Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

*Shorashim: The Roots of Israeli Dance* by Judith Brin Ingber
Pamela Squires; Susan L. Puretz


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Zorn and the linear abstractions of Laban, the West remains true to its fascination with the mechanics of dance while the Chinese seem determined to include the drama of a given movement along with its physical execution.

If this notational system fails to meet all the criteria deemed important among Western notational experts, it is nevertheless a worthy first attempt at documenting a ballet by a people whose values are somewhat different from our own.

Fine documentation of dance is by no means a novel phenomena in China. A Ming (1368-1644) dynasty scholar left wonderful descriptions from which we, in the 20th century, could reconstruct entire dances.

While ballet productions have flourished in Europe and in the New World, books to document these ballets have hardly kept pace with the ballets themselves. The inventiveness expended in the creation of ballets out-distanced the imagination used in preserving them by several hundred years. It might be said that the traditional "dancer to dancer with the help of a few notes" method of passing ballets from generation to generation has served dance well. Such a system prevented a hardening of the creative arteries and enabled ballets to express the dominant mood of the various periods in which they were being re-created.

Today, of course, the "preservation gap" has vanished. Western techniques for preservation have at last caught up with the Western capacity for creation. It might be argued that such a book is no longer necessary since there are films, videotape, and notational systems to preserve our dances for us. Nevertheless, no film and/or notational system includes all of the relevant material such as lighting, make-up, and property construction that this book does. While records are kept by the various specialists responsible for a particular ballet, when, if ever, are all of these diverse elements bound together in one volume for the preservation of the ballet in its totality?

Will the great advances in notation and in the filming of dance finally act as a restrictive force in the dance world? Will the filmed version of Balanchine's "Serenade" come to be seen as a standard that all future versions of the ballet must duplicate? Will this volume and the film of The Red Detachment of Women serve as models that admit no deviation? It is possible that such uniformity of production might be attempted, but it seems unlikely that any standard will remain undisturbed in the West. The Western drive toward innovation, change, and what is perceived to be progress is not apt to abate in America. If the revolution is to remain "green" in China as Chairman Mao has requested, it is probable that the revolutionary ballets will undergo periodical revisions as well. If the revolution ceases to experience these periodic reappraisals, then it is quite possible that ballet along with other aspects of life in China will tend to repeat former patterns since the conservative element in Chinese culture is very strong.

That the People's Republic of China, which has so short a tradition of classic ballet, should have produced so fine a volume to retain its new dance form is completely in keeping with China's traditional standards of excellence in historical writing. Once again, Chinese culture, even in this most revolutionary phase, shows its concern for preserving the past to instruct the future.

"Shorashim: The Roots of Israeli Dance"


Review No. 1 by Pamela Squires

This booklet is a compendium of separate articles, each dealing with one of nine choreographers of Israeli folk dance. The articles are prefaced by an orientation to the historical setting of Israeli folk dance and are followed by a section on theatre dance in Israel and current communities. A bibliography draws together some lesser known books and articles related to Israeli folk dance.

Ingber has chosen to present the five original creators in chronological order; Gurit Kadman, Rivke Sturman, Sara Levi-Tanal, Yardena Cohen, Leah Bergstein, and four of their protégés; Shalom Hermon, Yoav Ashriel, Yonaton Karmon, and Moshiko (Moshe Yitzchak Halevy). The choreographers span Israeli folk dance from its inception in the 1920's to the current folk dance scene in the 1970's.

In the title of the introduction, Ms. Ingber states the focus of the work, "How a New Country Creates It's Own Culture." This subject has stirred interest since the pioneers to Palestine consciously set out to create a music and dance tradition unique to their new Jewish homeland. Can Israeli folk dance be called a tradition if it has been initiated by the efforts of a few individuals over a span of only fifty years? Ingber deals with this controversial subject by presenting historical background, by having each choreographer address this question, and by ordering the material in such a way that the progression and juxtaposition of ideas speak for themselves. In dealing with what has been created, she summarizes the breakdown and identification of the many elements of Israeli folk dance given by Gurit Kadman in her book Am Roked.1

The style of writing is journalistic, yet the work is thoroughly researched. Each article is composed almost entirely of quotes which have been compiled from a series of extensive interviews conducted by the author with the choreographers. Each artist explains his life, his teachers, influences on his work, why he was moved to create, and how he created the dances he did.

Perhaps the best feature of this booklet is that the author lets the artists speak for themselves. Their personalities emerge, and with them emerges the flavor of the historical period in which they worked.

A few more evaluative comments on the impact of each choreographer on the current Israeli folk dance scene would have been helpful. The editorial comments that the author does make on the inception, development, and

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FOOTNOTE

current directions of Israeli folk dance are measured and well-founded, but unfortunately they are too few.

This work draws together valuable information on the development of Israeli folk dance. Surprisingly little has been published on this subject, although a large number of the dances themselves have been printed, and the music made available on commercial recordings. Research material has been collected on this subject, thanks mainly to the efforts of Zvi Friedhaber of the Archive of Jewish Dance, Gurit Kadman, and Fred Berk. We look forward to more works on Israeli folk dance, and to more publications by Ms. Ingber.

"Shorashim: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance"


Review No. 2 by Susan L. Puretz

Reading Judith Brin Ingber's introduction to this book is like being in Israel. There is a basic truth to her writing with which anyone familiar with Israel can identify. And for those not familiar, Ms. Ingber's descriptions will create their own reality.

Ms. Ingber's monograph is concerned with the biographies of the people who have influenced the creation of Israeli folk dance. She recounts the histories of Kadman, Sturman, Levi-Tanaik Cohen, Bergstein—the most important original creators—and of their protégés Hermon, Ashriel, Karmon, and Moshiko. Just the fact that a definitive history of the creators of this dance form can be written, points to the unique place Israeli folk dance occupies within the folk dance movement. In almost all of the extant international folk dances, the creators are anonymous and the dances, for the most part, have been passed on through the familial generations. This process has allowed for a certain amount of transformation of the original dance by layering. The original significance of these dances has been lost in this process but at the time of creation the themes were identifiable e.g., animal, war, agricultural, magic-religious, occupational and social—coming of age, courtship, marriage, etc.

In contrast to most international folk dance, Israeli folk dance, although also based on thematic material, was created purposely, and in some respects artificially, and the creators are known and alive. These differences may be merely academic, since to most folk dancers outside of Israel, both the choreographer's identity and thematic motivation is meaningless. Parenthetically, Gurit Kadman, the "mother" of Israeli folk dance, might argue that there were some early Israeli dances whose choreographers could not be identified because in 1944 at the first Daliah festival there was a dance which was an amalgam of three previously choreographed dances. Kadman, in Ms. Ingber's monograph states, "I was very proud of this dance because it showed that we already had one folk dance that was anonymous." This trend did not really continue, and the choreographers for the vast majority of Israeli folk dances can be readily identified.

Intermixed with the biographies, as it must be, is the history of Israeli folk dance. In the beginning (1920's) it was the "dances that had come with us from Europe like the Polish krakowiak, the Rumanian hora, the polka, the sherele, or the rondo (like the Polish polonaise) . . . these five or so dances were enough for many years" (p.7). Gradually, however, these dances were supplemented and then replaced with new creations. These creations were motivated by Jewish holidays, and then later by "the nature elements—growth and harvest" which related to the lives of the Kibbutzim—the major source and sustenance of the early folk dance movement. However, as Kadman relates, the greatest impetus to the movement was the first Daliah festival in 1944. This festival not only served as a generator of dances—the new influence of Arabic and Yemenite material became obvious—but also as a disseminator since large numbers of spectators saw and learned these dances and in turn taught them to others.

It has been said that after its initial growth as a concomitant part of national development, folk dance in Israel in 1974 has become slightly moribund. The dances have changed from being intrinsic to the spiritual growth of this new nation to now becoming something done by small numbers of people at specific locations and at specific times—like U.S. folk dance clubs. Thus many people have been questioning the future of Israeli folk dance. In Ms. Ingber's monograph, Gurit Kadman in assessing the future states, "But now, as a result of the Yom Kippur War, I think there is a kind of reawakening of the old values. The need to dance is something like it was in the beginning" (p. 15). Would it be so, for that trend might guarantee the survival of Israeli folk dance as a meaningful part of Israeli life not just as an artifact now created by ego-oriented dancers and danced primarily by the U.S. Jewish community.

Through each of the biographies of the various leaders, the reader of Ms. Ingber's monograph will learn of the subtle rivalries and philosophical differences between the creators as well as be provided with a historical-motivational frame of reference behind the creation of many specific Israeli folk dances. The latter type of background material has not heretofore been available. Additionally, the excellent accompanying photographs provide supplementary visual material. The bibliography is extensive; however one objection, which could have been overcome with some simple notation system, is that many of the publications are either in Hebrew or unavailable in the U.S. and the uninitiated reader has no way of knowing this. Because of the scarcity of material in English, this excellent monograph is a welcome addition to a slowly growing body of literature on Israeli folk dance.

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