody can function completely alone. What does that require from people, both tactically and ethically?

**Dana**: First of all, I don't tell people how they're supposed to collaborate. I have twin boys, and I often find myself saying to participants exactly what I say to my children:

“You need to figure out how to get along.” It’s funny because the project existed before they were even born. But that’s really what I tell people. You need to create together. Sometimes participants ask me beforehand, “But how?” And I say, “You’ll figure it out.” There are as many strategies as there are participants. And people change between the first and second rounds. Sometimes a co-creator feels they didn’t manage to express themselves fully in the first round, so they arrive at the second with much more momentum. Sometimes that works beautifully because by then the choreographer already feels they’ve exhausted their first ideas.

Dancers often rescue the process too. Everyone’s sitting in a room, there’s silence because nobody has an idea, and suddenly a dancer says, “Maybe we could try…” It constantly shifts. There were all kinds of creative solutions over the years. Once, two collaborators couldn’t agree on how to structure the piece, so they secretly split the stage in half. The audience had no idea. Each one worked with two dancers on their own side of the stage, but the piece was still presented as a single work.

**Yali**: Like a juxtaposition.

**Dana**: Exactly. Like two cinematic frames side by side.

**Yali**: I want to ask how you see yourself inside all this. What is your role? Are you a mentor? A facilitator? A choreographer?

**Dana**: What’s the Hebrew word for “enabler”?

**Yali**: Enabling what?

**Dana**: I try to create a sense of confidence, even when I don’t always feel it myself. I believe that if I believe in the process, then confidence will emerge. I believe in the spirit of playfulness and in its ability to generate unexpected things. I try to practice

faith together with them. Faith in creativity, faith in playfulness, and faith in the good things people are capable of bringing, even when they themselves don't yet know they're capable of them.

**Yali**: How do you actually do that?

**Dana**: I look at everyone with kindness.

**Iris**: Without judgment.

**Dana**: Without judgment.

**Ofir Yudilevitch**: I'm Ofir Yudilevitch. I've participated in Project 48 four and a half times. Twice as a dancer, twice as a choreographer, and once in a smaller format. For me, it's an extraordinary project because every time it acts like a mirror reflecting where I am in relation to my craft. Both as a dancer, what tools I have onstage and in the studio, how I influence a creative process, and how I bring all the knowledge I've accumulated as a performer. And as a choreographer, of course, the responsibility is greater. But I also saw myself repeating mistakes I had made in larger productions, or suddenly succeeding in doing things that would normally take me months, compressed into an incredibly short timeframe.

There's also something deeply exciting about it on a community level. We spend time together in ways we normally never do in the dance field. We eat together, spend two full days together, talking constantly. Honestly, I love this project. I'd do it again anytime. Maybe next time as an outside eye.

**Dana**: After years of being disillusioned and discovering things about myself too, I know for certain some people don't really see me clearly. And if that's true for me, then it must also be true for others. Everyone deserves another chance to be seen

differently. There have been many moments of re-seeing through this project. And with Sigal's help, I also invite people I don't know personally. Sometimes Sigal simply tells me, "I vouch for them." On one hand, we define the framework and the boundaries of what's possible. But production-wise, over the years, people have asked us for the strangest things. A bear's head. Chocolate sauce. Thousands of printed pages.

**Yali**: For the pieces.

**Dana**: Exactly. And in our field, there's always this reflex of "That's impossible. Impossible." But here, if I can make those strange little requests happen, it feels very important, even if they never end up using them. Yes, we'll print your thousand pages. Yes, we'll get the cauliflowers you want to use as brains. That moment of saying yes is incredibly important. Each group has a production assistant who communicates with us. A sound technician is waiting to help them record whatever they need. Everyone gets meals. It sounds unrelated, but it's actually deeply connected to the process. I really believe that something happens around a dining table. Even just asking someone to pass the salt creates a kind of communication that can't happen inside the studio or in those professional mingling spaces we all know from dance events.

**Yali**: Basically, you're building an ecosystem.

**Dana**: Yes.

**Yali**: You create a space, define its boundaries, and within that space there's freedom.

**Dana**: Exactly.

**Yali**: What more could artists possibly need?

**Sigal**: This year felt especially intense because of the war and everything happening outside Israel. Artistically and emotionally, I think these conditions created an unusually safe environment for people. Artists are constantly asking themselves how their work responds to reality, how it positions itself within this historical moment. And I felt there was a huge release in the project this year. Of course, reality was still present in the references and in the atmosphere. But part of entering this very intense journey is temporarily disconnecting from the constant stream of news and external pressure. For a moment, you create from a place of trust. Reality is still there in the back of your mind, but you don't have to justify it every second. And what amazed me was that in the final works, everything was still there. All of it. Without people needing to explain every step or spell out their thinking constantly. I think this is possible because of the framework itself.

**Iris**: From the outside, what I saw this year was an enormous sense of joy. It was contagious. The works were incredibly diverse and wildly different from one another, yet everything still felt held together.

Your presence there was very strong, but also warm and grounding. It was impressive.

**Dana**: There are all kinds of shifts and reconfigurations. Hierarchies change. I try, as much as possible and as much as people are willing, to bring in older dancers too. And by older, I mean people my age. Sometimes a dancer ends up performing alongside a former student. This year, for example, Yael Ben Ezer and Gili Navot danced together in one piece. Gili had once been Yael's artistic director at Batsheva. Inside a company structure, that would have been a huge hierarchy.

**Yali**: Not equal at all.

**Dana**: Exactly. Not equal. There's always a hierarchy there. But suddenly they're simply dancing together. And you remember that underneath everything, you're just human beings together in space. You are reminded of imagination. You experience what it means to be together. These hierarchies are fascinating to me. Ilaya Shalit danced with someone she teaches. How do you hold both things at once? How do you remain a teacher while also standing beside someone as an equal? The fact that I'm a teacher doesn't necessarily mean I have power over you, or that my knowledge is somehow more important. I can share knowledge with you. I can also stand beside you in uncertainty, even as a teacher. As a teacher myself, hierarchies really interest me. What is the role of a teacher? Why should teaching require distance or rigidity? Why can't I also learn from the situation? I'm not only there to give knowledge. And this exists inside the creative process too. We all know artists who don't allow themselves not to know something because they're afraid of losing their authority or prestige.

**Ariel Wolf**: My name is Ariel Wolf. I participated in the project as a choreographer. When I think about what stayed with me most strongly, it's the ability to throw myself into action almost instinctively. Usually, during pre-production and long rehearsal periods, we get lost, moving back and forth endlessly. But here everything becomes distilled. I also feel that responding to references creates an immediate physical response. Something translates directly into movement quality. That's very interesting to me.

For example, during the first evening Dana gave the reference "Don't Mention the War" from Monty Python. The immediate impulse was to explore movement qualities of disconnection, artificiality, and puppet-like behavior. Then the dramaturgy almost grows out of that first bodily reaction. And I think that creates a kind of creative

freedom we're always searching for. In this model, if you're willing to surrender to it, you're immediately thrown into deep water, and the body responds instantly.

**Yali**: I suddenly think this is a kind of moratorium space. Moratorium is a term Piaget used in developmental psychology to describe adolescence, a stage where teenagers are allowed to go wild, test limits, do foolish things, and society already forgives them in advance. So this becomes a safe space for doing things outside convention. But I also think it's a liminal space. Those are very similar kinds of spaces. Places where hierarchies and statuses can temporarily fall away, where you're allowed to do things you normally wouldn't do as a teacher, or as a choreographer, or as a young dancer, or an older dancer, or even as a designer. And generally, I also kept thinking that what you're doing is a kind of refresh.

**Dana**: Exactly.

**Yali**: Like refreshing a computer screen. You refresh the statuses, the people, the possibilities.

**Dana**: And then you discover nothing was erased.

**Yali**: Exactly. Nothing disappears.

**Iris**: Do participants realize they're gaining all these things? Is it discussed at all?

**Sigal**: Before or after?

**Iris**: Is there any kind of closing conversation afterward?

**Dana**: No. There's no formal wrap-up. I simply see things continuing afterward.

**Gilad Jerusalmy:** I'm Gilad Jerusalmy. I'm a dancer and choreographer, and over the years, starting almost at the very beginning of my career in Israel, I've had the privilege of participating in Project 48 several times, both as a dancer and as a choreographer.

I met many people there who are still part of my life today. Collaborators, colleagues, artistic partners. One of the things I remember most fondly is the sense of playground the project creates. You can throw everything into it. You can try things you've never tried before, fantasies you've been carrying around. There's no time to judge anything. Everything just spills out. One example that comes to mind was a piece responding to a video of Miri Regev, who was Israel's Minister of Culture at the time. I was the choreographer, working with dancers Noa Shiloh and Talia Beck, and my outside eye was Itay Mautner. We decided we wanted to present the complexity of Miri Regev as a character, all her different sides. We used the soundtrack from the musical Sweet Charity and created a struggle between different versions of her, the powerful, almost tyrannical figure. And then this year, I premiered Gilad: The Musical, an entire work built around musical numbers. But the seed of that idea was planted back at Project 48. I'm very grateful for that.

**Dana:** I see artistic collaborations emerging that never would have happened otherwise. Actual work continues developing after the project ends.

**Iris:** Give us examples.

**Dana:** Right now, Dafi Altbebe is working on a duet with Yael Ben Ezer and Ori Mebazbez. They don't exactly call me to update me, but I know it started there. Years ago, the artistic connection between Michael Getman and Osnat Kelner also began through the project. There's even a couple who met there and later got married.

**Iris:** Who?

**Yali**: Wow.

**Dana**: Alon Bracha and Zuki Ringart. Alon danced with me years ago, then left dance and became a physiotherapist. I invited him back to the project and said, "Come dance again for two days." That's where he met Zuki. A year later, they came to me with a box of chocolates and said, "We wanted to thank you. We met through the project and fell in love."

**Iris**: That's beautiful.

**Dana**: Maybe there are more romances I don't know about. But it's not only hierarchies that shift. Genres shift too.

This year, for example, Ziv Besor, who is originally a dancer and is now studying acting at Nissan Nativ, worked with Ariel Wolf, who also graduated from Nissan Nativ and participated as a choreographer. There was something deeply healing in that dynamic. You realize you don't actually have to choose one identity forever.

At some point, the road curves back around. Because there's always this fear: "Okay, now I've moved into another field. Is this who I am now? I work with text now. Will I ever make movement material again? Or I've moved into something more expressive, how do I return to my own language? I've become a 'Pinto style' dancer, can I ever go back?" And then you see someone who studied acting returning to choreography, and suddenly you realize there's always a way back.

**Yali**: I wanted to ask whether people switch roles inside the project. Whether dancers suddenly become lighting designers, costume designers, or something else entirely. Since each group includes two creators, and this outside eye dynamic.

**Dana**: Absolutely. Dancers choreograph all the time. Even inside the studios, dancers generate movement material constantly. And sometimes co-creators perform too. Neil Harris played the xylophone. Saggie Gurfung, who was actually a production assistant, played piano.

**Sigal**: This year, Tal Erez wrote a text and performed it onstage.

**Yali**: Do people fool around?

**Dana**: Constantly.

**Yali**: I mean, inside the studio.

**Dana**: Of course.

**Sigal**: Also onstage.

**Dana**: Definitely onstage too. There was one video by Rotem Tashach's group where everyone was dressed like aliens. They made a video dance on the roof to a pop song. Ofir Yanai, Anat Vaadia, Noa Gronich.

**Sigal**: It was a homage to Nunu.

**Dana**: Right.

**Iris**: Let's talk about the references for a moment. How do you choose them? What's your approach?

**Dana**: I always try to include at least one reference connected to current political or social reality.

**Yali**: Actually, there are always two references.

**Dana:** Right. One for each round. I have to think carefully about what works for the first round and what belongs in the second. Leading up to the project, we collect video clips all year long. Sigal sends me things too, clips we think might spark something interesting. But until the very last moment, we don't know whether they actually fit the specific moment we're in. Political references usually emerge at the last minute because in this country, you simply can't plan ahead. When we first started the project, things still felt more stable. Gradually, reality became more intense, more extreme. This year, I reached a point where I couldn't bring reality directly into the room anymore. I needed to find references that were still related to the situation but also created some kind of escape route, something indirect, something with distance, and maybe even a backward glance. So this year, one of the references came from Fawlty Towers, the episode "Don't Mention the War." Fawlty has this head injury, and honestly, he reminded me a little of Raful. German guests arrive at the hotel, and the more he tries not to mention the war, the more every word turns into another reference to it. Instead of saying "herring," he says "Goering." He just keeps stumbling into it again and again.

**Iris:** And what was the second reference, Sigal?

**Sigal:** Wow. The second reference was an incredibly moving video of Leonard Cohen arriving for a performance in Jerusalem years ago. He goes onstage, but the muse, or as he calls it, the Shekhinah, simply isn't with him. So he tells the audience he has to stop the show and go backstage with the band to meditate and do some inner work.

**Iris:** He doesn't even want to come back.

**Sigal**: Exactly. He basically tells the audience the concert may be cancelled. "I'm leaving." You see him backstage while everyone pressures him to return to the stage, and he keeps saying, "No. I just can't."

**Iris**: And this is after people had waited years for Leonard Cohen to come to Israel.

**Sigal**: Years. Really years. And then suddenly the audience begins singing "Hevenu Shalom Aleichem" together, a cappella. It's unbelievably moving and powerful. And finally, he comes back onstage and starts singing.

**Iris**: And he says thank you.

**Sigal**: Yes. He says thank you.

**Yali**: There are also references taken from dance history, important moments or artistic turning points. Can you give a few examples?

**Dana**: In the very first edition, one of the references was Jérôme Bel's Véronique Doisneau. Later, I brought a clip from Waltzer by Pina Bausch, where she slaps her pointe shoe. In the beginning, my references were much more dance-centred. Slowly, the range expanded.

**Iris**: Dana, how do you think about these triggers? Your references are so broad.

**Dana**: Honestly, I learn from the choreographers themselves. At first, I had no idea how people would respond to the references. Over time, I learned how endlessly they could be deconstructed. Some participants know the references, and some don't. Ella Rothschild, for example, taught me to look at things happening outside the center of the frame. One year, the reference was Miri Regev shouting "Cut the bullshit" at the Haaretz conference.

**Yali and Iris**: Of course.

**Dana**: I thought I was bringing a political and artistic reference. But Ella Rothschild ended up writing a love poem from the perspective of the bodyguard standing behind Miri at the edge of the frame. I had never even really noticed him before. Suddenly, the piece became about this man secretly in love with Miri, writing her a love letter. Onstage, Shmuel Halfon carried Shani Tamari on his shoulders, while Zuki and another dancer were attached on either side, creating this bizarre multi-headed creature moving through space. I never could have imagined that. But that's exactly how I learn from the artists. Sometimes they sample fragments from the soundtrack. One year I brought Hannah Gadsby speaking about Picasso, and by coincidence, that was also the year Ruti Direktor participated. Suddenly, people began diving into Picasso's biography. I had thought the focus would be Picasso and women, but instead the conversation shifted toward Paloma, his daughter, and something entirely different emerged. I let the artists teach me. I really try not to arrive with expectations. On the contrary. I'm basically saying: "Please surprise me."

**Iris**: But intuitively, you still feel when a reference is right.

**Dana**: I'm like Leonard Cohen, I hope. I meditate on it.

**Sigal**: I think all the references we exchange between us have this layered quality. We can already sense that a reference might become something deeply physical, but also something aesthetic or conceptual. That understanding came from experience. We look for materials that have density, references that people can interpret in multiple ways and extract different meanings from.

**Dana**: I kept thinking about how with small children, you buy them some elaborate toy, and then in the end, they play with the wrapping paper instead. That's often what happens here.

**Iris**: Like the teddy bear ticket.

**Dana**: Exactly. But that's the beauty of creation. It reveals angles and possibilities you never could have anticipated. And if there are five people in the studio, there are five completely different ways of approaching things. Eventually, somebody will propose something unexpected. There's also the opposite situation. Some people come from training environments where nobody ever encouraged them to suggest ideas. So they simply don't suggest anything. Sometimes they don't even realize that suggesting something is allowed. That's where I occasionally step in quietly and tell someone: "You know you're allowed to offer an idea." Not publicly, not in a humiliating way. But sometimes we guide people a little if we sense they need encouragement. These aren't moments of crisis exactly, just places where someone needs permission.

**Yali**: I notice that both of you keep speaking in terms of "we." I'd love to hear more about the differences between your roles within the project.

**Sigal**: Wow. Okay.

I really try to maintain a separation between us when it comes to production. Producing this project is incredibly intense, and I genuinely try to shield Dana from as much of it as possible. I try to bring as little bureaucracy and logistical stress to her doorstep as I can, and manage most of it myself with our partners. Of course, we're constantly talking and consulting with each other. But during the actual event, I think it's important that Dana can stay focused on what's happening artistically, to remain in that directing and guiding space. Sometimes the issues are tiny but urgent because in

just a few hours we have to deliver an actual performance. And sometimes it's interpersonal tensions or dynamics between participants that need handling. It's important to me that I carry that side of things. But the deeper work really happens beforehand. We think together about participants and references. It wasn't always like this. When we first started working together, there was a much stricter division between our responsibilities.

Over time, we grew together, and we also became close friends, so the conversation became much more collaborative. Sometimes I need reassurance that I'm making the right decision, and sometimes Dana surprises me by really listening to and trusting my ideas. I think we genuinely enjoy the dialogue between us. But the bureaucratic side, all the small exhausting details, I try to keep away from Dana as much as possible. I think that's important.

**Yali**: Tell us more about the production itself and about your role as producer.

**Sigal**: Producing this project is like making a Cholent.

Really. You soak the beans. You prepare the wheat. Everything has to slowly cook over time. There are endless preparations before the project even begins. Some of it is technical. There's a huge group of people who need to get paid. There are institutional partnerships with places like Seminar Hakibbutzim or, in recent years, Batsheva Dance Company. Those relationships need care and coordination because every institution operates differently. Then there are the artists and dancers themselves. Part of the work is helping them slowly "ripen" toward the event. No matter how much preparation we do, people still arrive on the first day not fully understanding what they're about to enter. But you still try to prepare them emotionally. To excite them. To make them arrive with openness and joy.

There's also fundraising, finding businesses willing to donate meals or support the project in different ways, basically building the ecosystem you talked about earlier. All those things happen beforehand so that during the actual two days, conducting the orchestra becomes smoother, with fewer crises and more room for flow and pleasure.

And I think in recent years we've finally reached a point where we can actually enjoy the project ourselves instead of spending the entire time in panic mode trying to hold everything together. We've developed gentler and more sustainable ways of working, and I think people feel that atmosphere.

**Dana**: Think about it. Today it might sound obvious, but it's actually quite extraordinary that Seminar Hakibbutzim, Batsheva Dance Company, and Project 48 all meet at one intersection. Who would have imagined there was even a point where those three worlds could connect? A lot of people also keep returning to the project year after year. Michael Shvadron, our video photographer. Ofri Zelniker on sound. Assaf the photographer. Yadid Hamel on streaming. Some of them have been with us for thirteen years, some for ten. Some don't even work professionally in those fields anymore. Ofri, for example, no longer works in sound professionally, but when we announce a new edition it's like reserve duty in the army. Everyone immediately returns. They already understand the spirit of the project. We don't need to explain anything anymore. And that shared history helps hold everything together.

People come because they love the project. And honestly, because they love this strange little camping trip we all create together.

**Iris**: I want to ask about money. Who funds the project? Who gets paid? How does it actually work?

**Dana**: We receive support through the Ministry of Culture.

**Sigal**: Everyone gets paid. Obviously.

**Dana**: Through the Ministry's "Projects" funding category.

**Iris**: Okay. And has the support grown over time?

**Dana**: No. When we first started, there wasn't even a category for projects. There simply wasn't a framework for it. At the time, according to the Ministry of Culture, an independent choreographer was basically defined as someone who creates work for themselves. Meaning that an independent dance artist wasn't really supposed to initiate projects that didn't look like traditional choreography. Companies were encouraged to invite artists, initiate collaborations, and create educational programs. But independent choreographers were expected to make their own work and nothing else. If you wanted to do something collective or communal, they would actually reduce your support. It was the opposite logic.

And I kept asking why.

You asked me earlier about calling myself an inventor. That's part of it. I have aspirations beyond simply being a choreographer. I want to connect people in the field. I want to contribute to a larger ecosystem. Why shouldn't I be encouraged financially to do that too? And I think that when the Ministry eventually created support for projects, they probably realized the system itself needed to change.

I still believe creation and projects shouldn't be separated. I don't want to say, "I'm a choreographer, and separately I'm a curator, and separately I dance, and separately I initiate things." I want to say: I'm some kind of octopus inventor. Everything feeds everything else. I nourish the field and the field nourishes me back. It's anti-narcissistic.

**Iris**: The structure of Project 48 is actually very precise. Could it exist without you?

**Dana**: If we teach it properly, yes. Before the war, I was in Ulm, Germany, where we produced a version of Project 48 Dance according to the exact score of the project. I had done a version earlier in Georgia, too, but there we couldn't really follow the structure fully. In Ulm, though, my partners were incredibly meticulous and curious. They kept saying, "Tell us exactly how to do it. Step by step. Including the food." It was amazing.

**Iris**: And you were there physically.

**Dana**: Yes, but only as artistic director. And in the middle of everything, I sprained my wrist because I suddenly felt the need to become more physically involved. One of the performance spaces was a cinema hall where dancers were moving across the seats. It was already eleven at night during the second round. People were exhausted, completely delirious. And somehow, forgetting I was already forty four years old, I decided it was a brilliant idea to demonstrate how I imagined they could move along the rows of seats. I immediately sprained my wrist. That was the end of that. I spent half the next day at the doctor.

**Iris**: Another thing I'm curious about is the spaces you work in and the institutions you collaborate with. Not only recently, but throughout the years. There's a very interesting institutional spread.

**Dana**: It started at Studio Naim in Tel Aviv. The second year too. It's actually complicated because you need something that feels almost like a campus, with five studios that aren't too far apart. The spaces need to stay connected because staff members are constantly moving between them, and we want a sense of synergy. After that, we moved to Bikkurei Ha'itim for a couple of years.

Then, Yael Venezia proposed bringing the project to Seminar Hakibbutzim. Her idea was that students could become part of the production and witness in real time what they're constantly being taught theoretically: what a creative process actually looks like. And since then, the project has continued there.

Eventually, one of the students wanted to create a student version, maybe it was called Project 24 or Project 36, I don't remember. I mentored her through it. She started as Sigal's assistant on our project and learned the structure from within. Now they've been running it independently for three years. The first year, they collaborated with the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, which is another encounter that almost never happens naturally outside academic frameworks, students from different institutions actually creating together. The second year, they collaborated with Re Search.

**Yali**: And just to clarify, this doesn't really happen under an academic structure.

**Dana**: Exactly. One year, the Jerusalem Academy invited me to create a Project 48 specifically designed to bridge the gap between the dance department and the movement department. And that's what we did. This project knows how to break walls. And if you look over the years, what we're experiencing now in the field is constant role switching. One moment I'm here, and you're there, and then suddenly it reverses. I felt this very strongly when I was artistic director of Curtain Up and then suddenly I wasn't anymore. I realized: I'm still exactly the same person. Only the positions have shifted. It's choreography in space.

Around 2015, Alma Karvat Shemesh, who was then a student at Thelma Yellin, approached Siki Kol and said she wanted to create a Project 48 at the school. They asked for my permission, and I happily gave it. I explained the structure a little, and

since then, they've been running a version called Project 36 every year at Thelma Yellin. Now here's the funny part: Thelma Yellin is the school I graduated from myself. This year, Alma participated in Project 48 as a dancer, and Ran Brown, the head of the department, also participated. So everything keeps cycling around anyway.

**Yali**: And do they run it with you or without you?

**Dana**: Without me. I just gave permission. I'm very happy to give permission. Less happy when people do it without asking, which also happens. But if they ask, they have my blessing. At Ga'aton, the high school connected to Ga'aton runs it every year. There I come in and teach a workshop about how I work with references, the ignition point of an idea. Their teacher joins the workshop too, the teacher who'll later accompany the students through the project. I mentor them every year, and then they continue without me.

At Kabri High School, they asked me to invent a project connecting the theater, scenography, dance, film, and music departments. So we built one. There, my role was mostly mentoring the staff, because the teachers themselves became part of interdisciplinary groups. A scenography teacher would suddenly work with dance students, theatre students, film students. I moved between spaces across the campus, guiding the process.

At Ironi Aleph, they created it twice as a collaboration between dance and film students. There I began with two workshops: one teaching film students about dance, and another teaching dance students about film.

**Iris**: How does all of this sit inside your larger body of work?

**Dana**: The image that comes to mind is the center point at the top of a circus tent, that one point holding the entire structure together. I think Project 48 marked a turning point in my career because it pushed me into a place everyone said was impossible. And that excited me. I still entered the unknown anyway. There isn't a single morning when I wake up without impostor syndrome. Not one. Every time I begin a new process I think: I have no idea what I'm doing. Is there even any point to this? And then I remember Project 48, and it gives me strength. Being an independent creator is incredibly lonely. Project 48 is the place where I meet future collaborators. Since the project began, I've never held another audition. I simply meet the dancers I want to work with. Within twenty four hours, you already know whether someone is right for you artistically. The project gave me a community.

I'll run into someone who danced in Project 48 years ago, and we hug immediately, even though our entire shared history is just those two days together. That's incredibly powerful. Community matters deeply to me. And honestly, our field isn't communal enough.

**Iris**: Do the things you witness onstage or in the creative processes affect you personally?

**Dana**: Completely. It's always about discovering things I thought were impossible. And I think that's what Project 48 ultimately does. You find your center precisely through losing balance.

**Nurit Drimer**: Hi, I'm Nurit. I participated in Project 48 as a choreographer even though I'm actually a theatre director. One of the things I love most about the project is that despite being so short and absurd, it somehow contains the entire emotional arc of a creative process. You go through torment and pleasure, confusion and

discovery, changing direction, giving up, reformulating ideas. You experience the entire cycle in this incredibly intense and almost psychedelic form. And somehow, despite the chaos, it works in the end. What's even more extraordinary is that after finishing one complete creative process and presenting a performance, you immediately have to begin all over again. And that second round is something I genuinely wish I could experience in longer creative processes too. At that point, you're already floating somewhere between exhaustion and delirium. Half of reality feels unreal. And suddenly the second process becomes airy, almost effortless, as though it creates itself. It's difficult to explain. But as an artist, it's an extraordinary lesson.

**Iris**: So, where does all this go? Beyond existing in your memory, Sigal's memory, and the memories of the participants?

**Dana**: I would love for it to happen all over the world. We were supposed to bring it to London in May 2024. At first, they contacted me after the war began simply to check whether I was okay and suggested postponing the project to a calmer moment. But as the war continued, they called again and said their board had decided it wouldn't be appropriate to host the project. Not then, and not later. And the sentence they used was: "This is the end of the road for Project 48."

**Yali**: They actually said that?

**Sigal**: Tell them about your will, Dana.

**Dana**: There are endless hours of footage documenting rehearsals, creative processes, performances, everything. At Iris's initiative, all the materials were deposited in the archive.

**Iris**: Deposited.

**Dana**: But my instruction was that nobody should open them. Maybe only after my death.

**Iris**: Seventy years after your death.

**Yali**: What?!

**Sigal**: Seventy years?!

**Dana**: I don't know what's in there. And it's very important to me that the footage remains inaccessible. The creators themselves don't receive copies. They can't use the material in showreels, reels, or anything else. Because every time I think about the next artist arriving, I want them to feel completely free to fail spectacularly without fear that it will exist online forever.

**Yali**: But that's exactly why I reacted so strongly. Because for researchers, this material is a goldmine. Anyone wanting to understand creative strategies and tactics inside rehearsal spaces, something that almost never becomes visible, would find extraordinary material there. If I had doctoral students, I'd send them immediately.

**Iris**: According to copyright law, the archive remains confidential until seventy years after Dana's death. That's simply the law. But theoretically, researchers could still approach her with academic approvals. And honestly, I think this project is genius. It genuinely changes the field. It gives people strength, connection, opportunities, courage, exactly the things we've always needed and especially need now. It's extraordinary.

Thank you.

**Yali**: It goes far beyond dance.

**Dana**: I hope it also encourages people to invent more projects like this, even projects I can't yet imagine. Because, especially in periods like this, when reality feels like a dead end, only creative imagination can help us recognize what else might still be possible.

**Yali**: Thank you so much.

**Dana**: Thank you. Thank you both.

**Yali**: This was truly illuminating.

**Project 48 Dance: One-Time Encounter for a Creative Community**

Featuring

Dana Ruttenberg and Sigal Dahan

Additional participants

Ofra Idel, Ofir Yudilevich, Ariel N. Wolf, Gilad Jerusalmy, Nurit Drimer

From the series

Creative Direction and Curation

Translation

Dana Ruttenberg / Yali Nativ

Produced by Yali Nativ and Iris Lana

https://www.hayotmahol.com/

Creatures of Dance

podcast

DANCENOW in Israel

Iris Lana & Yali Nativ